

THE LAND OF DELIGHTS

A king had a daughter beautiful in all perfection; she fell in love with a brave cavalier, the son of a king who was her father's enemy, and as she judged that such an inclination would not meet with approval she hid it carefully and resolved to marry her lover in secret.

Soon afterwards she found that she was pregnant; she feared the wrath of the king, for herself and for her child. She pretended to be indisposed, and in truth she was, but it was supposed to be a different illness. She remained shut away in her apartment, hardly allowing herself to be seen, only going for walks with a single confidante in the garden, at the far end of which there was a beautiful river.

The princess was in great difficulty regarding the care of the child that would be born; she did not want to confide its destiny to anyone and resolved to abandon it to the gods.

She gave birth to a prince, more handsome than Amour, and after having washed his face with her tears, under the spur of necessity, she put him very neatly in a cradle of Chinese wood, with the most beautiful lacquer in the world; she ornamented the child with jewels and precious linen, and ordered her confidante to set it adrift on the river.

That river flowed into the sea. The cradle was carried there rapidly and fortunately caught in a fisherman's nets. Surprised and delighted by such a miraculous encounter, he welcomed the beautiful child, had his wife nourish him, and enriched himself with his spoils. He named the prince Miracle, and brought him up with a great deal of care, but in the vulgarity of his profession.

He grew tall, so well formed and so handsome that he merited having another theater than the edge of the sea and another exercise than that of fisherman. He was incessantly busy with his nets or with his line and hooks, but he had eyes far more capable of catching hearts than everything he employed in catching fish.

He was approaching his twentieth year, and knew nothing other than his *métier*, although a natural instinct made him imagine that there was something better for him to do, when one morning, when he had all of his catch laid out on the sea shore, he had sufficient appetite to want to eat a few of the oysters he had caught.

They were excellent in that region, and that those of England could not have had such an exquisite taste. The prince ate some moderately, and, taking one that was larger than the others, as he had it in his hand and was raising his knife to it, it opened of its own accord and a voice emerged from it that made him tremble.

"Oh, my poor Miracle," said that voice, "don't open me, don't destroy me, respect my shell, which is so beautiful and so polished."

The prince was frightened, and thought about dropping the oyster. "Don't be astonished," she said to him.¹ "Conserve my life, and give me liberty. Get back in your boat and sail to the big rock two hundred paces away; I make my dwelling there, and I want you to put me back there; I promise you a fine recompense."

Miracle was humane; he leapt lightly into his little vessel, still holding the marvelous oyster.

"But who gave you the faculty of speech?" he said to it.

"In sum, my son," she said "there are great marvels; it's not important for you to know them; let it suffice that I render you in a brief interval an incomparable man. I only ask for a fortnight, during which you come to see me. You're charmingly handsome and you have the stature of a hero; I'll teach you all the sciences that a great prince ought to know. You're a prince too, don't believe that you're the son of a

¹ *Huitre* [oyster] is a feminine noun in French, so the use of the pronoun *elle* in this regard could simply signify "it," but the oyster does give further evidence of femininity, and the potential sexual symbolism of opened mollusks is undoubtedly significant in this instance.

miserable fisherman; so you can render yourself worthy of reigning and you will reign if you abandon yourself to my guidance. Put me down there; that's my palace. Adieu, young Miracle, until tomorrow."

As you can imagine, Miracle was very surprised by so many astonishing things; he scarcely slept all night, and at daybreak, without considering whether the oyster might still be enjoying all the sweetness of slumber, he embarked and raced to his rock. He called out to her with all the lack of consideration of an impatient young man. A brilliant glare emerged from a concavity in the rock, and the oyster appeared.

In order to abridge my tale, I will simply say that he saw her for fifteen days in succession, and at the end of that time he was the most knowledgeable, the most polished and the most gallant prince on the world. He was ashamed to remember his first estate, and he begged the oyster to lead him to a great adventure.

"My son," she said to him, "I want you, by means of my advice, to acquire a kingdom, and render you the possessor of the most charming princess that there ever was; but the conquest of both must be made in a very singular manner.

"Listen to me; there is in the world a place that is called the Land of Delights; you didn't see it when I taught you geography because it isn't on the map; that's a mystery.

"You'll understand by the name of the country in question that it has all the beauties put together; let our imagination go, and it will still fall far short, unable to attain all the charms that the agreeable empire contains.

