



# Ririro

READ ANYWHERE, ANYTIME

## The Poppies

*Abbie Phillips Walker*

A long distance from here, in a far Eastern country, there once lived a very rich king. All kings are not rich, you know, but this one was, and his jewels were the most beautiful ever seen.

But this king dearly loved all the good things of this world and gave feasts and dances that lasted for days without any one sleeping. Of course he could not lead such a life as that and have good health, and at last there came a time when the king could not sleep.

At last he offered a reward to any one who could put him to sleep, no matter how it was accomplished. He said to the one who could do this he would give half his kingdom.

The poor king was the subject for many experiments, and when he had almost given up hope of ever sleeping again there came a strange-looking man to the gate of the castle. He wore a turban and a long, flowing robe of white, and wore around his neck many chains and strings of queer-looking beads.

"I can make the king sleep," he said, "but I must be allowed to have the grounds of the castle to myself and the king must obey me in every way."

The king was ready to do anything, and so the strange-looking man began his work, but before he would do anything for the king he insisted upon having half the kingdom given into his hands, and when this was done he set to work. No one was allowed to be near him, and the king was left alone in the castle with him.

One morning, not long after, the king saw what looked to be a sea of green all around the castle, but it really was a bed of green leaves, and soon there appeared white flowers among the leaves, and then the strange man told the king to walk among them.

Soon the king felt a drowsy feeling stealing over him, and he sat down in the midst of the sea of green and in a few minutes he was sound asleep.

Then the strange man began to repeat something in a sing-song tone and wave his hands over the sleeping king. He walked among the leaves and flowers, repeating his queer rhyme, and the leaves and flowers grew taller and taller until the king could not be seen, and the man moved away, still chanting:

"Poppy, poppy, flower of sleep,  
Your drowsy spell around him keep,  
For I can all his kingdom take  
If you do not let him wake."

The poppies grew until they reached the top of the castle, and every one who went near to look for the king fell under the spell of their strange power until the people around gave it up and the strange man became king; he built a new castle and the old one was forgotten.

All went well with the new king until a young man called at his castle and asked him about the old king, and the servants told him how the strange flowers had grown around the castle and no one could go near, and that every one thought that the old king was dead.

The new king, when he heard that the stranger was asking for the old king, had him driven from the castle.

"Tell your master," said the stranger to the servants, "that he will hear from me again."

The stranger went into the woods, where there lived an old witch, and at midnight they came out and went to the castle among the strange flowers.

The witch held her hands high over her head and waved them up and down, saying all the time:

"Poppy, poppy, sleepy flower,  
Now I have you in my power.  
I would have you shorter grow  
Until the sleeping one you show."

Down came the tall flowers and bushes until the young man cried out, "Here he is," and then the flowers ceased to grow small. The witch knelt beside the sleeping king and whispered in his ear:

"Awake, good king, 'tis break of day,  
And drive the false king far away."

The king opened his eyes and looked at the witch and the young man beside her. "What has happened?" he asked.

"I will leave you to tell him," said the witch. "The sun is up and I must go."

"When you offered to give half your kingdom to the one who could make you sleep," said the young man, "I set out for your castle with a box which contained



a strange flower that had the power to make people sleep, but it had to be used with the greatest care, and I alone knew the secret of using it, for it was given to my grandmother by an old witch doctor.

"Before I could reach you I was overtaken by a band of robbers and the box stolen. They made me tell what I intended doing with the flower, on pain of death, but I did not tell the whole secret. Then they put me in a cave and rolled a stone in front of it too heavy for me to move, and left. I was almost dead from starvation when I was found by some peasants, who nursed me until I was well enough to travel, when I hurried here, only to find that one of the band of robbers had taken your whole kingdom after putting you to sleep with the charmed flower.

"He drove me from the castle when he heard that I was asking for you, and if it had not been for the witch who lives in the wood I should not have been able to awaken you. She knew the secret, as she is the daughter of the witch who gave the flower to my grandmother."

When the king heard the strange story he hurried with the young man to the castle where the robber king lived. He was asleep when they arrived, and the servants, who did not like their new master, ran out to meet the old king, and when they heard what had happened they went back to the castle and bound the robber while he slept, and when he awoke he was so frightened that he promised to tell where the rest of his band could be found if they would spare his life.

This they promised to do, and the country was rid of these bad men, for they were put on a ship and made to work the rest of their lives.

The king was so grateful to the young man who rescued him that he made him his heir, and when the king died he left him his kingdom.

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