



THE PRINCESS AND THE ICROBE

BY
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ILLUSTRATIONS BY J. J. GOULD

THE Princess Olivera Rinalda Victorine sat on a stone seat by the mermaid fountain in the royal gardens, crying bitterly because she was not a prince. The sun was warm, the water splashed merrily over the mermaids' tails, and not far away two infant counts, an archduckling, and a baby marchioness were playing on the green grass, but the Princess would have none of their game of tag. She only howled with her mouth open, and paused for breath, and howled again. Then Lady Marie Françoise Godolphin and the Duchess Louise of Werthenheim, who were pacing the garden paths by box hedge and rose bed (Lady Marie was superb in pink chiffon over white silk, and the Duchess wore blue embroidered tulle looped with clusters of artificial lilies), frowned and whispered to each other that the naughty child ought to be punished, which was manifestly unfair, as it was all their fault. Never would the Princess Olivera Rinalda Victorine have thought of being wickedly ungrateful for the privilege of being a girl if the following conversation had not reached her through the box hedge:

Lady Marie: His Majesty will be so relieved that it is a son. Think, the boy will be Auguste Philippe the Twenty-fourth!

The Duchess: I distinctly remember the

grief of both the King and Queen when the Princess turned out to be a girl.

It was then that the Princess Victorine, who had been dandling her doll and gaining great comfort from this distinctly feminine occupation, threw this same doll from her with violence, unconscious of the symbolic character of the act, and digging her little fists into her eyes, burst into weeping so loud that Lady Marie Françoise and Duchess Louise dragged their buckram-stiffened trains away over the grass to escape from their victim's cries.

Presently sobbing became hard work, and the Princess sat still in the sunshine, thinking. Her blue eyes had red rims about them, her yellow hair was dried in wisps on her forehead, her fat legs hung dejectedly down. She was reaching back farther and farther into her dim little consciousness, trying to remember how she ever came to make that dreadful initial mistake. She had disappointed the Queen, her mother—here the sobs began again, for the Princess loved that royal lady; she had chosen, though she could not remember when, and had chosen wrongly. Then she began to wonder what it was to be this thing that the King and Queen and Lady Marie and the Duchess were so grateful for, a boy. She candidly thought that she

was nicer than the two little counts and the archduckling, and she found her riddle hard to read, for no one had ever before suggested to her, much less explained, the disgrace of sex.

Crying was difficult, and thinking was harder still—for the Princess. Presently she jumped down from her bench and trotted away almost joyfully, for a happy thought had struck her. The Princess was the sweetest, most obliging little soul in the world, and helpful withal. A way of escape had suggested itself to her: she would find out what boys were like and be one. The Queen, her mother, should be no longer disappointed in her, nor should any ladies of the court make invidious remarks through box hedges. Whatever happened, she would never again turn out to be a girl. So, in an unfortunate comparison, made by two people who could obviously ill afford to be critics, began the evolution of that unnatural monster, more “fell than hunger, anguish, or the sea,” a mannish woman.

At first the Princess Victorine prayed about it. Every night, in her little golden crib, which had the arms of her house—a spotless leopard, *couchant*—embroidered on the blue satin hangings, she shut her eyes and begged to be made into a prince with yellow love-locks and scarlet doublet and pink hose. Would he be Olivero Rinaldo Victor the Twenty-fourth, she wondered? But every morning she wakened with indignation to the fact that she was still a girl. As her faith in miracle weakened, her determination to succeed by her own efforts grew stronger, and she never doubted that she could do it if she tried hard enough. Her face took on an expression of firmness “most unfeminine,” said Lady Marie, who was her governess.

“Do not run, my dear—it is so masculine,” said Lady Marie, often; or “Do not climb trees, Your Highness—such rough playing is fit only for boys.”

Then the Princess would look at her with non-committal, wide-opened eyes and say nothing. She had a secret, inner knowledge, dating from that moment of revelation in the garden, of the superiority of being a boy, and henceforward nothing could take it from her, not precept, nor example, nor soft insinuation of the beauty and propriety of womanliness. She knew that people were trying to deceive her; she

had heard of conspiracies before—but she never let them see that she knew. On occasions like this she had a way of looking stupid which was nearer cleverness than anything else that she ever did.

