

A TALE
OF
THREE
BROTHERS

BY
CHARLOCCE
GLOVER

A RED HEN PUBLICATION



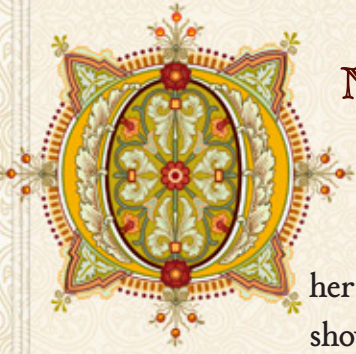
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FOREWORD:

THE UNHAPPY LITTLE SHOW-OFF



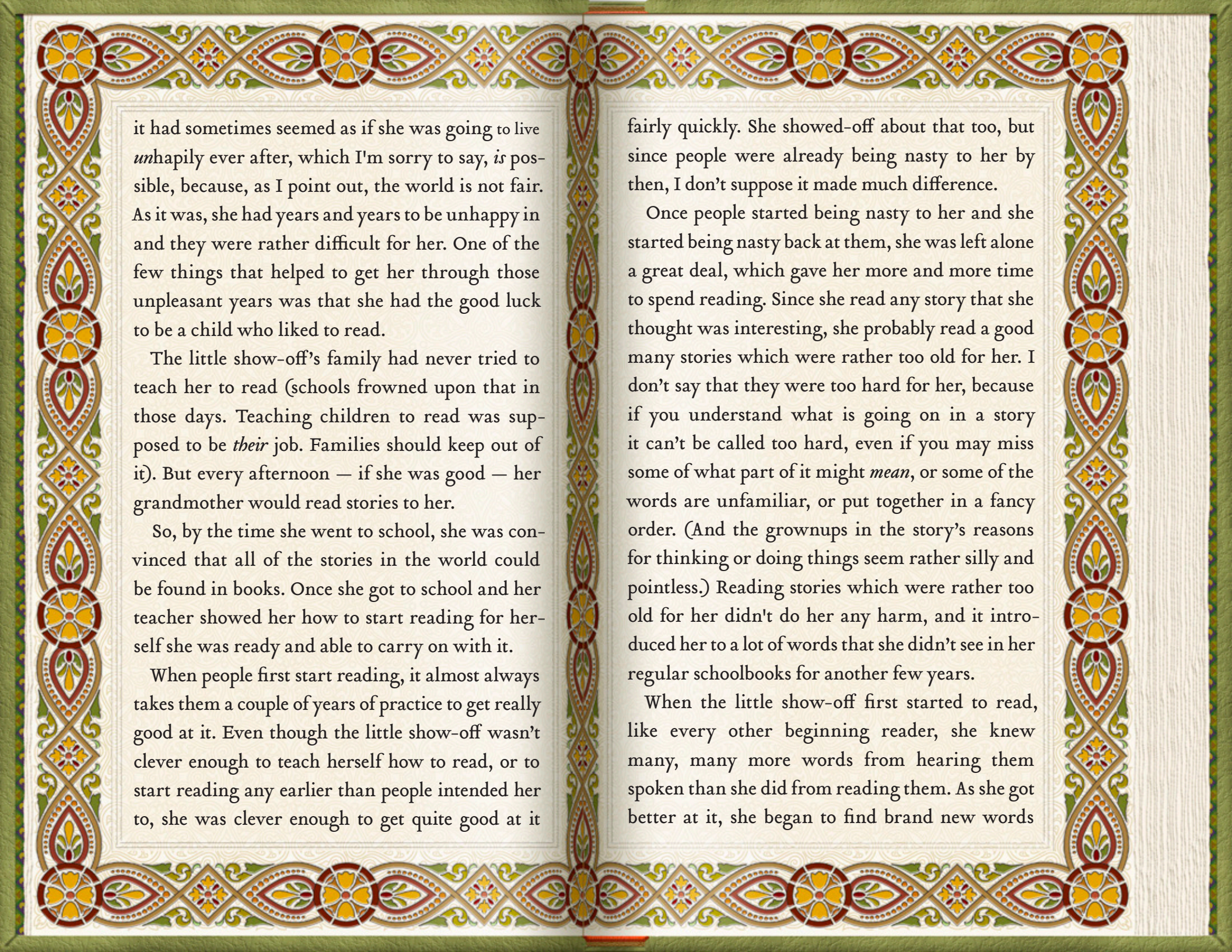
ONCE UPON A TIME, there was a little girl who was a horrible show-off. She showed off the pretty dresses her mother made her, and she showed off her toys and she showed off her singing — which was rather nice, but not at all as fine as *she* thought. None of the other children liked her very much, so they were nasty to her whenever they happened to think about it. Which just goes to show that they weren't as nice as they thought *they* were, either.

Now, the little show-off wasn't a nasty child to begin with, but people being nasty to her when she hadn't done anything to them made her very cross and unhappy so, whenever it happened, she was nasty to them right back. After a few years she got so used to expecting other people to be nasty to her

for no good reason (not particularly liking someone is *no good reason* to be deliberately nasty to them after all) that she fell into the habit of being nasty to them first. This may have served a few of them right, but it was very unfair to the rest, which meant that she had no friends and was lonely.

This part of the story has a fairly pleasant ending. The little show-off grew up and went to college. In college there were so many other people trying to show off that *her* showing off was hardly even noticed, so she started growing out of it. She also found that decent grownup people had more important things to do than to go around being nasty to *her* for no better reason than that they didn't particularly like her. So she stopped automatically being nasty to other people too. When she finished college, she got a job. Then she moved away from home, found some hobbies that she enjoyed, and met some nice people to talk to and go out and do things with. She became quite comfortable and was probably as contented as anyone ever gets to be in this basically unfair world since, in the real world, nobody actually gets the chance to live happily *ever* after.

Of course, back when she was still growing up,



it had sometimes seemed as if she was going to live *un*happily ever after, which I'm sorry to say, *is* possible, because, as I point out, the world is not fair. As it was, she had years and years to be unhappy in and they were rather difficult for her. One of the few things that helped to get her through those unpleasant years was that she had the good luck to be a child who liked to read.

The little show-off's family had never tried to teach her to read (schools frowned upon that in those days. Teaching children to read was supposed to be *their* job. Families should keep out of it). But every afternoon — if she was good — her grandmother would read stories to her.

