

THE LOST QUEEN.

IN the shadowy background is a quaint stone house, whose roof top is silvered by the gleaming moon. A rose-covered arch over a wicket gate leads to the garden in the foreground. A flagstone walk, lined with pink and white clove pinks and English daisies winds through the garden. It breathes the loving fragrance of flowers which are everywhere—gaudy tulips, shy forget-me-nots, dainty mignonett, old-fashioned larkspur, slender lilies and budding roses.

On the left in the fountain the moonlit spray of water tinkling plays. On the right is a moon-bathed sun dial half hidden by lemon lilies and blue cornflowers. Further back, to the right, vines spray summer snowflakes over an arbor partly hiding from view a rustic bench.

It is a dreamy June night. The sailing moon slips aside her cloud veil to gaze on the sleep-wrapped world. There is a languorous note in the air, and the dew is beginning to fall.

(There may be played for a few moments a very soft strain of Liszt's Nocturne in E by the violin.)

The wicket gate clicks gently and tiny feet patter lightly down the flagstone walk. A slight little girl with wistful brown eyes and golden curls stops by the fountain. She is clad in a lacy white nightie, covered by a woolly pink kimono, and slippers.

She peers cautiously behind her. Then giving a soft little chuckle she stretches her arms toward the moon, the flowers, the fountain. Crooning softly she dances her way in and out among the flowers. With a coazing smile or a gentle whisper she bends toward one here and there. Then she flashes away around the fountain. A tiny breeze ripples over the flowers.

The garden gate clicks abruptly and a fine looking man with a square jaw, rather worried blue eyes, and yet the unmistakable air of a prosperous business man, enters. He stops and gazes in wonder at the dancing child, who does not see or hear him. He pulls his unlighted cigar from his mouth.

The Father: Elaine!!

(The child stops poised on one foot. After turning slowly she see the intruder. She shrinks back a little.)

Father: Elaine!! what are you doing?

(She gazes at the ground in frightened silence).

Father: Young lady, what does this mean? Speak up at once!

Elaine: (haltingly) Daddy, I-I-was-only—

Father: That will do! That will do! Haven't you any sence? The dew is falling and what do you have on? A nightdress! A kimona!

Elaine: But, Dadddy, it's warm and—

Father: Warm! It will be warm works for your aunt to take care of you with a cold. What have you on your feet?

(Elaine thrusts forward one tiny foot as her father approaches).

Father: I thought so! The new slippers your Aunt Mary made for you. They'll be ruined and you'll have to get a new pair!

Elaine: Oh, Daddy, really could I?

(Her eyes shone for a moment.)

Father: (slightly abashed) Well, er—

Elaine: And, Daddy, if I spoil them, will you talk a long while to me again like now? (wistfully).

(The Father starts and looks rather puzzled, pulls himself together, and rather forces himself to speak sharply).

Father: Well, we shall have no more talking right now. Go up to bed at once before you catch cold!

(He goes and sits on the bench under the arbor, with a rather mystified, but obstinate look on his face. Elaine reminds him too much of Other Things. Elaine walks slowly up the walk).

(The garden gate clicks sharply and loudly as Aunt Mary a bony, tidy, sharp-eyed woman, bustles toward Elaine. Her thin lips are drawn tight with vexation. She does not see the Father at first).

Aunt Mary: Elaine Roberts! so you sneaked out the back door again to-night! And catching your death of cold!

Elaine: But, Auntie—

Aunt Mary: But me no "but Aunties." I'll have no back talks, young lady, or any of this foolishness. You're just cram full of your mother's fool notions! (The Father starts slightly).

Elaine: (draws back as if struck) What!

Aunt Mary: (impatiently) How often have I told you not to say "what"? Not a grain of manners in you! Oh, what a trial! When your father comes back from his walk—then we shall see. I'll let him know what wicked actions—Stop your sniffing, and—

Father: (coming indignantly toward them) Oh, I say, Mary!

Aunt Mary: (startled) Why, George!!

Father: Aren't you a little rough on the kid?

Aunt Mary: "Rough on the kid? Such Grammer! If you only knew what I've had to endure when you've been away on all these business trips. A man never realizes! Father: Of course! Of course! But Elaine was only playing!

Aunt Mary: Playing, you call it? I'll warrant she was dancing. You should have heard Mrs. Price's lecture on it in W. C. T. U. yesterday. She promised to come over this evening, Though I must say—!