Now, there are people for whom one idea, with variations, will last a lifetime, and the Princess Olivera Rinalda Victorine was one of them. As to questions about the whys and wherefores of things, she never asked one in her life, nor answered one. Very systematically she set about her life-work. As His Highness, her baby brother, grew up, she imitated him. Once she was found standing with her sturdy legs apart and her arms akimbo, whistling. Lady Marie and the Queen both wept, and deprived the Princess that day of her bread and jam, but to no effect. She seemed inspired by the energy of the small boy or the demon. Her legs could not keep still; she ran, she jumped, she leaped, she climbed, she played all boyish games, and once, but my ink blushes red in recording this, she was caught by the Duchess turning somersaults in the garden. Terrible were the reproaches heaped upon her, and her misdeeds seemed greater because they went unexplained. On this occasion Lady Marie and the Duchess were both sent to discipline her. (Lady Marie was attired in rose satin covered with black lace, and the Duchess was charming in Nile-green brocade, with pearls.) When Lady Marie said, with her scented handkerchief at her eyes: “My dear, your actions are bringing me into disrepute; what will their Majesties think of me?” the Princess, who detested scents, only turned red and said nothing. Not once did she retort that she never would have tried to be a boy if these two had not taught her the desirability of it; she only trudged on in her own way toward the longed-for goal, sure that the scoldings, the reproaches, and, saddest of all, her mother’s tears, came because she had not tried hard enough and had not succeeded.

There were times when the Princess Victorine surpassed Auguste Philippe. One sunshiny morning, when the two were playing knight and ogre in the courtyard, the Prince announced that he meant to climb the castle wall. He did it only out of bravado, for, being a boy, with a boy’s common sense, he knew that it was impossible.



"There aren't any—there's only the Microbe.—Page 239.

"I'm going to climb it, too," said Olivera Rinalda Victorine, stubbornly.

"Pshaw, you can't! You're only a girl," said Auguste Philippe, strutting up and down in his slashed velvet doublet and his feathered cap.

"And you are only a boy," said the Princess, meditatively eyeing him. She did not say it to be saucy—she was only thinking. Then she deliberately took the hem of her embroidered blue satin skirt in her teeth and began to climb the wall, while Auguste Philippe watched from below with wrath and terror in his eyes. By means of a niche here, a clinging ivy vine there, a window ledge, and, now and then, a friendly, grinning gargoyle, the Princess succeeded, and stood at last triumphant upon the battlements, waving her blue skirt for a flag. But all that she got for it was a scolding, and, to the day of his death, Auguste Philippe never admitted that it was true. In fact, he never entirely believed it, though he had watched every step from the courtyard below.

Better even than boyish sports, the Princess loved stories of knightly deeds, and the very pith and marrow of chivalry entered into her bones. She could not read, but that did not matter, for the story-tellers could not write, but oh! they could tell tales. Stories of dragons slain and ogres

vanquished, stories of maidens rescued, enchanters caught and prisoned, stories of caitiff knights thrust through at the moment of their greatest villainy by the swords of heroes, all these the Princess Victorine drank up with greedy ears and mind, and her heroic little heart throbbed within her. Often—it was most unmaidenly—she furtively felt of her muscle in leg or arm, wondering when she would be strong enough to go forth in quest, for not one tale roused in her the desire to become a teller of stories herself—she only wanted to act one. Once she took Auguste Philippe aside, saying:

"I'll tell you a secret if you won't tell."

"Go ahead!" said Auguste Philippe, graciously. He had doubly the air of a sovereign, being at once a brother and heir presumptive.

"I'm going out to find and fight a dragon," said Princess Victorine.

"Huh!" sneered the Prince. "There aren't any dragons any more. You are behind the times."

"Aren't any dragons!" cried the Princess. "What do you mean?"