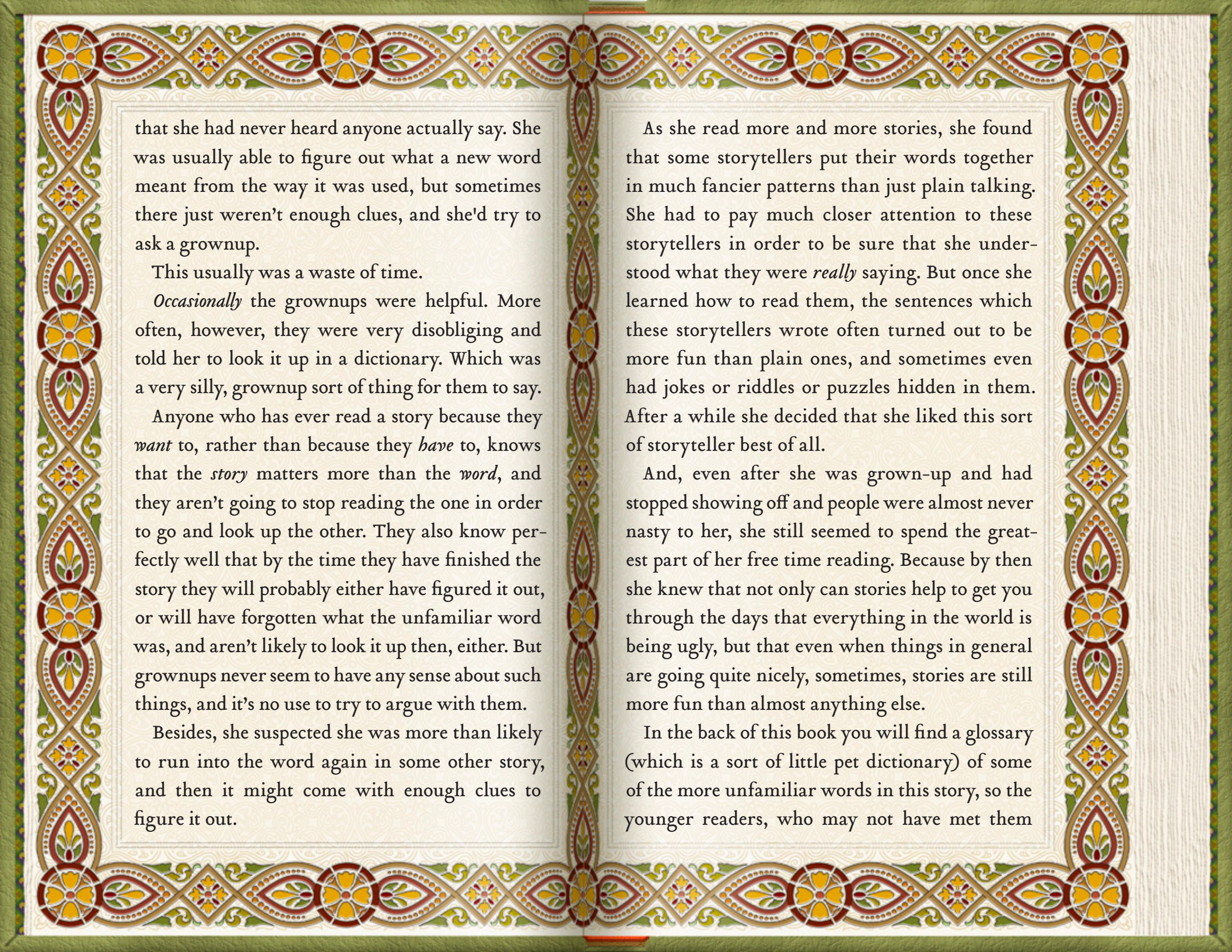
So, by the time she went to school, she was convinced that all of the stories in the world could be found in books. Once she got to school and her teacher showed her how to start reading for herself she was ready and able to carry on with it.

When people first start reading, it almost always takes them a couple of years of practice to get really good at it. Even though the little show-off wasn't clever enough to teach herself how to read, or to start reading any earlier than people intended her to, she was clever enough to get quite good at it

fairly quickly. She showed-off about that too, but since people were already being nasty to her by then, I don't suppose it made much difference.

Once people started being nasty to her and she started being nasty back at them, she was left alone a great deal, which gave her more and more time to spend reading. Since she read any story that she thought was interesting, she probably read a good many stories which were rather too old for her. I don't say that they were too hard for her, because if you understand what is going on in a story it can't be called too hard, even if you may miss some of what part of it might *mean*, or some of the words are unfamiliar, or put together in a fancy order. (And the grownups in the story's reasons for thinking or doing things seem rather silly and pointless.) Reading stories which were rather too old for her didn't do her any harm, and it introduced her to a lot of words that she didn't see in her regular schoolbooks for another few years.

When the little show-off first started to read, like every other beginning reader, she knew many, many more words from hearing them spoken than she did from reading them. As she got better at it, she began to find brand new words



that she had never heard anyone actually say. She was usually able to figure out what a new word meant from the way it was used, but sometimes there just weren't enough clues, and she'd try to ask a grownup.

This usually was a waste of time.

Occasionally the grownups were helpful. More often, however, they were very disobliging and told her to look it up in a dictionary. Which was a very silly, grownup sort of thing for them to say.

Anyone who has ever read a story because they *want* to, rather than because they *have* to, knows that the *story* matters more than the *word*, and they aren't going to stop reading the one in order to go and look up the other. They also know perfectly well that by the time they have finished the story they will probably either have figured it out, or will have forgotten what the unfamiliar word was, and aren't likely to look it up then, either. But grownups never seem to have any sense about such things, and it's no use to try to argue with them.

Besides, she suspected she was more than likely to run into the word again in some other story, and then it might come with enough clues to figure it out.

As she read more and more stories, she found that some storytellers put their words together in much fancier patterns than just plain talking. She had to pay much closer attention to these storytellers in order to be sure that she understood what they were *really* saying. But once she learned how to read them, the sentences which these storytellers wrote often turned out to be more fun than plain ones, and sometimes even had jokes or riddles or puzzles hidden in them. After a while she decided that she liked this sort of storyteller best of all.

And, even after she was grown-up and had stopped showing off and people were almost never nasty to her, she still seemed to spend the greatest part of her free time reading. Because by then she knew that not only can stories help to get you through the days that everything in the world is being ugly, but that even when things in general are going quite nicely, sometimes, stories are still more fun than almost anything else.

In the back of this book you will find a glossary (which is a sort of little pet dictionary) of some of the more unfamiliar words in this story, so the younger readers, who may not have met them

yet, can look them up as they go along. Or, they can check through the glossary when they finish the story and remind themselves that there was a word, or several, that they wondered about.



