

The Sweetest Sound in the World

Written for The Western Home Monthly by Jessie F. Brown

Once upon a time when the world was a great deal younger than it is to-day, in a far-off Kingdom lived a great and good King. He ruled over a vast territory, and was loved devotedly by his many subjects. Not a man among them but would have gladly laid down his life for the King, nor a woman who would not have gladly given her husband, son or lover to die for the King.

Now, the King had an only daughter who was so lovely and charming that she was known throughout the Kingdom, and in other Kingdoms as well, as the "Beautiful Princess." Indeed, she was a very charming girl, and of suitors she had scores. But none of the handsome and dashing young princes who had come a-wooing had so much as touched the heart of the Princess. Her father the King said: "Do not be in a hurry, my dear. Wait till one comes whom you love." So the Princess waited.

Then one day in the royal forest she met a young woodcutter, handsome, good and noble, the eldest of a large and poor family. After that the world looked different to the Beautiful Princess. The sun shone more brightly, the birds sang more blithely, the flowers bloomed more

as he rode down the street. So the King was very sad, and the Beautiful Princess was sad, too, because her dear father was unhappy.

The Court physicians having failed entirely to relieve the King of his affliction, His Majesty sent for a famous soothsayer. Now, since his hearing had left him the King had been forced to wear attached to his person a slate and a pencil, with which those who wished to converse with him wrote down what they had to say. The soothsayer, therefore, took the pencil and wrote:

"Yes, I can tell your Majesty what will bring back your hearing."

"What is it?" cried the King. "What is it?" cried the courtiers, in one voice.

"When the sweetest sound in the world is made in the presence of your Majesty," wrote the soothsayer, "your hearing will be restored, and you will be deaf no longer."

"The sweetest sound in the world," said the King. "The sweetest sound in the world," echoed the courtiers. Then they all said together: "What is the sweetest sound in the world? Tell us."

But the soothsayer replied "Nay, I cannot. That is for you to discover."



French Soldiers going to the Front with the Red Cross Dogs presented by the French Ex-President, M. Felix Faure

beautiful and fragrant. She loved the woodcutter. She did not tell her father, for good and kind as the King was, it was hardly to be expected that he would approve of a woodcutter as a son-in-law. He might forbid his daughter to see the woodcutter at all, so the Beautiful Princess kept silent on the subject of her love for the young man.

Now, just at this time a great misfortune befell the King. And because he was so beloved by his subjects, great distress was felt throughout the whole Kingdom.

Men, meeting one another on the street, would say "Have you heard about the King? Is it not dreadful? And they say nothing can be done for him. The Court physicians cannot cure him. Dear, oh dear!"

The women in the market places shook their heads and sighed over the cabbage and onions and said: "What a pity! What a pity! And they say nothing can be done for him. The Court physicians cannot cure him. What a pity!"

The school children paused in their heedless frolic long enough to say, with long looks on their little faces: "The poor King! Isn't it too bad! And they say nothing can be done for him. The Court physicians cannot cure him. Isn't it too bad!"

And the people offered prayers in all the churches throughout the entire Kingdom, but still the misfortune remained with the King.

Now, the misfortune was this. The King had become stone deaf. He could not hear a sound. Two sounds were very dear to him, and they were the sound of his daughter's voice and the shouting of his people as he rode down the street. It grieved the King very deeply that he could hear neither the voice of the Beautiful Princess nor the shouting of his people

But it may be heard, Sire, in your own Kingdom."

Then the King said, for so greatly did he desire the return of his hearing, "I beg you to tell me this secret. If you tell me, I shall make you a great lord in my Kingdom."

But the soothsayer replied, now almost in tears, "Sire, I cannot. Indeed, I cannot. I do not know. I wish I did. But I do know that it is to be found in your own kingdom, and when it shall be made in your presence, you will hear it and your deafness will be cured."

Now, the Beautiful Princess was standing by, and she said to herself "Surely the young woodcutter is the wisest and most clever man in the Kingdom. Surely, he can discover this secret," so she took the slate of the King and wrote thereon, "Father, do you believe the soothsayer?" And the King said "My dear, I think I do."

"Then," wrote the Beautiful Princess, "let us issue a proclamation and say that whosoever shall discover the secret of this sweetest sound in the world, if she be a woman, she shall receive castles and lands; but if he be a man, he shall wed your daughter, even myself. Then surely will all men strive to discover the secret, and surely the man who discovers it will be good and wise enough to wed your daughter."

"It shall be done as you say, little wise one," said the King. So the proclamation was issued, and every day at noon the King held court in the great hall of the Palace and there came to him all the wise and clever people in the Kingdom who thought they knew the secret of the sweetest sound in the world.

First, came a great violinist. "Surely," said he "the voice of the violin is the sweetest sound in the world. Surely the King will hear it." And he played the most enchanting music, till the courtiers

said one to another "Ah, surely the King will hear this wonderful music." But the King said, "I can hear nothing." Disappointed, the violinist went away.

A nature-lover came and said: "To my ear the sweetest sound in all the world is the song of the running water and the whispering wind. If the King will come with me to the forest, I will show him a rippling rill that plays all day long amid sunlight and show, and surely he will hear the rhyme of the ripples and the voice of the West Wind whispering among the grasses." So the King went, and the courtiers, and the nature-lover led them to a lovely glade in the forest where, as he had said, a rill rhymed and rippled, caressed by the warm West Wind. "It is very sweet, said the courtiers one to another, 'will he hear it?' But the King said, more wearily than before "I can hear nothing at all."

A preacher sought audience with the King, and said: "Is not the sweetest sound in the world the hymn of praise and thanksgiving from the hearts of a multitude of people? If you will come with me to my church, surely the ear of the King will hear the hymn of praise of his people." So the King went to the church of the preacher, and when the hymn of praise went up from the great company the courtiers looked at one another and said: "The sound is indeed sweet. Surely the King will hear it." But the King said: "Take me home. I can hear nothing."

Came a miser, with his money-bag. "The sweetest sound in the world is surely the clink of gold," said he. But as the golden coins clinked one against the other, the King said: "Take him away. I can hear nothing. Is there not some one can discover this wonderful sound? What is the matter with you all?"

"Surely," said an old man, "the sweetest sound in all the world is the kiss of lovers, plighting troth." And two young lovers came before the King and plighted their love with a kiss, but the King said: "I can hear nothing."

So they went to the forest, and when they had arrived there the Princess heard the sound of the woodcutter's ax, and the rosy color mounted in her cheek. "Do you not hear anything, Father?" she

wrote on the slate. The King shook his head sadly. "Nothing, nothing at all."

So the young woodcutter strode before the King and led him to his Mother's humble cottage.

And as they drew near, they saw his Mother in the doorway with a young babe in her arms, and she was crooning a lullaby.

The King's face began to change, and suddenly he cried out: "I hear it. As I live, I hear it. My hearing has come back to me. The lullaby. The sweetest sound in all the world."

Then he turned to the woodcutter and cried joyously: "And, you, young man, shall wed my daughter. You have led me to this great discovery."

Then indeed there was rejoicing throughout all the Kingdom. The praises of the humble woodcutter were sung from one end of the Kingdom to the other, and everyone agreed that he was quite wise and good enough to wed their Beautiful Princess. So the woodcutter married the Beautiful Princess, and they lived in great happiness. And when, after many years, the good King died, the woodcutter reigned over the Kingdom, and ruled so wisely and well that he was much beloved by the people.

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