Father: (interrupting) Yes, I know, Mary, but Elaine is not wicked. Let me talk to her one moment! Elaine creeps closer and a smile breaks through the glistening tears).

Aunt Mary: You'll only—(a door bell rings). Oh, my! There goes that bell! Must be Mrs. Price!! Well, I hope she has the supper dishes washed this time. These women who go out to find gossip instead of doing their work!

Father: (rather drily) Some seem to manage both!

Aunt Mary: (turning quickly) What's that?

Father: Er—nothing! You should hurry, Mary, before she goes. I'll attend to Elaine.

Aunt Mary: But she has on that pair of slippers I made for her! She'll ruin them in this wet grass.

Father: (hastily) Oh, I don't think so. They have very substantial soles.

Aunt Mary: And she'll catch cold with so little on!

Father: (more impatiently) How absurd! On a warm night like this!

Aunt Mary: Well, of all the—(Bell rings again) Oh, that plagued bell! Mind you give Elaine a good lecture. And her lies she tells about fairies and—

Father: (drily) Really, Mary, I think Mrs. Price must have gone over to Mrs. Beeman's.

Aunt Mary: (rushing toward gate) Oh, no! I wonder if she has her new hat on! Remember a month ago, George (ominously).

Exit Auntie.

(George goes white for a moment, then seats himself on the bench while Elaine stands twisting on one foot.)

Father: Elaine, come! I'm no apparition. Sit down, dear! (Elaine's face lights up at the "dear," and she sits down on the bench).

(There is a silence for a moment, broken only by the music of the fountain. The Father lights his cigar and watches the moonbeams play on Elaine's hair.)

Father: Tell me, Elaine, what were you doing?

Elaine: (slowly), Nothing, Daddy!

Father: (hurt) Nothing?

Elaine: Well, nothing very much!

(Another silence in which the man smokes reflectively watching the smoke rings curl).

Father: Elaine, my dear, why are you so afraid of me?

Elaine: Afraid, Daddy?

Father: (Raising his eyes) Oh, I know! Tell me.

Elaine: (timidly) Why—'cause—Auntie said you did not like naughty girls!!

Father: Well?

Elaine: And I'm the naughtiest one in all the world. I'm just awful!! (with a kind of awe).

Father: (angered) What! Who says so?

Elaine: (surprised) Why Auntie! And she knows!

Father: (raising his eyebrows) So she knows? Oh! I—by Jove, I wonder! (His face is thoughtful—He turns to Elaine) Well, what would my little girl say if I told her she weren't quite the naughtiest?

Elaine: (doubtfully) Well, I—don't—know—

Father: You don't know?

Elaine: with chin on palm of hand and gazing before her) It's kind of nice to be something "iest", you know.

Father: Well, for heavens sakes!! Oh!

Elaine: (seemingly pays no attention) It's not much fun just nothing! (Raises her head suddenly and smiles mischievously) And I got my mouth washed out with ivory soap for saying what you did!

(The father almost jumps in surprise and then laughs. He draws Elaine closer and looks tenderly down on the golden head resting against his shoulder).

Father: Now, little girl, won't you tell your Daddy, who has been naughty too, what you were doing?

Elaine: (hesitating) I was dancing.

Father: Yes.

Elaine: There is a full moon to-night.

Father: Yes, dear. Go on.

Elaine: (slowly) But, Daddy, you see I can't!

Father: Can't!

Elaine: No! The wicked fairy won't let me.

Father: (a little hurt) So you won't tell me just because—

Elaine: (impulsively) Oh, I'll tell you some. (She clasps her hands and her face just shines) You know the fairies have a big ball every full moon. Oh, yes, I know they dance every fine evening; but that night the queen must be there. For all the posies would fade or drown with tears without her, and to-night she isn't here!

Father: (half smiling) Well, honey, that's quite tragic. Why isn't she? A new gown not finished? A quarrel with the servants? Or just the usual reason?

Elaine: (slightly puzzled, but most serious) No, you see, King Oberon drove her away at the last ball!

Father: The sinner! And who is he?

Elaine: Why her husband! And Daddy, all the flowers are crying 'cause they can't dance 'til she comes. (Her face becomes animated. Tossing back her curls she seizes the father's arm and pulls him from the bench. Then she dances

in and out once more). See, Daddy, all the tear-drops on their faces! And Look! the little spider carpenters have made all the tables. See all the diamond dishes? (Points to cobwebs jewelled with dew-drops).