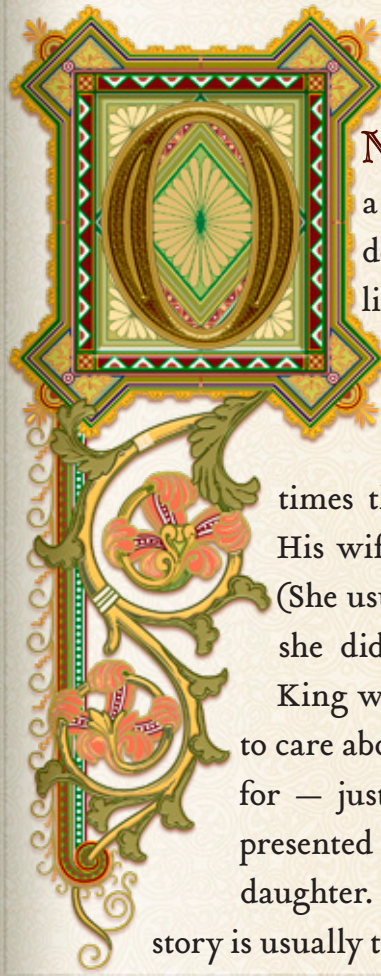
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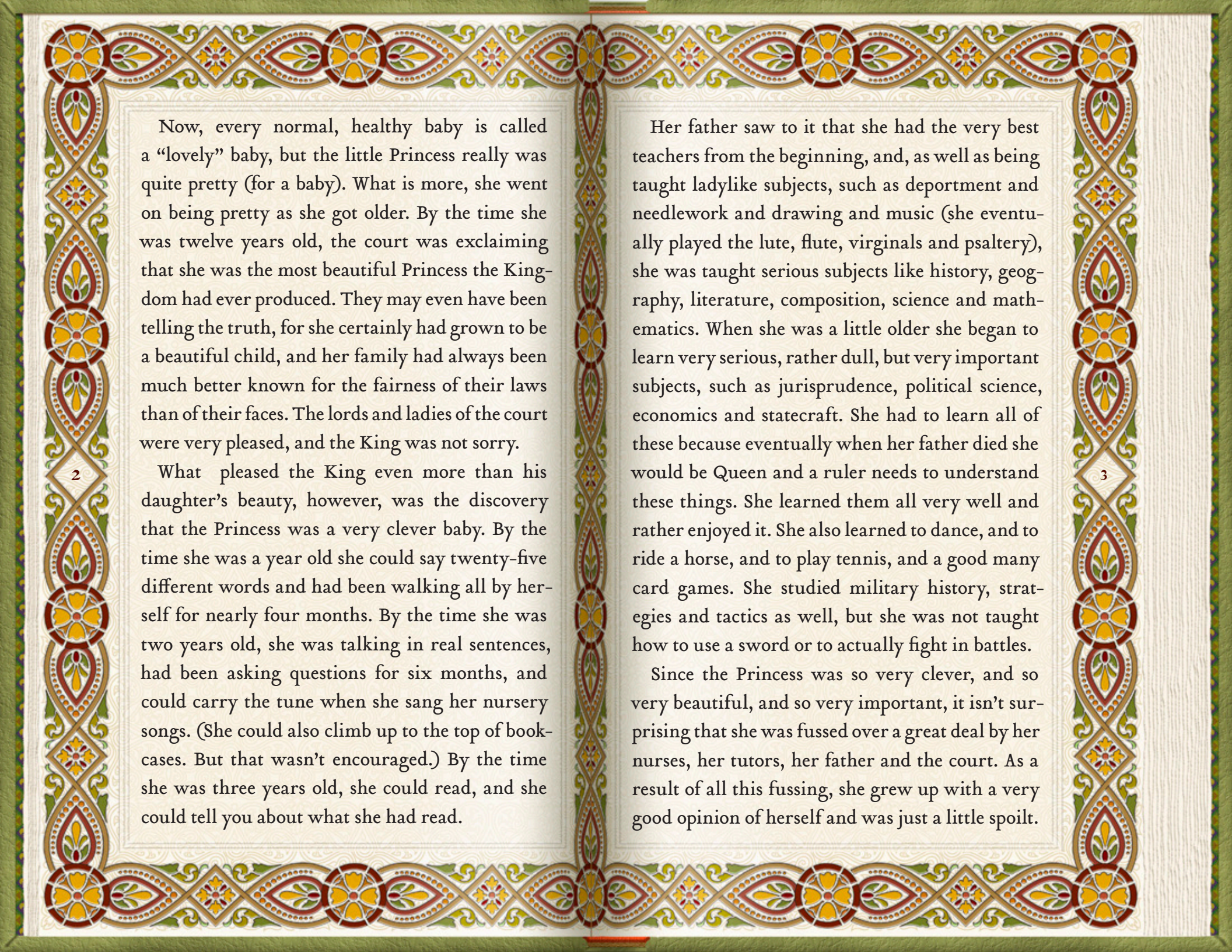


CHAPTER 1:

THE CLEVER PRINCESS



ONCE UPON RATHER
a long time ago, in a king-
dom which was just a
little too good to be true,
there lived a King.
(There is always a King
in these stories, some-
times there is more than one.)
His wife, the Queen, was dead.
(She usually is, poor thing.) But
she did not die and leave the
King with no one but his court
to care about, or to care about him,
for — just before she died — she
presented him with a lovely baby
daughter. (Which in this sort of
story is usually the case.)



Now, every normal, healthy baby is called a “lovely” baby, but the little Princess really was quite pretty (for a baby). What is more, she went on being pretty as she got older. By the time she was twelve years old, the court was exclaiming that she was the most beautiful Princess the Kingdom had ever produced. They may even have been telling the truth, for she certainly had grown to be a beautiful child, and her family had always been much better known for the fairness of their laws than of their faces. The lords and ladies of the court were very pleased, and the King was not sorry.

2

What pleased the King even more than his daughter’s beauty, however, was the discovery that the Princess was a very clever baby. By the time she was a year old she could say twenty-five different words and had been walking all by herself for nearly four months. By the time she was two years old, she was talking in real sentences, had been asking questions for six months, and could carry the tune when she sang her nursery songs. (She could also climb up to the top of bookcases. But that wasn’t encouraged.) By the time she was three years old, she could read, and she could tell you about what she had read.

Her father saw to it that she had the very best teachers from the beginning, and, as well as being taught ladylike subjects, such as deportment and needlework and drawing and music (she eventually played the lute, flute, virginals and psaltery), she was taught serious subjects like history, geography, literature, composition, science and mathematics. When she was a little older she began to learn very serious, rather dull, but very important subjects, such as jurisprudence, political science, economics and statecraft. She had to learn all of these because eventually when her father died she would be Queen and a ruler needs to understand these things. She learned them all very well and rather enjoyed it. She also learned to dance, and to ride a horse, and to play tennis, and a good many card games. She studied military history, strategies and tactics as well, but she was not taught how to use a sword or to actually fight in battles.

3

Since the Princess was so very clever, and so very beautiful, and so very important, it isn’t surprising that she was fussed over a great deal by her nurses, her tutors, her father and the court. As a result of all this fussing, she grew up with a very good opinion of herself and was just a little spoilt.

One day, at breakfast, when she was seventeen, her father said to her;

“My dear, it is high time that we started trying to find you a husband.”

The Princess was rather startled.

“Surely that isn’t necessary so soon?” She replied.

“Of course it is! You are nearly eighteen and it would be very sound policy to have you safely married by the time you are twenty-five or so.”

The Princess frowned and thought about that.

“Well, I can see your point,” She said at last, “And seven years ought to be enough time in which to learn something of the possible candidates.” But she did not seem to be very happy with the idea.

“Excellent,” Said the King, buttering a muffin, “After all, I am growing no younger and would like to be sure that the Kingdom will be in good hands when I am gone.”

“It shall be in my hands, Father.” The Princess said, rather offended.

“To be sure it will, my dear, but I never intended you to have to rule it alone.” Her father replied, “After all,” He said, “Queens don’t.”

The Princess handed her father the marmalade, which he was looking for. “I do not think that I

would rule it badly,” She said, “After all, I would have all of your counselors to help me. And I have been very well taught.”

“Well, yes, but I’m sure everyone would be more comfortable if you had a husband to be their King.” Her father replied, “They are accustomed to dealing with a King. And besides, who would rule it after you?”