"There haven't been any for a long time," remarked Auguste Philippe, nonchalantly, his hands in his pockets. But the Princess would not have the foundations of her faith shaken too easily.

"What do they mean by telling us about

them all the time?" she demanded. "Every minstrel that comes here does, and so does old Lord Jean and the Countess Madeline, and everybody nice."

"I don't care," asserted the Prince. "There aren't any—there's only the Microbe."

"What's the Microbe?" gasped the Princess.

"It's worse than dragons, that's what it is," said Auguste Philippe, viciously.

"What does it do?" asked the Princess.

"It bites," answered the Prince. "It stays somewhere in the woods and swamps, and every year it eats a great number of youths and maidens and old men and children. It's always hungry."

"Why doesn't somebody go and kill it?" said the Princess.

"Dunno!" answered Auguste Philippe.

"What does it look like?"

"It has one great eye," answered the Prince, unhesitatingly, knowing that life demanded that he should instruct the feminine mind whether he had information or not; "it has ten great rows of teeth, and what it does not bite with one set it bites with another. It never roars—that makes it worse than a dragon, for you can't tell when it is coming. And it has a hundred thousand claws reaching everywhere."

The Princess went and sat by a rose-bush, wearing her most enigmatical expression. If she was overawed, she was too plucky to show it. Prince Auguste Philippe looked at her, not without remorse. He was aware that he knew nothing of the Microbe save its name, but he decided not to confess—it would only shake a sister's confidence, so he went away to fly his kite.

Now, years flew past, and every day the Princess's bosom swelled with knightly ardor, and every waking thought was of the slaying of the Microbe. The words of Auguste Philippe that day by the rose-bush became the second inspiration of her life, and the second only completed and strengthened the first. At eighteen, as at six, the Princess Olivera Rinalda Victorine was round of face and pink of cheek. Her big blue eyes, set in the baby fairness of her face under the yellow hair, had the confiding look of a little child. All this was very pretty, but manly sports had developed her physique far beyond the bounds of feminine propriety. There were muscles on

her lovely shoulders, and they made her tiring-women weep. As for her biceps, she had always to wear loose, flowing sleeves, for the strong arms broke through the embroidery of tight ones. She was taller than she should have been, and her waist refused to taper. If her sex had been different, the royal parents would have gloried in her strength and her agility, but as it was, they cast down their eyes in her presence and begged her, if she had any filial reverence, to talk mincingly and small, at least in their presence.

One day the Princess Olivera Rinalda Victorine sought out Lady Marie.

"I am going on a quest, to find and fight the Microbe," she remarked, briefly. Lady Marie gave her one look, and fainted, and the Princess revived her by means of her vinaigrette.

"My dear!" whimpered Lady Marie, "think how many gray hairs you are bringing down in sorrow. I do not mean mine," she added, hastily; and, in truth, hers were no longer gray.

"It's got to be killed," said the Princess, sturdily. "It's a pest."

"But what is it?" whispered Lady Marie, blushing through her rouge. "Is it a thing that a young girl ought to know about?"

There was hubbub in the court for ten days. Counts, marchionesses, dukes and earls gathered in corners and talked under their breath. Some thought that the Princess should be imprisoned in a dungeon; others spoke of her with pity, believing her mad. One party, headed by old Lord Jean and the Countess Madeline, said that it was all nonsense. Everybody knew that there was no such thing as the Microbe; it was only a new heresy, wickedly devised to shake the established faith in dragons. The Princess might just as well be allowed to go the way of her folly and find out the truth. Another faction, made up of believers, spoke darkly of the mystery that enshrouded the foe, for he lived in a fog, and went out to kill veiled in cloud, and they hinted that if the Princess went to find him she would not return alive. His Majesty and Her Majesty, bewildered, agreed with both parties, wept, protested, but did not forbid the Princess to go, for fear that she would not mind. Auguste Philippe said a bad word.



Drawn by J. J. Gould.

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At first the Princess tried to reason with them—an unwonted occupation for her.

