

ladies an answer in an audience, to which they should be admitted the next day.

Bertholde, the enemy of beauty, could not hear the petition and reply, without burlesquing into a loud laugh. The king asked the reason: Bertholde ridiculed his complaisance and the easiness of his temper, when the king replied, that he was in a terrible embarrassment; that he should be ruined if he granted their request, and that his danger would not be less if he refused it. A refusal, said he, will enrage them; they are able to revenge themselves, by making their husbands, who have the command of my troops, rise up against me. My dear Bertholde, added he; Bertholde, my faithful friend, help me out of this labyrinth: Thy imagination, fertile in stratagems, has hitherto drawn thee out of the dangers thou hast fallen into at my court, and I am persuaded thou canst relieve me out of this. Bertholde promised every thing, and desired the king to be satisfied. Having stood musing for a moment, he left the palace, went to the market and bought a little bird: He shut it in a box in the presence of the king, gave it to him, and desired him to send it to the queen, for her to give it to the ladies who had presented her the petition, with a most express prohibition against opening the box, on pain of incurring his highest indignation; but to keep it till the next day, when it should be opened before him, at the audience he had promised to grant them.

The officer to whom the box was given, discharged his commission, and the queen also gave the box to the ladies, who were still with that princess, talking together on the answer the chancellor had brought from the king. As we easily persuade ourselves to believe what flatters our self love, there was not one present who did not think, that their request was already granted. His majesty, said they, is sensible of the justice of our demand, and as he is equity itself, he immediately found that it was impossible for him to refuse us; to heighten the favour which he will certainly grant us, he has only thought fit to defer it till to-morrow. There is now no doubt, continued they, but that this box contains something extremely valuable, and the confidence with which he has deposited it in our hands, shews also, that he does not think us unworthy of the honour. Come, ladies, let him see that we deserve it, by an exact and faithful observance of the prohibition relating to this precious treasure.

At this they took leave of the queen, and after having agreed to assemble the next day at the governor's lady's, in or-

der to to go the audience in a body, each returned home.

They were hardly got home, when every one of them was filled with an impatient desire to know what it could be that was contained in that box; and this impatience increased to such a degree, that they could not sleep all night. Never was any hour watched for with more impatience, than that appointed for their assembling at the governor's lady's, and they were all there three quarters of an hour before the time appointed. They all began to discourse on the box they had received the evening before, which the governor had taken from his wife as soon as she came home; and fearing lest her well known curiosity should bring him into disgrace, had taken the precaution to lock it up in his cabinet. However, as the time of audience approached, it was bro't out and given to the assembly.

The box no sooner appeared, than they viewed it with the utmost impatience, and all being eager to see the hidden treasure, several very fine speeches were made to shew, that there could be no harm in just satisfying their curiosity; in short, this was a proposal that met with the unanimous concurrence of all present; and as the box had no lock, it was immediately opened, when out flew the little bird, which taking to a window that stood open, disappeared in a moment. How shall I describe the consternation of these unhappy ladies at seeing the bird fly away, and the box empty! They had not time to see whether it was a linnæa, a nightingale, a canary bird, or a sparrow; had they but known of what species it was, they would have put another in its place; but this secret was known only to the king and Bertholde.

Their consternation now kept them silent, and they no sooner recovered their speech, than they burst into tears and lamentations. It was in vain for them, they said, to hide their disobedience from the king—with what face could they appear before him? And then reproaching themselves, O this unhappy, this curst curiosity, cried the governor's lady, has ruined us all! O fatal box, a thousand times more fatal than that of Pandora! If the curiosity that opened that box, occasioned evils on earth, a hope of deliverance, and a cure for those evils remained at the bottom, but alas! alas! we have not this feeble consolation!

Mean while the hour of audience approached, and in the perplexity they were in, they knew not whether they should go to the palace or return home, when one of the ladies proposed, that they should throw