The Princess did not like the sound of this at all. She took a deep breath, “Father,” She said, “Please tell me the truth. Is there any particular Prince that it is my duty to marry?” For such is quite often the case in royal marriages.

“Oh, no! No,” The King admitted, “In fact, at present, none of our immediate neighbors or any of our traditional allies have a single marriageable Prince among them. It’s really very unexpected. Inconvenient too. Finding you a proper consort may actually be somewhat difficult. On the other hand, you can look at it as a piece of good fortune that you have rather more freedom in this regard than usual.” He smiled at her. Then he stopped smiling. “Of course, there is always your cousin, Daniel.” He added unenthusiastically.

“Good heavens, Papa! Daniel is only eleven years

old and already disgustingly arrogant.”

“Yes, I know. It’s a pity his father is dead. His mother spoils him,” He sighed, “Nor is a second cousin marriage something one really wants to have to contemplate. I agree that Daniel is quite unsatisfactory. But if any great harm were to befall you, he is the next heir, you know. And he’s young. He may yet improve.” He added with no great appearance of hope.

“Yes. I shall have to give the matter some thought,” She said, “Rather a lot of thought, in fact.”

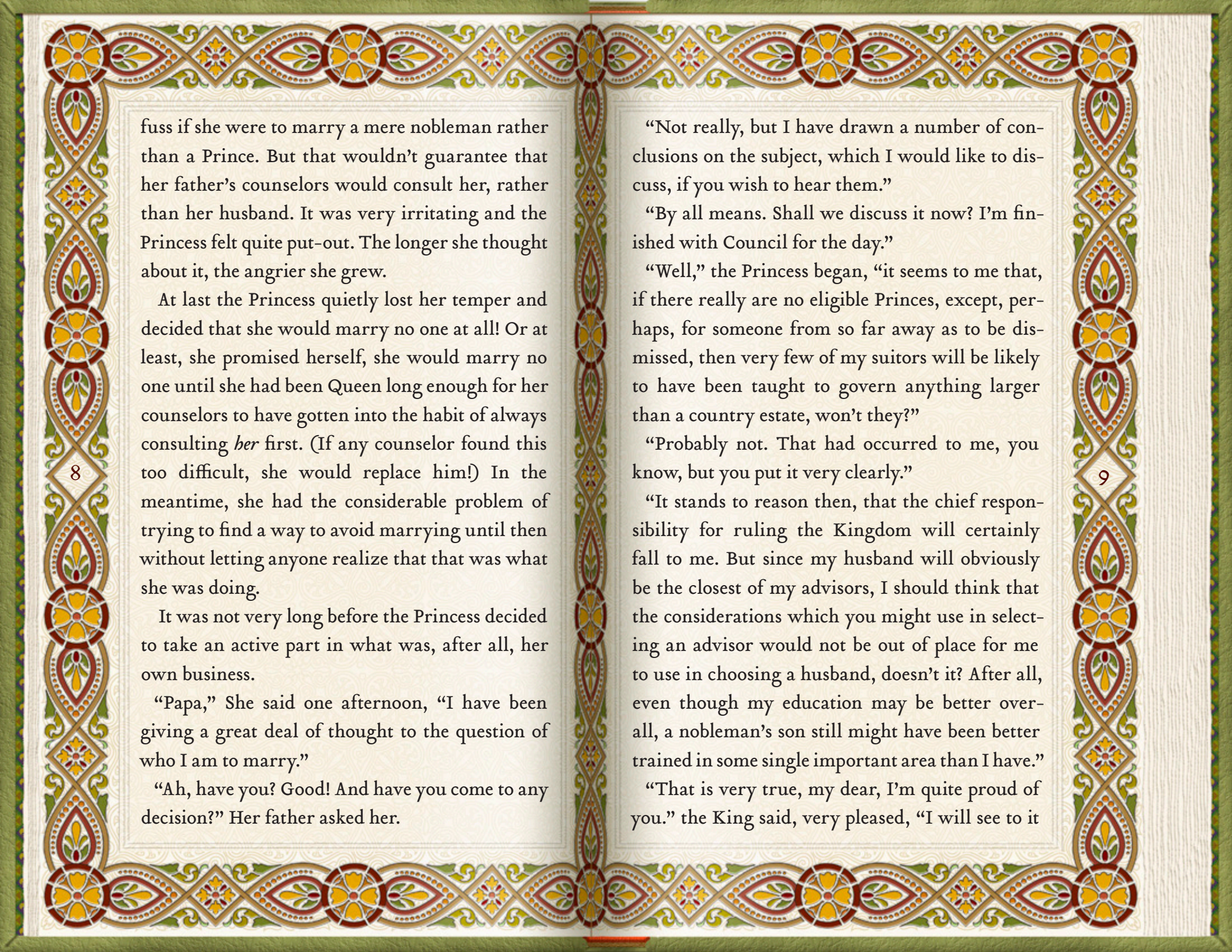
6 For some time after her father had finished his breakfast and gone off to council, the Princess sat at the table, stirring her cold porridge, looking out the window and frowning. Her line of thought was not a pleasant one.

She was absolutely not going to marry her cousin Daniel. He would make a terrible King. She also could very well believe that her father’s counselors would be more comfortable if she gave them a King to deal with. In fact, they would probably become so comfortable that they would consult with her husband on any state business and never think to ask her at all!

Of course, even though her husband would be

King, it would still be her Kingdom, and she had been educated expressly for the purpose of being able to advise him on how it should be governed. On the other hand, if she married someone and made him King, that would make it his country, and what if he turned out to be the sort of person who wouldn’t take advice? Or not from his wife at least. What is more — now that she thought of it — if there were no eligible Princes, then there were no potential suitors who had educations which were comparable to her own either. A nobleman’s son would be taught to run an estate, but only a Prince would have been taught to rule a Kingdom. Therefore, if her husband turned out to be the sort of person who wouldn’t take advice, then this would probably mean that he was not only headstrong but ignorant as well. And her counselors would still discuss policy with him before consulting her! Oh! How the Kingdom could suffer for that!

7 At first, the Princess only wondered if there was any way that she could marry someone and not make him King. She decided at last that she probably could, although her father might have to make a new law over it. He could — and probably would — do so without raising too much of a



fuss if she were to marry a mere nobleman rather than a Prince. But that wouldn't guarantee that her father's counselors would consult her, rather than her husband. It was very irritating and the Princess felt quite put-out. The longer she thought about it, the angrier she grew.

At last the Princess quietly lost her temper and decided that she would marry no one at all! Or at least, she promised herself, she would marry no one until she had been Queen long enough for her counselors to have gotten into the habit of always consulting *her* first. (If any counselor found this too difficult, she would replace him!) In the meantime, she had the considerable problem of trying to find a way to avoid marrying until then without letting anyone realize that that was what she was doing.

It was not very long before the Princess decided to take an active part in what was, after all, her own business.

"Papa," She said one afternoon, "I have been giving a great deal of thought to the question of who I am to marry."

"Ah, have you? Good! And have you come to any decision?" Her father asked her.

"Not really, but I have drawn a number of conclusions on the subject, which I would like to discuss, if you wish to hear them."

"By all means. Shall we discuss it now? I'm finished with Council for the day."