"It really is a combat that a lady could very well engage in," she said, earnestly. "It isn't as if it were a dragon, you know." But they only pooh-poohed and ha-haed until she shut her lips very tightly together, and went on her way as usual, unexplained.

Just here attention was diverted from her, for His Majesty, who had been hurt in hunting, sickened and died, and, amid sobs and whisperings and discussions, Auguste Philippe the Twenty-fourth came to the throne. There were many rumors and whispers of how the late King had come to his death: some said that it was a fall from his steed; others hinted the Microbe, shivering with horror at the name. No one was sure of anything, and the court physicians very cleverly gave out that they could not explain at length His Majesty's ailment because nobody knew enough to understand.

But the Princess Victorine, who was not a person of doubts, was convinced from the first. With her head held very erect, she went to the court armorer, and gave orders that he dared not disobey; then she went to the royal stables and made her choice, while all stood still to watch her, spell-bound, no one venturing to lift a hand. Her Majesty was too much overcome with grief to care what happened; Lady Marie and the Duchess were absorbed and happy getting the court into mourning, and so there was no one but Auguste Philippe to say good-by to the Princess when she went away. He had risen very early, and stood upon the battlements to see her go.

It was one brave June day when the Princess Olivera Rinalda Victorine, armed *cap-à-pie*, went forth to war. She was mounted on a charger of dapple gray; a palfrey she would not have. On her head was a shining steel helmet, through the back of which her tawny hair floated down her back—there was not room to do it high. Through her visor her blue eyes sparkled with a steady light. On her arm she carried a blue shield, for even in her battle mood she could not forget what color was becoming. It bore the device that she had chosen for herself, a virgin *rampant*, gules. The armor that covered her from head to foot was of wrought rings of finest steel, made with a flowing skirt

that fell in protecting folds about her feet. Her right hand held a spear; with her left she guided her steed.

"Good-by, dear!" called the Princess, waving her hand to Auguste Philippe.

"You are a silly thing," he remarked, affectionately, from the battlements. "You won't do anything but tear your clothes."

He did not try to stop her. In the strain of becoming Auguste Philippe the Twenty-fourth he found that there were many things he was not so sure of as he had been before. The flame in his sister's eyes he did not understand, and he wondered why she was not content to stay at home and play at quoits and dance to music, as he was; but he resolved that Victorine should make a fool of herself in her own way, and that it should not cost her too dear. So he stood long watching her as she went shining across the great green plain with the light flashing from a thousand glittering points on her armor.

Now, the Princess rode by night and day, and not once did her courage fail or her arm grow weary. She left behind the green plain and the pleasant trees and travelled in a grievous waste beyond the songs of birds, and anon she came to a woodland that was dark and old. She was sorely puzzled as to the habitat of the Microbe, for in his raids he came from east and west and north and south, and no one could tell if he had a permanent abiding-place. Often in the dusky shadows of the wood, she stopped to call a challenge: "What, ho! Come out and try thy skill!" But that was not his way of fighting, and he stayed hidden. Sometimes she inquired at a cottage door or at a shepherd's hut on the edge of the wood, but all thought that the lovely lady in armor was surely mad, wearing such strange clothing and asking such strange questions. Once she came upon a witch-wife who was gathering simples by a swamp in the wood.

"Is the pretty lady looking for the pretty knight that passed this way yestere'en?" asked the witch-wife, with a horrible leer of her sunken eyes.

The Princess elevated her eyebrows with a look of scorn.

"No," she answered, coldly; "I am looking for the Microbe."

"How?" asked the witch-woman, with her hand behind her ear.

"The Microbe!" shouted the Princess.

"Is it a man or a lady or a place?"

"It's a monster!" shrieked the Princess. "It kills and eats and destroys." And then followed a faithful repetition of Auguste Philippe's description of the beast. The witch-wife laughed and rocked to and fro, her yellow teeth showing in her shrunken gums.

"Oh, deary, deary, deary!" she said, "there ain't any such critter, truly there ain't. I've lived here in the swamp seventy-nine year; I never saw one, and I sees pretty nigh everything."

