



Ririro

READ ANYWHERE, ANYTIME

Princess Cantilla

Abbie Phillips Walker

Princess Cantilla lived in a castle like most princesses, but she was not a rich princess, for her father had lost all his lands and money by quarreling with other kings about the length and breadth of his kingdom and theirs.

So poor little Cantilla had to work just like any common peasant girl and cook the meals for herself and her father.

The old castle where Cantilla and her father lived had fallen into decay, and only a few rooms at one end were now used, so that the bats and owls had taken possession of the towers and once gorgeous halls on the opposite side of the castle, where beautiful ladies and courtly gentlemen were once seen in happy and festive pleasures. A kitchen and a bedroom apiece were all the rooms that Cantilla and her father, the old King, used, and the furniture was so old it hardly held together.

One day Cantilla was cooking soup for dinner, and as the steam rolled up from the kettle Cantilla thought she saw a face with a long beard looking at her. She drew her hand across her eyes to make her sight more clear, and the next time she looked she did see a face, and a form, too.



A little man with a misshapen back and a long white beard, the ends of which he carried over one arm, stepped from the cover of the boiling pot and hopped to the floor.

"Princess," he said, bowing low before Cantilla, "I am an enchanted dwarf. I can give you back your once beautiful home and make your father a rich king again.

"I can cause all the rooms of the old castle to become new and filled with beautiful hangings and furniture, as they were before your father became so poor."

Cantilla began to smile at the thought of all the luxury and comfort the dwarf pictured, and she lost sight of his ugly-looking body and face for a minute, but she was brought to her senses by what the dwarf next said.

"All this will I give you, Princess Cantilla, if you will become my wife," he said, taking a step closer to Cantilla.

"Oh no, no! I cannot do that," said Cantilla, holding up both hands as if to ward off even the thought of such a thing.

"Wait," said the dwarf. "Do not be so hasty, my Princess. I will come again for your reply to-night at the fountain in the garden where the honeysuckle grows."

Before Cantilla could reply to this he swung his beard over his head and disappeared in a cloud of what looked like steam or smoke.

Cantilla looked about her and pinched herself to make sure she had not dreamed all she had just seen, and by and by she believed it was a dream—that she must have fallen asleep in her chair by the fire.

That night while she was sleeping she was awakened by feeling some one touch her on the face.

Cantilla had been awakened so many times by the little mice that overran the old castle that she only brushed her face with her hand without opening her eyes and went to sleep again.

"Cantilla, open your eyes! Open your eyes!" she heard some one whisper close to her ear, and again she felt the touch of something on her face.

Cantilla opened her eyes and sat up in bed. The room was quite bright, and a beautiful lamp with a pink silk shade gave everything in the room a rose tint.

Cantilla was sure she was dreaming, for it was not her old shabby room at all she was looking at.

She looked down at the covering of her bed—that was pink silk, too; she felt of it and found it was filled with the softest down; she also noticed that she wore a beautiful night-robe of pink silk and lace.

On the floor beside the bed on a soft, pink rug stood two little satin slippers, trimmed with swan's-down.

"I am dreaming," said Cantilla, "but I will enjoy it while it lasts," and she looked about her.

The furniture was white and gold, and soft pink rugs covered the floor. Her bed had little gold Cupids on each post, and they held in their hands the ends of pink silk that formed a beautiful canopy; little frills of lace fell from the bottom of the silk, making it look very soft and pretty in the lamplight.

On the table beside her bed, which held her lamp, Cantilla saw a big gold-and-glass bottle. She reached for it and took out the gold stopper, then she tipped

the bottle and bathed her face and hands with the delicious perfume it held.

Cantilla put her little feet out of bed and slipped them into the slippers and walked over to the gold-and-white dressing-table at the other side of the room.

Everything was so beautiful she just looked at first, then she picked up a gold brush and smoothed her hair. She took up each of the gold toilet articles and saw that on each was the letter "C."

"They must belong to me," said Cantilla. "But, of course, it is all a dream," as she opened a drawer of a big gold-and-white chest.

What she saw made Cantilla gasp with wonder, for the drawer was filled with beautiful clothes, and as she opened the others she found they all were filled with silk and lace-trimmed clothes.

Cantilla forgot all about her dream and ran, just as though she were awake, to a closet door that was open. She swung it back and looked; there hung before her astonished gaze pink silk dresses and blue silk dresses and white and dainty green and yellow silk dresses.