"Well," the Princess began, "it seems to me that, if there really are no eligible Princes, except, perhaps, for someone from so far away as to be dismissed, then very few of my suitors will be likely to have been taught to govern anything larger than a country estate, won't they?"

"Probably not. That had occurred to me, you know, but you put it very clearly."

"It stands to reason then, that the chief responsibility for ruling the Kingdom will certainly fall to me. But since my husband will obviously be the closest of my advisors, I should think that the considerations which you might use in selecting an advisor would not be out of place for me to use in choosing a husband, doesn't it? After all, even though my education may be better overall, a nobleman's son still might have been better trained in some single important area than I have."

"That is very true, my dear, I'm quite proud of you." the King said, very pleased, "I will see to it

that all of your suitors are interviewed with this in mind, in addition to any other considerations.”

“Papa,” She said boldly, “I should like to be the one to interview them.”

“You? My dear child...” The King expostulated.

“Papa, how else will I be able to be certain as to how a suitor’s education compares with mine? I shall ask each of my suitors a number of questions on subjects related to rulership, and he must be able to answer them to my satisfaction before I will seriously consider his claims.”

“Surely you are not proposing to marry any man who can answer a few questions!” Her father exclaimed, scandalized.

“Certainly not! But I definitely refuse to consider marrying any man who can't answer them.” The Princess replied reasonably.

“And what do you propose we should do about a man who cannot?” The King asked uncomfortably.

“Oh, I suppose we could send him away from court for a while. Three years perhaps, to learn what he doesn’t know. That should be long enough to discourage the most frivolous candidates. If someone is serious about it he may try again after that time. Or, just return to court and forget the

matter, if he thinks better of it.” The King looked relieved at this, and gave it some thought.

“Hmm,” He said, “And who do you propose to be asking these questions of?”

The Princess had considered this also.

“A good many foreign nobles, I should imagine, Papa. And probably an even larger number of those here at our own court, at least at first. Do you suppose we should also consider students and alumni of the University as well? While a nobleman’s son might be very well educated at home, most of them are not, and our University is quite famous. Professor Sharpe tells me that there are very fine scholars from many nations in attendance there.”

The King raised his eyebrows, lowered them again and looked rather grim.

“I think,” He told her, “That you are trying to bite off more than you can chew.”

The King was not altogether pleased with all the features his daughter’s proposal, and he tried very hard to dissuade her from some of them. But the Princess was used to having things her own way, and had a reasonable-sounding answer for every objection. After several discussions, the

King reluctantly agreed to let his daughter have her own way in this as well and had his legal advisors draft a proclamation on the subject. The proclamation was sent out on the Princess's eighteenth birthday.

The Princess soon discovered what her father had been trying to warn her of, for there were a great many more would-be suitors than she had anticipated, (She was very annoyed at the nerve of many of them.) and it was very difficult to get rid of them all. She found that interviewing them became very tiresome indeed. But she did manage to send them all away at last, and eventually only needed to interview another one every few weeks. Quite a lot of them still came back, however, and had to be sent away all over again. After a couple of tries, most of them gave up and married someone else. The Princess made certain that these candidates — and their wives — were always welcome at court.

Upon the whole, the Princess was reasonably satisfied with her plan. But there had been a point, in the very first year, that she was given a great deal of trouble when something went seriously wrong.

CHAPTER 2:

THE MERCHANT'S SONS



IN THE KINGDOM'S capital city, there was a merchant. In fact there are always a great many merchants in capital cities, but these histories usually haven't much to say about them. Merchants come in a great many varieties, from shabby peddlers and small shopkeepers to very wealthy traders and bankers who *almost* — but never *quite* — count as gentlemen.

Jacob Jacobson was a very gentleman-like merchant.

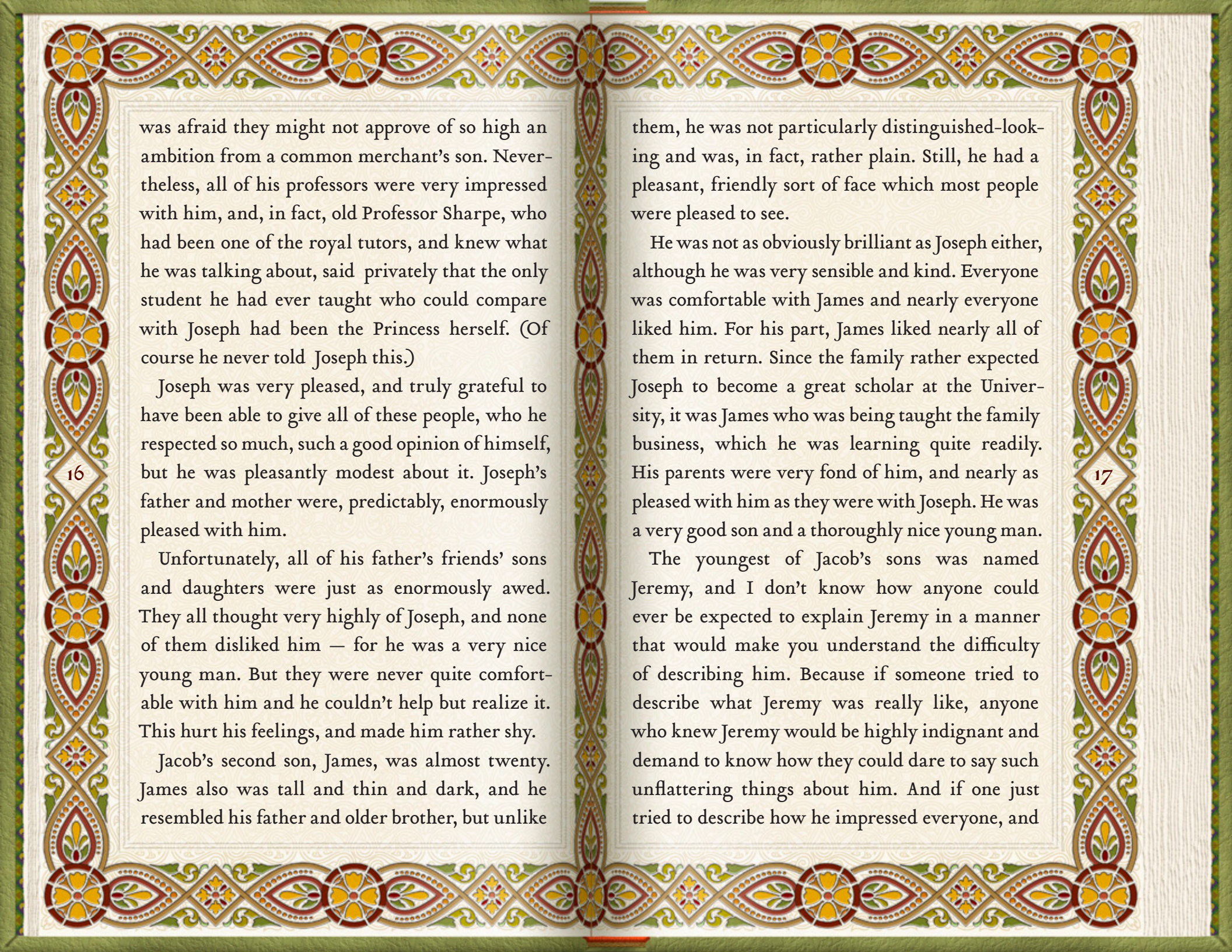
His great-grandfather had been a poor shopkeeper, and his grandfather a



fairly prosperous one. His own father had become a ship owner and a successful importer, in a small way, and Jacob himself had grown that business to become a successful ship owner and importer in a very large way, and was one of the richest men in all of the King's fine city. When Jacob was a rising young trader, he had married the beautiful daughter — and heiress — of a wealthy banker, and by the time the Princess was eighteen he had three fine sons. (Which is also very traditional in this sort of history.)