Father: So you came—(He watches her wondering and lovingly as she sways, skips, and dances over the velvet grass)

Elaine: To tell them the queen loves them and maybe she'll come at Cinderella time.

Father: Cinderella time?

Elaine: (excitedly) That's what moth—she—(confusedly) I mean that's midnight!

(Father looks at her strangely).

Father: And you danced—

Elaine: In her place—for the flowers.

(The Father paces up and down breathing deeply of the fragrance.)

Father: Well, dear, how can we get this Queen of yours back?

Elaine: If only King Oberon would let her! But that wicked fairy—

Aunt Mary: (off stage) George! Are you still out there? Mrs. Price wants to talk to you.

Father: One moment, Mary! I'm very busy.

Aunt Mary: Oh, all right! I hope you're giving that child one good lecture!

(Father turns to Elaine, who appears rather agitated).

Father: We must hurry, little one. But first won't you dance for me—just for a moment!

Elaine: (sighing softly) No, Daddy, I just can't any more—even for you and the flowers. I—I—oh, Daddy! (She sobs.)

Father: (astounded) Wh, Elaine, what ails you? There, there dearie!

Elaine: (between choking sobs) I—can't—dance without her any more.

Father: (puzzled) But who, dear?

Elaine: Mo—the Queen!

Father: (stammering, with a trembling lip) Oh, my, child, you must not allow your imagination to run away with

you. Come, we'll take our little fairy into the house and tuck here in bed. If only——

(He picks her up in his arms, but she still sobs). There, there, honey! She'll be here to-night to dance for the flowers! She'll be here!

Elaine: (raising her head) Do you really mean it? Will you let her?

Father: (slowly) Let her? What have I to do with your Fairy Queen?

Elaine: Why, 'cause you're King Oberon of course. Didn't you know that?

(The Father sinks down on the bench gazing at the pleading face. The moonlight is caressing the whole beautiful scene).

Father: (in a low, tense tone) And the queen?

Elaine: Is—Daddy, (pleadingly) won't you break it?

Father: What? You amazing child!

Elaine: (earnestly) The spell of the wicked fairy.

Father: I suppose she is Aunt Mary.

Elaine: (apologetically) Well, I was just pretending. Of course she makes the yummiest tarts and, Daddy, she really was quite nice before the W. C. T. U. elected Mrs Price President. But you see she said—oh, Daddy, am I the naughtiest girl anywhere?

(George's face works as he sits gazing sadly into the fountain. With an effort he smiles as he puts his arm around her and gently strokes her hair).

Father: Little girlie, what would you say if I told you I had a small daughter who is the dearest little girl in all the world?

Elaine: (her eyes shining) Oh, Daddy! I'd say what Moth—she said!

Father: (eyes averted) And what was that?

Elaine: (dreamily) She used to hug me tight and say in a trembling voice, "Oh, my little fairy, I just wish I dared steal up and kiss him once more. If we could only get him into Fairy land—really—perhaps! I suppose she was scared just like me, 'cause you're so busy!

Father: Then she came out here—with you!

Elaine: Yes, and sometimes we went hunting for wood fairies and flowers. And of—— Daddy, what's the trouble?

Father: (eyes flashing and angrily muttering) What a fool! I might have known! The wicked fairy! Business And I've lost her!

Elaine: (startled) Why, what is it, Daddy!

(After a short silence in which the Father's whole face is lined with suffering. He turns to Elaine).

Father: (slowly and slowly) Little girl, do queens—even forgive?

Elaine: (with her hands on his arm) Oh, goodness, yes. Mother—oh!

Father: Mother! Yes, go on, dear!

Elaine: (happily) Mother said everyone should forgive. So I spose queens must. They have to, you know. Or there wouldn't be any little flowers!

Father: (turning abruptly) Elaine, do you and the flowers want to dance to-night?

Elaine: I'll ask them!

(She tiptoes again among the moon caressed posies. Then smiling, she runs back nodding her head vehemently).

Elaine: Yes, yes, yes. You just bet!

Father: smiling in spite of himself). And is that the kind of language the flowers use?

Elaine: (innocently) Oh, yes, they were so excited—just like I get in school sometimes.

Father: Dear, come! We are going to bring the Queen back, tonight!! If she will forgive us!

Elaine: (dancing with delight) Oh, Daddy, Daddy!!

(A rising breeze stirs the flowers into a joyous dance to the fountain's music).

Elaine: Look, Daddy, look! The flowers are beginning to dance already.

CURTAIN.

O. M. A. '26.