Now, I did not tell you that Cantilla had black hair which hung in long curls about her pretty face and over her pretty white shoulders, and her eyes were as deep-blue as the deepest blue of a violet, and when she put on one of the pink silk dresses and stepped in front of a long mirror she forgot all else for a moment. Then suddenly she heard her name called softly. "Cantilla, Cantilla," the voice said.

Cantilla looked up, and on the top of the mirror stood a little fairy dressed in pink gauze.

"Oh! you have a pretty pink dress, too," said Cantilla, forgetting to be surprised at seeing a fairy in her room.

"Yes, but it is the only dress I own," said the little creature, with a smile, "while you have a closet full; but then mine never wear out, and yours will."

"You mean I will wake up in a minute, I suppose," said Cantilla. "Yes, I know it is a dream, but I am having a good time. I wish I could have a dream like this every night. I wouldn't mind being poor through the day."

"Ah! but you are not dreaming at all, Princess Cantilla," said the fairy, "and if you will follow me I will show you more of your beautiful home. Come along."

Cantilla did not answer, but walked after the fairy, who skimmed along before Cantilla like a little pink bird.

The fairy touched a door with her wand and it flew open. Cantilla looked about her in wonder, for the hall, which had been hung with tatters of faded tapestry,

now looked like the hall of a king.

The tapestry hung whole and rich-looking upon the walls, which were of deep-blue and gold. The old armor that had been broken and covered with dust and mold was erect as though its former wearer was inside it.

The fairy touched the door of the room where the old King was sleeping, and again Cantilla looked in wonder, for her father slept beneath a canopy of red and gold upon a bed of gold, and all the furnishings of his room were such as a king would have.

Cantilla looked at her father. He was smiling in his sleep, and the care-worn look had gone from his face.

The fairy beckoned to her and Cantilla, with one backward glance at her sleeping father, followed.

Next the old dining-hall was opened for Cantilla to see. The once faded and torn draperies were whole, and bats and owls were gone from the corners of the room where they had often made their nests.

The beautiful table of onyx and silver was covered with dishes of silver, and dainty lace napkins lay beside each place as though ready for the coming guests. But the fairy led her away, and next Cantilla saw the beautiful halls where the old King held his grand balls and kings and queens and princes and princesses had danced.

The lights burned in the gold-and-glass fixtures fastened to the walls and made the place look like fairyland.

The blue damask curtains with their edge of priceless lace hung from the windows, whole and shimmering with richness, and chairs of gold stood upright and bright against the walls, and the floor shone with polish.

And so through the whole castle the fairy led the wondering little Princess to look at her old ruined home, now beautiful and whole.

Then the fairy took Cantilla to the gardens. The once dry fountains were playing in the moonlight, the nightingales could be heard among the roses, and the air was filled with rich perfume.

When they reached the lower end of the garden Cantilla suddenly stopped and stood very still. She was beside a fountain, and honeysuckle grew over an arbor close beside it.

Cantilla remembered the words of the dwarf she had seen in her dream, and his words, "I will come for your reply to-night at the fountain where the honeysuckle grows."

The fairy stood on a bush beside her. "You remember now, do you not?" she asked. "You see it was not a dream this morning, and you are not dreaming now, my Princess, but I cannot help you. I have finished my work and must return to my Queen. Farewell!"

Cantilla watched the fairy disappear without uttering a single word. She saw in her mind's eye only the ugly features of the dwarf and heard his words.

In another minute she saw what looked like a cloud near the honeysuckle arbor, and in another minute the dwarf of the morning stood before her with the ends of his long white beard thrown over one arm.

"I have come, Princess Cantilla, for my answer," said the dwarf. "Marry me and all you have seen shall be yours."

Cantilla threw out her hands as she had in the morning and started to reply, but the dwarf checked her. "Before you give your answer," he said, "think of your old father and how contented and happy he looked surrounded by the comforts of his former days of prosperity."

Cantilla let her hands fall by her side, her head bent low, and she stood lost in thought. She saw again her old father in his bed of gold, and the face that looked so happy, then she raised her head without looking at the ugly creature before her and said: "I consent; I will become your wife; I cannot love you, but I will wed you if that will content you."

"Follow me, then," said the dwarf, throwing his long beard over his head and letting it fall over Cantilla as he spoke.

Cantilla saw only a fleecy cloud closing all about her, and the next thing she knew she was on a little island in the middle of a deep blue ocean, with the dwarf standing beside her.