His eldest son, Joseph, was twenty-one years old, and Jacob was very proud of him. Only a very small part of this might have been because Joseph looked very much as Jacob had when Jacob was young. He was tall and thin and dark, and although he was not precisely handsome, he was very distinguished looking. He was also quite brilliant, and, since his father was exactly the sort of wealthy commoner who could afford such things, Joseph was currently studying law and political science at the University.

He was very happy there. Joseph hoped, one day, to go into government, but he had never mentioned this to his family or to his tutors, for he



was afraid they might not approve of so high an ambition from a common merchant's son. Nevertheless, all of his professors were very impressed with him, and, in fact, old Professor Sharpe, who had been one of the royal tutors, and knew what he was talking about, said privately that the only student he had ever taught who could compare with Joseph had been the Princess herself. (Of course he never told Joseph this.)

16 Joseph was very pleased, and truly grateful to have been able to give all of these people, who he respected so much, such a good opinion of himself, but he was pleasantly modest about it. Joseph's father and mother were, predictably, enormously pleased with him.

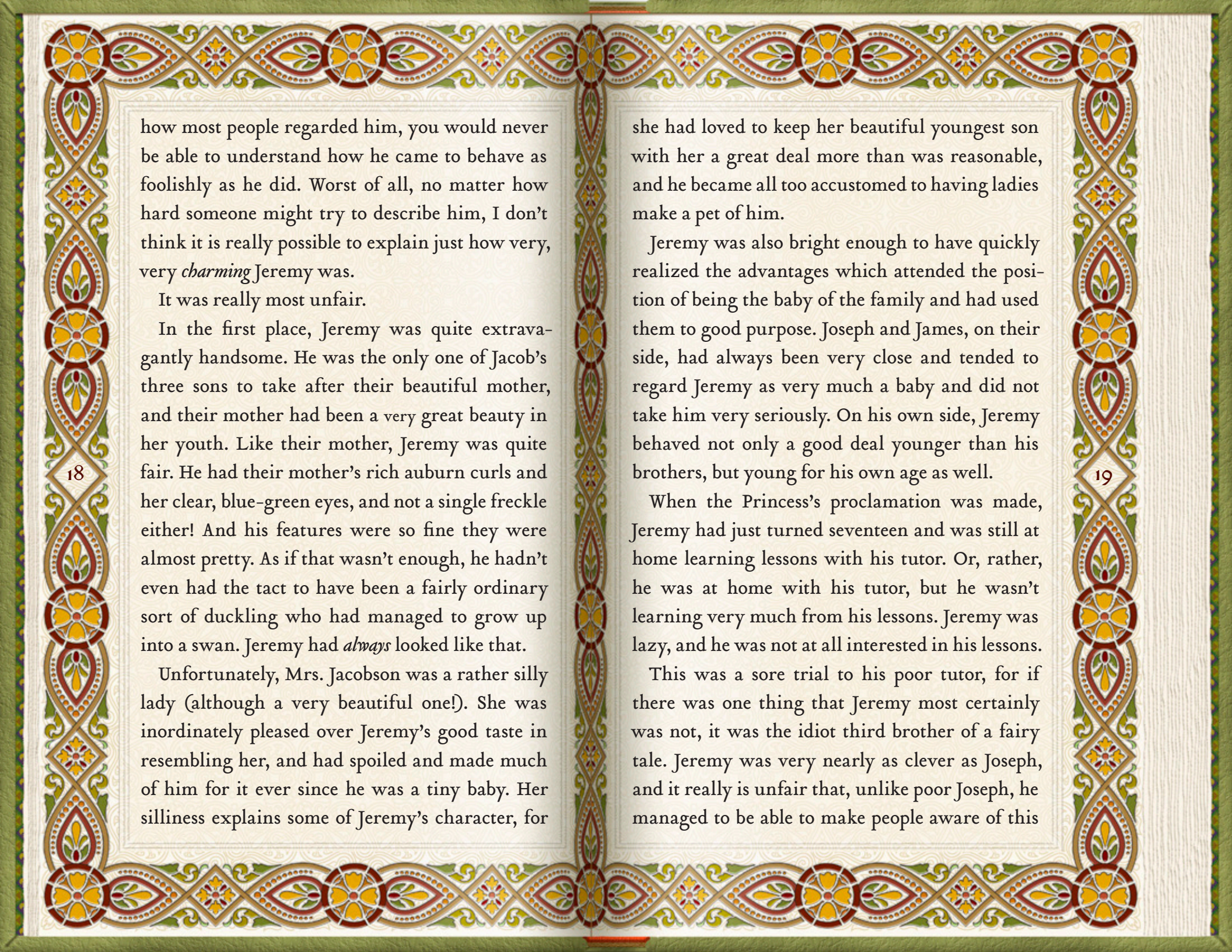
Unfortunately, all of his father's friends' sons and daughters were just as enormously awed. They all thought very highly of Joseph, and none of them disliked him — for he was a very nice young man. But they were never quite comfortable with him and he couldn't help but realize it. This hurt his feelings, and made him rather shy.

Jacob's second son, James, was almost twenty. James also was tall and thin and dark, and he resembled his father and older brother, but unlike

them, he was not particularly distinguished-looking and was, in fact, rather plain. Still, he had a pleasant, friendly sort of face which most people were pleased to see.

He was not as obviously brilliant as Joseph either, although he was very sensible and kind. Everyone was comfortable with James and nearly everyone liked him. For his part, James liked nearly all of them in return. Since the family rather expected Joseph to become a great scholar at the University, it was James who was being taught the family business, which he was learning quite readily. His parents were very fond of him, and nearly as pleased with him as they were with Joseph. He was a very good son and a thoroughly nice young man.

17 The youngest of Jacob's sons was named Jeremy, and I don't know how anyone could ever be expected to explain Jeremy in a manner that would make you understand the difficulty of describing him. Because if someone tried to describe what Jeremy was really like, anyone who knew Jeremy would be highly indignant and demand to know how they could dare to say such unflattering things about him. And if one just tried to describe how he impressed everyone, and



how most people regarded him, you would never be able to understand how he came to behave as foolishly as he did. Worst of all, no matter how hard someone might try to describe him, I don't think it is really possible to explain just how very, very *charming* Jeremy was.

It was really most unfair.

In the first place, Jeremy was quite extravagantly handsome. He was the only one of Jacob's three sons to take after their beautiful mother, and their mother had been a very great beauty in her youth. Like their mother, Jeremy was quite fair. He had their mother's rich auburn curls and her clear, blue-green eyes, and not a single freckle either! And his features were so fine they were almost pretty. As if that wasn't enough, he hadn't even had the tact to have been a fairly ordinary sort of duckling who had managed to grow up into a swan. Jeremy had *always* looked like that.