"The sovereign of those charming places is called Favor; she was born of the two most perfect lovers there ever were. The empire is scarcely populated, its inhabitants are like gods; the princess is divine. The land is a peninsula, only separated from that of Advances by a wall of milk that reaches all the way to the heavens. It doesn't seem to be anything, but it's everything, and bronze and iron are no stronger; even the birds have no communication from one realm to the other.

"There is also a princess in Advances, who does everything to receive those who try to land in the Land of Delights. One can only reach it by sea. That princess has a false appearance of Favor, and many people content themselves with her, thinking that she is Favor.

"The sea that surrounds almost all of the Land of Delights is full of adventurers seeking its fortunate shores, but it is very difficult to reach them, and few of those who are fortunate enough to arrive are able to stay there for very long.

"Take this coat," the oyster continued, "which is less superb than gallant; it's attached to this branch of coral. Here are fishing lines and hooks, and in this jar of ambergris you'll find your nourishment. Put all of this in your little boat, and let it drift. It will stop when the time comes, and when I believe you to be happy I'll go to see you. Adieu, my son."

The oyster went back into the rock, and the handsome Miracle put on his coat, picked up his jar and his lines, and let this boat drift at the whim of the winds and fortune.

After a few days' travel, on awakening one morning, it seemed to him that the air he was breathing was purer than usual. He perceived land, a land that caused some emotion in his heart. The trees there were tall and green; a thousand birds of rare plumage, whose song was harmonious, made the entire shore resound—but what a sight Miracle perceived over the sea! In the distance, he saw a superb fleet, which was that of a powerful emperor, who was making futile efforts to reach the Land of Delights. He saw magnificent ships that were also making little progress. He noticed many veiled women on some vessels, who were incognito, and could not land. He remarked an innumerable quantity of well made men who were attempting in vain to disembark in the charming country.

"Well, what can I do?" exclaimed Prince Miracle. "All alone? In what manner can I enter a land where I desire so passionately to be?"

His boat veered of its own accord and, taking a particular route, sailed on for another day. Having finally left all those vessels behind, very little was offered to his view when his boat stopped in a solitary and very pleasant place. Miracle did not know whether here ought to set foot ashore and whether he dared to disembark in that charming country. He fitted his hooks to his line and amused himself fishing while waiting until he had made a decision. As he was doing that, a slight noise made him turn his head; he

perceived between some trees a person so charming that, by a true presentiment, he did not fail to guess that she was Favor. She was walking on her own.

“If you are not a goddess,” the prince said to her, “you must be Favor.”

“I am the person you have named,” she replied, with a charming smile, and continued: “Have you made a good catch, agreeable fisherman? Cast your line.”

The prince obeyed her, quite nonplussed, and when he withdrew it, all his hooks were charged with the rarest precious stones, of the finest workmanship. Favor was dazzled by them, and the prince was astonished; he threw them at the feet of the princess, and launched himself there at the same time.

“I aspire to other treasures,” he told her, “and since being struck by the splendor of your charms, I can only love you.”

“Many others love me,” the princess replied. “I can only give myself to the most faithful; people are for a time, but not forever; that is why people only possess me imperfectly. It’s still a great deal to enter into the Land of Delights; you’re here, fear that you might not remain for long.”

Having said that, she stepped away, in order to leave. The prince tried to follow her.

“I can’t remain with you,” she said to him.

She went away, and, the prince having tried to retain her, one of her ribbons remained in his hand. Her movement was so prompt and precipitate that, remaining fearful, unable to take a step, he cried: “Fickle Favor, you’re flying away very quickly; I’m losing you at the moment when I have you.”

With those words he found himself in a boat, and whatever he did, it was quite impossible for him to regain any port.

It was not the same boat that had brought him into that clime; it was cleaner and more comfortable. It had a little cabin with a bed, in order that he could repose when the fancy took him. Two young boys were guiding it, and were careful to give Miracle what was necessary to him. He had a new coat every day, an essential thing to please the majority of ladies. The prince knew that very well, so he took great care in adorning himself.

He spent a long time only seeing the Land of Delights and desiring the charming Favor, but that was all. He could not land. He thought he was able land there, but that was the realm of Advances. The queen was in the port, and from a distance he thought that she was Favor; he flew to her, and did not find any impediment. She received him in the most obliging manner, which was the last thing he expected.