"Who eats the youths and the maidens, and the old men and the children?" demanded the Princess, sternly.

"How do I know? How do I know?" cackled the old woman. "I don't."

The Princess Victorine rode away, and behind her the witch-wife laughed.

"That's the way the pretty knight went," she called. "You'll find him further on."

The Princess indignantly turned her charger and rode in the opposite direction. That morning came her moment of great reward, for, by the side of a noxious swamp a gray mist met her, blinding her eyes, and she thought she heard sounds of gurgling and lashing and clawing. Once she caught sight of the great shining eye of which Auguste Philippe had told her, and then she dimly detected the grin of teeth. Olivera Rinalda Victorine was sure that she had met the Microbe at last. With lifted spear, and with the shout, "A maiden to the rescue!" she rode into the floating cloud and thrust it through and through. Her spear crashed on—something; her charger seemed to trample a living creature under foot, and snorted with terror. Thrice came swift blows upon the Princess's shield, but whether they were of claws or tail she could not tell. Her ears were deafened by the noise; her armor ripped in the gathers at the waist; her good steed for a moment lost his footing in the morass, but she reined him up, and, mad with the thrill of victory, struck out again and again with more than woman's strength. Then, was it fancy, or did she hear a roar as of mortal pain? Did she catch the sound of swift retreat of a hundred thousand wounded legs?

At home, upon the battlements, that morning, stood Auguste Philippe with some ladies of the court. (Lady Marie

was lovely in deepest crêpe, and the Duchess was looking her best in heavy mourning.)

"It was in that direction that she went, did you say?" sobbed the Duchess, with a black-bordered handkerchief at her eyes.

The young king nodded.

"How can I bear it?" asked Lady Marie, raising her clasped hands to heaven. "Oh, Your Highness, send out a searching party! Send fifty armed knights! Think what may happen at any moment!"

"Pshaw!" said Auguste Philippe the Twenty-fourth, "Victorine can take care of herself. She is four inches taller than I, and her arms are like iron. Let her be. She is foolish, but she has got to have her fling."

"In my day," said Lady Marie, "no modest girl would have suggested such a thing."

"I dare say," sighed His Majesty, "but the thing has got to come; they must sow their wild oats! She will come back all right."

Though Lady Marie did not know it, His Majesty, Auguste Philippe, then, as always, spoke the truth.

At that very moment, beyond the wide green plain, and beyond the sandy waste, a young knight, riding slowly, with his head bent down upon his breast, came upon a maiden sitting at the edge of a wood. Near her, cropping the grass, strayed a gray charger, with his bridle falling loose upon his neck. The maiden was curiously clad in shining armor, only her helmet was off, and tears were trickling down her cheeks. Now and then she dried them with strands of her yellow hair, and then she shuddered, gazing at a bloody spear that she held in her left hand.

"Fair lady," said the Knight, riding toward her, "tell me your trouble, that I may help you."

The Princess Olivera Rinalda Victorine looked up at him and sobbed, and her chain armor rose and fell upon her bosom. She had not cried this way since that memorable day on the stone bench in the garden, twelve years ago.

"I've—I've killed the Microbe!" gasped Princess Victorine.

"Indeed?" said the Knight, raising his visor and showing a pleasant smile upon a pale face. "And are you not glad?"

"Ye-es!" said the Princess, with a great heave of her bosom as she looked at the disfigured spear.

The stranger alighted from his horse and came slowly toward the Princess. He was tall and strongly built, but he walked as one to whom every motion brings pain.

"Are you quite sure that the beast is dead?"

The Princess nodded.

"Quite."

"I wonder," said the Knight, meditatively, "if you brought away his head or a claw?"

"No, I didn't; but I feel very sure. Men are so sceptical!" said the Princess, with some heat.

"Not at all," answered the Knight, courteously, "only your quest is the same as mine, and I should be glad to know that it is over. I, too, am hunting him."

A beautiful expression swept over the Princess's face and into her blue eyes. She looked less like a baby than she had done at any time for seventeen years.

