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The Princess and the Gentleman

R.H. Busk

There was a princess who had her own method for dealing with the suitors who came to call on her. When a man arrived to pay his respects and make his case, she would produce a dead chicken and begin plucking it, or do something equally unexpected with it, watching to see how he reacted. Those who were affronted, or confused, or simply too startled to recover themselves—and that was most of them—she declined. She was looking for someone quick-witted enough to respond without blinking.

One young gentleman heard about the princess and her chicken and thought the situation over carefully. He sent a dead chicken through in advance of himself, with a note explaining that he had heard of her test and had arranged that the preliminaries should go on ahead. When he arrived, she was already laughing.



He was not rich, but he was clever and she was not indifferent to cleverness, and they fell very thoroughly in love. Her father had other ideas about the match, and the walls of the palace garden were high; but the young man was industrious, and there was a large stone statue in the garden near the wall. He found a way underneath it, and through it, and over the course of some weeks a passage was established.

They eloped, and put themselves as far from her father's displeasure as they could manage by taking work as servants at another great house—somewhere they could be nobody in particular until the situation resolved itself.

It resolved itself when a man fell into the river one afternoon and the princess—now a servant in a household where no one knew her—dove in without a moment's thought and pulled him out. It was the sort of action that tends to attract notice, and the notice that gathered around her turned out to include people who recognized her.

Her father, when the story reached him, was moved. He had had a year or two without her, which had softened him considerably. He took back his daughter and accepted the young man who came with her.

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