The dwarf, with his beard still over one arm, held his hands to his mouth and gave a long, loud call, which seemed to descend to the depths of the ocean.

Up from the water came an arm and hand holding a twisted shell, and then Cantilla saw a head appear and blow a long, loud blast from the shell.

A splashing was heard, and out of the water came an old man in a chariot of mother-of-pearl.

The chariot was drawn by two horses with feet and manes of gold, and in one hand the old man carried a long wand with three prongs at one end.

The old man struck the water with the queer-looking wand, and from all over the surface of the water came the sea nymphs and all sorts of monsters and creatures that live at the bottom of the ocean.

But when the mermaids appeared the old man sent them back quickly and drove his chariot toward Cantilla and the dwarf.

Cantilla by this time was beyond being frightened or surprised, and she stood beside the dwarf waiting for the next thing to happen.

"My Lord Neptune," said the dwarf, bowing low as the old man drove close to the island on which Cantilla and the dwarf stood, "I have come with my Princess for you to perform the ceremony. She has consented to become my wife."

"What!" cried the old man, in an angry voice, "do you mean you have found a Princess who will consent to have such a husband as you are—ugly and misshapen wretch?"

"Answer him, my Princess," said the dwarf. "Tell my Lord Neptune you consent to marry me."

"I do consent to marry the dwarf," Cantilla managed to say, and again the old man struck the water, this time in anger, and the water spouted about them like huge fountains throwing up rivers.

Cantilla felt the dwarf take her hand, and he said, "Fear not, my Princess; it will soon be over."

In a few minutes the water was calm again, and the old man in the chariot stood a little way off, surrounded by the nymphs and other creatures, holding the three-pronged wand high over his head.

"I release you; you are wed; be gone from my sight," said the old man, and as the trumpet-bearer sounded his loud call, the old man and his chariot passed into the deep water, followed by all his nymphs and the others.

Cantilla looked toward the dwarf, wondering if ever any one had such a strange wedding, but to her surprise he was gone and by her side stood a handsome man, who said: "My Princess, behold in me your husband. I am free from the spell of the old man of the sea, who wanted me to become a sea monster and live under the ocean.

"I was changed into the shape of the ugly dwarf because I would not marry a mermaid who happened to fall in love with me one day while I was bathing, and she called upon a sea witch to change me into a sea monster, but I escaped before I took on the sea shape, but not before I was changed into the ugly dwarf you saw this morning.

"A kind fairy interceded with her Queen to save me, and she went to the old man, who is Neptune, the God of the Waters. He told the Queen if I could find a princess who would consent to marry me he would release me from the spell the sea witch had cast over me.

“You know how that was accomplished, my Princess, and if you think you can accept me in place of the dwarf for your husband we will return to the castle, where your father is still sleeping, I expect, for the Fairy Queen said she would watch until sunrise for our return.”

Cantilla, no longer looking sad, but smiling and happy, put her hand in her husband’s and told him she was the happiest girl in the world.

“And I am the happiest man in the world,” said her husband, “for I not only am freed from the spell of the sea witch, but I have won the one woman in the world I could ever love for my wife.”

Three times he clapped his hands together, and the little fairy in the pink gauze dress appeared.

“The Queen sends her love to you and this message, ‘Bless you, my children,’ and now I will take you home to the castle.”

She touched the Princess and her husband on the cheek with her wand, and Cantilla found herself back in the castle garden by the fountain and honeysuckle arbor, with her handsome husband standing by her side.

“Come, my dear, we must go in to breakfast,” said her husband; “your father will be waiting for us.”

“How will we explain about our wedding and the changed appearance of the castle?” asked Cantilla.

“Oh! the Fairy Queen has arranged all that,” said Cantilla’s husband. “Your father will not remember he ever lost his fortune; he will ask no questions.”

Cantilla and her husband went hand in hand into the castle to their breakfast, and from that day Cantilla never knew another sorrow or unhappy moment.

Stories help us explore cultures, learn moral lessons, connect with nature — or simply have fun. That's why [ririro.com](https://www.ririro.com) offers 3,000+ free stories — fairy tales, fables, bedtime stories, myths and more — for every age, in 13 languages, with free printable PDFs and often audio. Reading should be a right, not a privilege. Share [ririro.com](https://www.ririro.com) and spread the joy of reading.

Instagram: [@ririro_reading](https://www.instagram.com/ririro_reading) · Pinterest: [pinterest.com/ririrocom](https://www.pinterest.com/ririrocom)