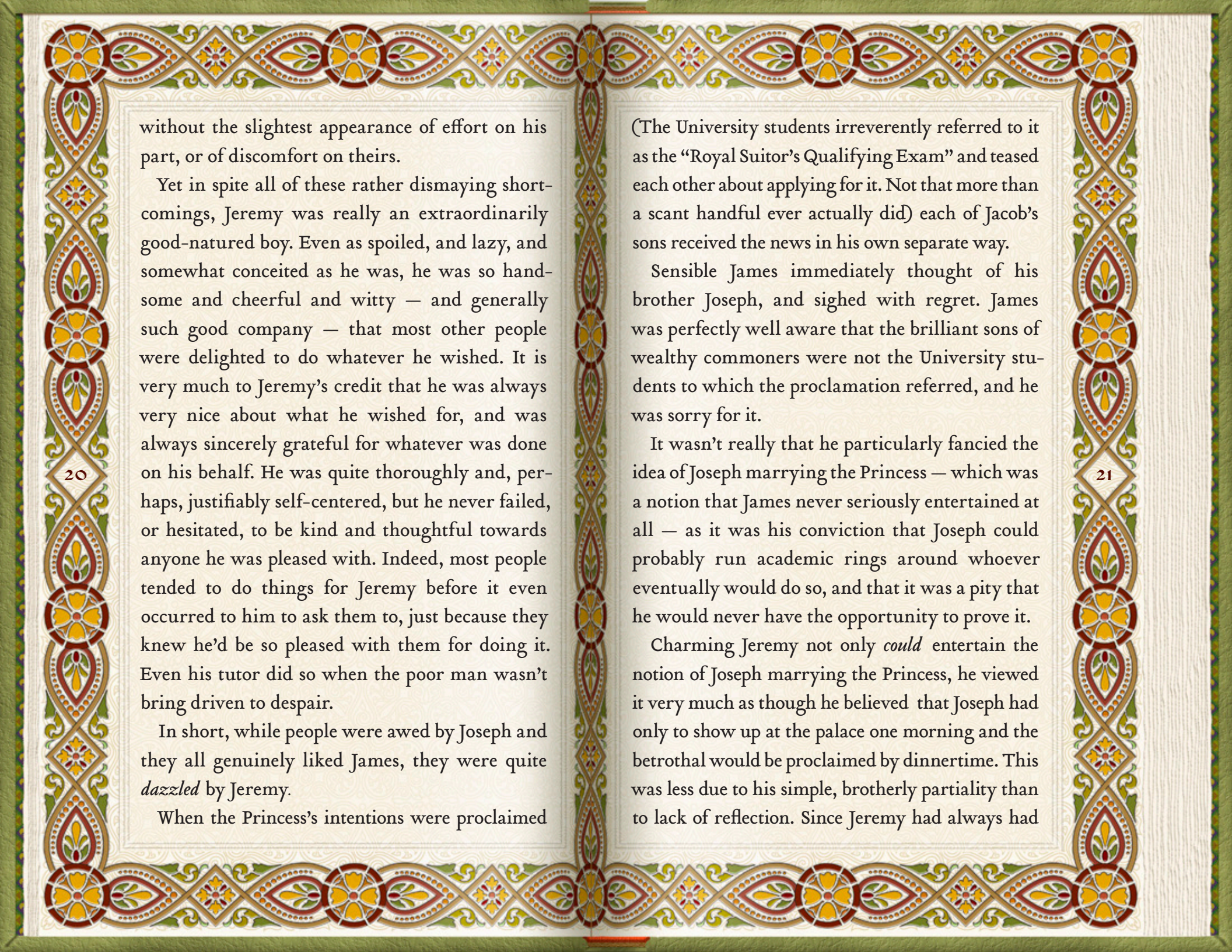
Unfortunately, Mrs. Jacobson was a rather silly lady (although a very beautiful one!). She was inordinately pleased over Jeremy's good taste in resembling her, and had spoiled and made much of him for it ever since he was a tiny baby. Her silliness explains some of Jeremy's character, for

she had loved to keep her beautiful youngest son with her a great deal more than was reasonable, and he became all too accustomed to having ladies make a pet of him.

Jeremy was also bright enough to have quickly realized the advantages which attended the position of being the baby of the family and had used them to good purpose. Joseph and James, on their side, had always been very close and tended to regard Jeremy as very much a baby and did not take him very seriously. On his own side, Jeremy behaved not only a good deal younger than his brothers, but young for his own age as well.

When the Princess's proclamation was made, Jeremy had just turned seventeen and was still at home learning lessons with his tutor. Or, rather, he was at home with his tutor, but he wasn't learning very much from his lessons. Jeremy was lazy, and he was not at all interested in his lessons.

This was a sore trial to his poor tutor, for if there was one thing that Jeremy most certainly was not, it was the idiot third brother of a fairy tale. Jeremy was very nearly as clever as Joseph, and it really is unfair that, unlike poor Joseph, he managed to be able to make people aware of this



without the slightest appearance of effort on his part, or of discomfort on theirs.

Yet in spite all of these rather dismaying shortcomings, Jeremy was really an extraordinarily good-natured boy. Even as spoiled, and lazy, and somewhat conceited as he was, he was so handsome and cheerful and witty — and generally such good company — that most other people were delighted to do whatever he wished. It is very much to Jeremy's credit that he was always very nice about what he wished for, and was always sincerely grateful for whatever was done on his behalf. He was quite thoroughly and, perhaps, justifiably self-centered, but he never failed, or hesitated, to be kind and thoughtful towards anyone he was pleased with. Indeed, most people tended to do things for Jeremy before it even occurred to him to ask them to, just because they knew he'd be so pleased with them for doing it. Even his tutor did so when the poor man wasn't bring driven to despair.

In short, while people were awed by Joseph and they all genuinely liked James, they were quite *dazzled* by Jeremy.