He was very astonished, and understood his mistake.

“Oh, this isn’t the divine Favor,” he said, quite beside himself.

Advances was piqued, but it was not in her character to reject people. For Miracle she went as far as baseness, but she did not touch his heart. She had a certain air that sometimes appeared very charming; seen from certain angles she was very agreeable, but from others she was repulsive; she did not please persons of sensitive and delicate taste.

Prince Miracle soon quit that country and the queen; he went back to the little boat. The next day he received a sword-knot on the part of the queen of Advances; she continued to lavish presents in the following days, but did not satisfy him.

He was still searching for some favorable entry into the Land of Delights, and, as often happens, he found himself there when he least expected it. He only saw charming people, young and handsome; some were cheerful, while others concealed the most delicate contentment under a cold attitude. There were not many natural inhabitants, and it was rare for strangers to stay there for very long. The soil produced of its own accord, without the aid of art; there were no workers of any sort. Large storehouses of anything one might desire were found in that beautiful country. There were no cities to be seen there, but magnificent palaces, with gardens of an extraordinary beauty. Miracle could not approach the palace of Favor; there were many guards to get past; that of Caresses was at the door of his apartment.

He was well lodged, as one might imagine, but he only saw Favor in the distance. He was astonished to feel a perpetual spring in that charming land, but he was told that, as the most pleasant thing in the world that one does all the time becomes horribly tedious to the human mind and humor, which love diversity, there was an excessive heat in some parts of the country and an intense cold in others, in order to content the voluptuous. Young Miracle wanted to go there.

When he began to feel the heat, he saw superb tents on the edge of forests or in meadows, where one could savor freshness. Rivers of scented waters offered agreeable bathing, and everything that the human imagination has invented of the lively and the delicate was found there.

In the place where cold was dominant, there were large public squares where various spectacles were put on, beautiful palaces where balls were held, and private apartments with good fires of aloe wood. The candles providing illumination were made of those precious gums that are only found in Arabia, and the beds were aired by light embers of coriander seeds. There was no fear of the vapors in that land, their cause being unknown there.

Finally, the handsome Miracle was able to approach Favor; she made him envisage that she would give in to his perseverance if he continued to persuade her of his fidelity in such an appropriate manner.

He was not with her for long and, constrained once again to go back to his little boat, he wandered for a long time, and the castles in Spain that he built were his only consolation.

The favorable oyster that had helped him thus far was not an ordinary oyster; she had the same origin as Venus, having been born at the same time and in the same way; she reigned over the sea as the goddess did on land, and she was as powerful as her sister. She loved Miracle, whom she regarded as a child of the waters and whom she wanted to render happy; she disposed everything in his favor.

He entered the Land of Delights again; everything smiled on him this time. All the inhabitants came to him, with hats of roses on their heads, throwing flowers in his passage and perfuming his path, as was once done for Alexander the Great. He was not quite as great as him, but he was happier.

A thousand charming sounds were rising all the way to the skies when, though a crowd of agreeable people, he perceived Favor's caleche. This was how it was equipped:

The caleche was lined with a magnificent yellow fabric, quilted and padded and full of the rarest odors. The cinnamon of the ancients had not been forgotten. The curtains were in Spanish leather, attached with yellow and silver strings; by that color one can see clearly that the princess must be a brunette. The side glasses were made of a single diamond; there was none in front because Amour was the coachman and nothing must separate Favor from Amour. Enjoyment was beside that god, costumed as a slave, for he often treats her as such, although he obtains everything from her. Eight fine horses dusted with Cyprus powder drew Amour and his retinue; the Shepherd's Hour served as postillion, and the Pleasures preceded and followed the admirable caleche. Favor was sitting in it; she was leaning slightly on Modesty, who was beside her; the Graces were at the doors, and the prettiest between her knees.

The entire brilliant equipage stopped in front of the amiable Miracle; Modesty yielded her place to him, and Favor was his, by the command of Amour. Charming fruits were born of such a desired union. The prince was happy for the rest of his life always in delights, and always heaped with favors.

He died in extreme old age and his life only seemed a single moment to him at the hour of his death.

Favor devoted herself to others; she makes the felicity of mortals.

*Fortunate whoever can obtain you,
Favor, caught by a faithful and tender heart;
You make yourself long-awaited
And very difficult to retain.*