"I thought men didn't care."

"Some do."

"Auguste Philippe doesn't—he only laughs, and so does old Lord Jean; but I think that this will convince them," and Princess Victorine triumphantly brandished her spear.

"Ah!" said the Knight, looking at it with sudden interest, "may I see your point?" But as he moved to take it, he gave a sudden groan and fainted at the Princess's feet.

"Oh, oh, oh!" cried Olivera Rinalda Victorine. In a trice she unlaced the Knight's helmet and corselet, and was horrified to find blood flowing from an open wound in his shoulder. Hastily she brought water in her helmet from a spring hard by, and bathed his forehead and eyes, and then ran for more to pour on the wound, saying, as she went, something unpleasant about her skirt of chain armor, which kept getting in her way. As she worked, the eyelids fluttered, and the dark eyes slowly opened.

"Are you hurt?" asked the Princess, eagerly.

"I'm afraid that I am rather badly cut up," he answered, with a groan.

"Did that—Beast do it?" asked the Princess.

"It may be," said the Knight.

The Princess rose and put on her helmet.

"Where are you going?" asked the Knight.

"After It," said Victorine, sternly.

"Lovely lady," he said, feebly, "don't you think you ought to wait until I am better?"

"I'm not a lovely lady; I'm a warrior," said the Princess, "but of course I'll stay if you want me to."

"You are both," said the Knight. "Do you know I think that it would make me forget my pain if you should tell me of your fight."

So the Princess, with a shining face, told him of her battle in the mist, and of the monster with the great, glowing eye, and as she talked she failed to see that the wounded man kept looking toward the spot where his gleaming helmet lay.

"And now," said the Princess, reproachfully, with red flushing her cheeks, "tell me how you were wounded. Do you mind explaining how you came to be hurt in the back?"

"Somebody or something attacked me from behind," said the Knight, with a smile half hiding the look of pain on his face.

"The coward!" cried the Princess Victorine, in great anger.

"It may have been someone who did not know the rules of the game," said the Knight.

"That makes *no* difference," said Princess Victorine, loftily.

"Well, it was a strange combat," remarked the Knight, "and the blows were the oddest I ever received. They came thrashing from all sides, in defiance of all the laws of fighting. Whether they came from man or beast I could not see—you know yourself that it is foggy in the woods, and I was disabled by the blow in the back."

"I know," nodded the Princess, sympathetically. "You've been fighting that same monster that I killed." And for the life of her she could not help a little feeling of triumph that the beast had gone down before her rather than before him.

"When did you kill him?" asked the wounded man.

"This morning," beamed the Princess. "When were you hurt?"

"Oh, I believe it was this morning," said the Knight, carelessly.

"I wish, for your sake, I had done it sooner," said Victorine, regretfully. One of her greatest charms was her slowness in putting two and two together. Now she had little time for it, for the Knight fainted again. For the first time in her life, the Princess repented of her aversion to smelling-salts. However, there was plenty of water in the spring, and she kept her best lawn handkerchief, which she had carried up her sleeve, wet upon the sick man's brow. Through the fever of that day she watched him, and all night, and again a second one, and on the third day there was a look of weariness upon her face that had never been there before. As the fever abated, and the Knight was aware of the tender nursing that he was receiving, he watched the Princess with eyes full of gratitude. She had laid aside her armor, and was becomingly attired in blue brocade, which she had worn underneath the steel. The sun shone pleasantly on her yellow hair, and if the color in her cheeks was less pink than it had been, it meant, with the dark shadows under her eyes, only new beauty. When he spoke his thanks, she turned red as a boy would have done, and asked him please to stop, which he did.

That afternoon the Princess grew confidential. She was sitting near the invalid, who was propped up on a mossy pillow, supported from underneath by her armor and her shield.

"Just feel my muscle!" said the Princess, impulsively.

"I have!" said the sick Knight, gravely.

"Why, when?" demanded the Princess.

"Oh, you mean when I lifted your head. But look how it stands out."

He did so.

"You see," said Olivera Rinalda Victorine, "I am so unfeminine. I ought to have been a boy."

"Never!" cried the Knight, vehemently.

The Princess looked at him in surprise.

"I'm very sure," she said, gently. "I've known it ever since I was so high," and she measured off the stature of six years by holding her white hand above the ground.

"I don't agree with you," said the Knight. "You're not in the least like a boy, really. You do not look like one, nor use your arms like one."

"When have you noticed that?" asked the Princess, in surprise.

"Oh, lots of times," he answered, evasively. "But tell me why you think so."

Sitting beside him, with the beech leaves making a flickering shade on her face and throat, the Princess told him all the tragedy of her life, her discovery of her initial great mistake, her unavailing efforts to set it right, and the persecutions she had suffered because she was not ladylike. It was the first confidence that she had made in all her life, and her cheeks flushed deep red. Overhead sang thrush and sparrow, and a little breeze came and played with her floating hair. Suddenly the Knight reached out and took the white hand in his and kissed it.

"Why did you do that?" asked the Princess, softly. "To comfort me for not being a boy?"

"No," growled the sick man.

"Then why?" she persisted, drawing it away.

"Oh, I can't tell you," he groaned, "until I know whether I shall get well of this beastly wound."

But the Princess, taking both hands to arrange the wet handkerchief, suddenly found them prisoned and covered with kisses.

"It is because I love you," he moaned.

"Don't you understand?"

Princess Victorine eyed him with curiosity, and shook her head.

"No," she answered, kneeling down and looking at him, "I'm afraid I don't. Nobody ever did before."

The Knight laughed out from the mossy green pillow.

"That's just what makes you so adorable."

"Won't you try to make me understand?" said the Princess. "I am very slow, but when I once learn, I never forget."

"Victorine," said the Knight, fixing his dark eyes on her, "I love you, and I need you. I love your hair and your eyes and the touch of your hands, and I want you to be my queen. You are a princess, I know, but then I am a prince."

Olivera Rinalda Victorine was silent a long time, kneeling on the moss.

"Are you angry?" asked the Knight, at length.

"No," said the Princess, in a whisper.

"I think I like it." Then he smiled up at her, but did not even touch her hand.

"Tell me truly," said the Princess, "don't you mind my climbing trees and doing all those things?"

"Not a bit."

"Nor the device on my shield?"

He laughed and shook his head.

"Nor my wanting to go on a quest, and do all those unfeminine things?"

"Victorine," said the Knight, "it is the brave soul of you that I love. We will go on and fight together."

Then there was a sudden shining that was neither from the sun nor the Princess's hair, but from the light that sprang into her face, and when the wounded man lifted his arms and drew her toward him, she bent and kissed him on the eyes, and no one ever knew, she least of all, where she had learned that.

Three days more and three nights they stayed there, and the sick man's strength came slowly back. In the quiet they talked of many things in the past and many yet to come. Only once in all that time did Princess Victorine look troubled.

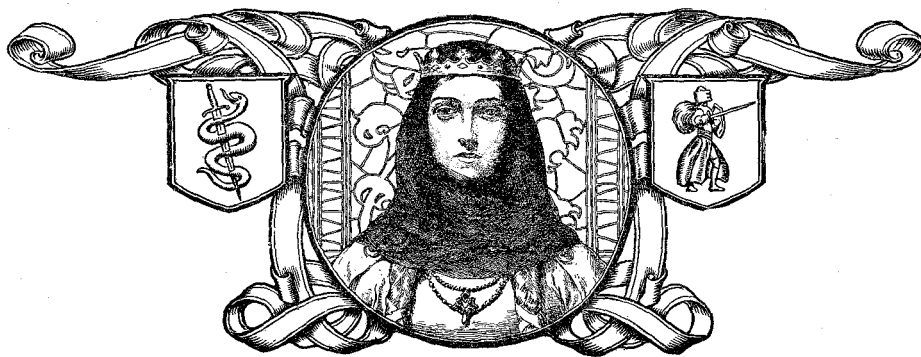
"Dear," she said, one day, "there are moments when I am afraid that you do not quite believe in me. I am not sure that you are convinced that I have really killed the Microbe."

"Beloved," said the Knight, putting down a piece of his armor, where he had been idly fitting the point of the Princess's spear into a great hole, "I believe in you utterly, only, there may be more than one, you know, and so our quest is not over."

On the fourth day they put their armor on, caught their steeds, and rode away. On the Princess's shield the maiden stood out bravely against the blue; the stranger Knight carried the device of an ugly worm transfixed by a glittering sword, and the motto was "I search." The maiden knight and the man looked at each other from under their visors.

"To the death!" he cried, and he spurred his steed.

"To the death!" echoed the Princess, dashing after him, and so they rode gallantly away. Whether they have found and fought the Microbe none can say, but this is known, that they are happy in the quest.



MISS MARTIN'S HOUR

By Anne O'Hagan

I



THE age of Miss Martin, measured by any calendar, is a matter of no importance. Women a decade her senior in years were younger than she in joyousness and charm.

Women a decade younger were her elders in sophistication, in emotion, and in *ennui*. Miss Martin had never bloomed. She had faded in the bud. It is a fate not unlikely to befall girls in small towns whence the young men make early escapes.

Miss Martin eventually made her own escape from Standish Plains. The auctioneer's hammer had fallen on the last stove-lid, the last clothes-line, the last of everything in the undistinguished house that had been her lifelong home. Across an elm-bordered street and down a slope she could see the dark evergreen bushes and the low, slanting stones of the cemetery where all of her race, save only herself, now lay—her mother's years new chiselled on the yellowing marble that had long weighed down her father's sleep. No tears suffused her eyes at the sight, but her mouth sank into a more permanent groove of loneliness. Miss Martin's pale skin had never wrinkled, her features only seemed to sink inward with each new year and each new sorrow.

When she had closed the door of her old home upon herself for the last time, she was conscious of a moment's stoppage of the living forces within her breast. Fear gripped them. A great timidity seized her, a great loneliness. But patient, undefining acceptance of all that came to her had been the unconscious rule of her life. She could permit herself no coddling note of her fright. She looked but once at the old house with its roof sloping groundward at the kitchen. Over the knocker she tacked up the sign for the new tenant's eye—"Key next door." Then she crossed to the kitchen of the neighboring house and left the key. The stove glistened with fire

and with polishing, as she paused on the step to make her adieux; her buxom neighbor had a freckled tow-head clinging to her skirts. The odor of hot gingerbread was on the air. Miss Martin suddenly beheld herself, a little girl again, at her mother's skirts on baking day. But it was the neighbor's voice that broke, the neighbor's eyes that filled, as they said good-bye.

Then Miss Martin had taken the train southward and the evening saw her parents' pictures and her black leather Bible neatly disposed on a hall bedroom chiffonier in a New York boarding-house. By day she was one of a noisy swarm of young men and women at a business college. By night she diligently transcribed stenographic notes from a soft-backed note-book, and fitted herself to become a wage-earner. The money from the auction would see her modestly through the time of preparation; the tiny rental from the cottage would be a source of comfort and security. As for the rest she found the new life exciting. The young women with pompadours hanging over their eyes and tulle bows spreading behind their ears almost awed her with their air of brilliant, careless worldliness. The young men, though not so magnificent, seemed paragons of wit and good humor to her. She moved among them, quiet, gray, as usual, but with stirrings of admiration. Mere novelty wore for her the hues of gayety. The carping spirit of the inexperienced she never had.

As for the boarding-house, though there were many to revile it, Miss Martin at first found it stately and stimulating. Dinner each night was a festivity by the mere effect of numbers; it was an elaborate function because of the presence of a negro waiter and the appearance of viands in successive courses. To Miss Martin the badinage of the older boarders was spirited and lively, the suspicious punctilio of the newcomers the perfection of high breeding. She drank diluted chickory without even a sigh of regret for the fragrant mixture she had known at home. She cleaned her own