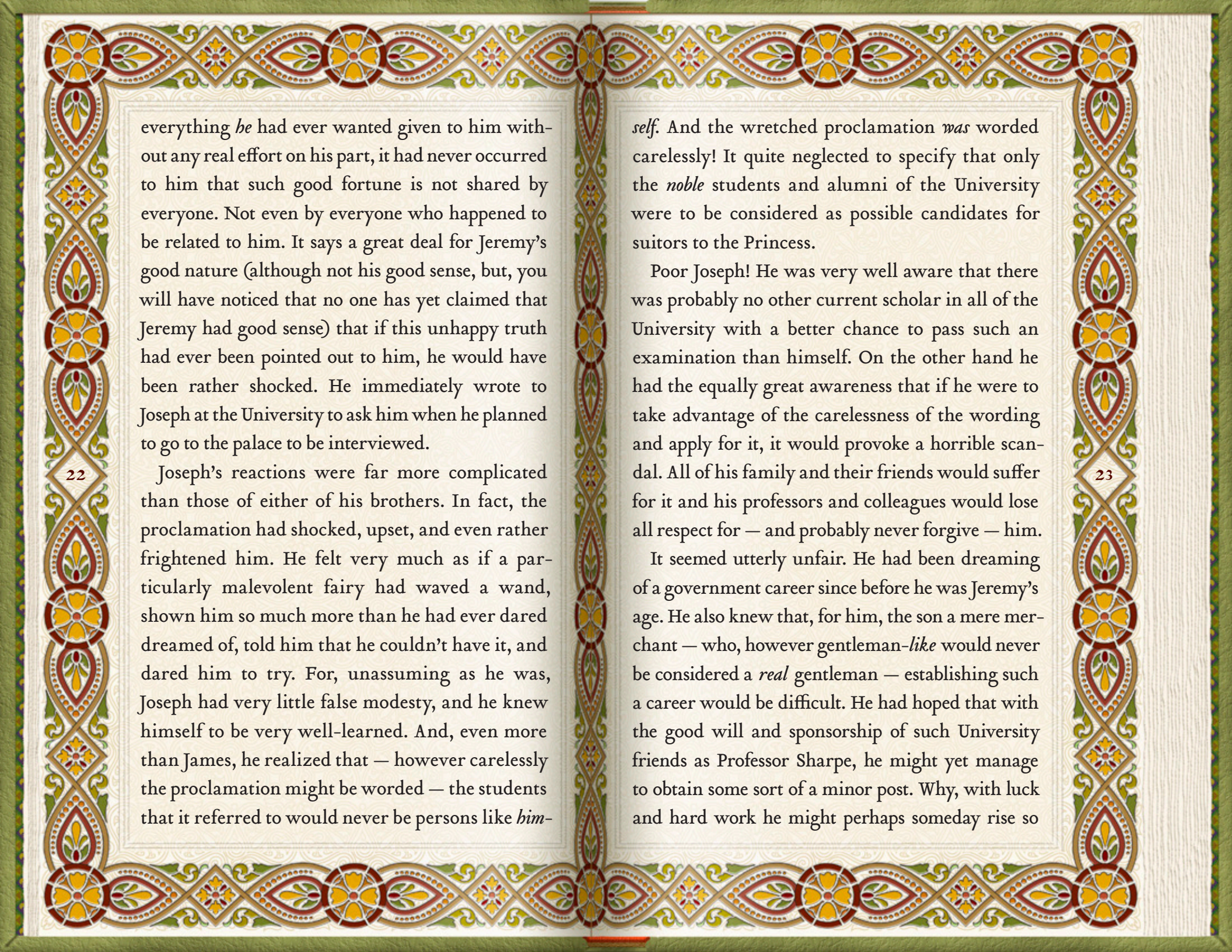
When the Princess's intentions were proclaimed

(The University students irreverently referred to it as the "Royal Suitor's Qualifying Exam" and teased each other about applying for it. Not that more than a scant handful ever actually did) each of Jacob's sons received the news in his own separate way.

Sensible James immediately thought of his brother Joseph, and sighed with regret. James was perfectly well aware that the brilliant sons of wealthy commoners were not the University students to which the proclamation referred, and he was sorry for it.

It wasn't really that he particularly fancied the idea of Joseph marrying the Princess — which was a notion that James never seriously entertained at all — as it was his conviction that Joseph could probably run academic rings around whoever eventually would do so, and that it was a pity that he would never have the opportunity to prove it.

Charming Jeremy not only *could* entertain the notion of Joseph marrying the Princess, he viewed it very much as though he believed that Joseph had only to show up at the palace one morning and the betrothal would be proclaimed by dinnertime. This was less due to his simple, brotherly partiality than to lack of reflection. Since Jeremy had always had



everything *he* had ever wanted given to him without any real effort on his part, it had never occurred to him that such good fortune is not shared by everyone. Not even by everyone who happened to be related to him. It says a great deal for Jeremy's good nature (although not his good sense, but, you will have noticed that no one has yet claimed that Jeremy had good sense) that if this unhappy truth had ever been pointed out to him, he would have been rather shocked. He immediately wrote to Joseph at the University to ask him when he planned to go to the palace to be interviewed.

22

Joseph's reactions were far more complicated than those of either of his brothers. In fact, the proclamation had shocked, upset, and even rather frightened him. He felt very much as if a particularly malevolent fairy had waved a wand, shown him so much more than he had ever dared dreamed of, told him that he couldn't have it, and dared him to try. For, unassuming as he was, Joseph had very little false modesty, and he knew himself to be very well-learned. And, even more than James, he realized that — however carelessly the proclamation might be worded — the students that it referred to would never be persons like *him*—

self. And the wretched proclamation *was* worded carelessly! It quite neglected to specify that only the *noble* students and alumni of the University were to be considered as possible candidates for suitors to the Princess.

Poor Joseph! He was very well aware that there was probably no other current scholar in all of the University with a better chance to pass such an examination than himself. On the other hand he had the equally great awareness that if he were to take advantage of the carelessness of the wording and apply for it, it would provoke a horrible scandal. All of his family and their friends would suffer for it and his professors and colleagues would lose all respect for — and probably never forgive — him.

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It seemed utterly unfair. He had been dreaming of a government career since before he was Jeremy's age. He also knew that, for him, the son a mere merchant — who, however gentleman-*like* would never be considered a *real* gentleman — establishing such a career would be difficult. He had hoped that with the good will and sponsorship of such University friends as Professor Sharpe, he might yet manage to obtain some sort of a minor post. Why, with luck and hard work he might perhaps someday rise so

high as — dare he think it — the first secretary to a Royal Counselor! It seemed horribly ambitious, but not *impossible*. Surely it was not *altogether* impossible! Now alas for those poor dreams! Thanks to this carelessly worded proclamation, it had become terrifyingly easy to dream of far, far more than that. And every bit of it unthinkable!

But he couldn't stop thinking of it.

Jeremy's letter upset him even more. He sat down and tried to write a reply which would coolly explain to his young brother all of the very wise, cautious reasons why it would be a hopelessly bad idea for him to do anything so rash as to request to be interviewed by the Princess. And found that he couldn't think of a single wise, cautious thing to say. Whenever he picked up his pen, all that he could think of was that no man with Jeremy for a brother would ever be able to think himself appealing, and that even the perfectly ordinary daughters of their parents' friends had never been able to feel at ease around him. And he could hardly expect Jeremy to be able to understand *that*, even if he had been able to bear to write it out. Which he couldn't. It was also absolutely no help to think of all he had ever been told about the

Princess. That she was the most beautiful Princess the Kingdom had ever known, and even more learned than himself. No, he couldn't write to Jeremy about that either.

In defeat, he admitted to himself that if he had been a nobleman's son rather than a merchant's, he would probably not have been able to resist the temptation to write to the palace for an interview. In fact, he even suspected that had he been a nobleman's son, he might have been being subtly encouraged to do so by more than one of his professors.

(In this, he was quite correct. Several of them, if he had only known it, could only compare him in their minds' eyes with some of the nobleman's sons that they had tried to teach over the years, and shake their heads in regret. For, merchant's son or not, Joseph was quite as well liked in the University as James was in the City, and the professors were very nearly as dazzled by Joseph as everyone else was by Jeremy. But they all also knew that it *just wouldn't do*.)

In the end, he sent Jeremy a simple note saying that he did not plan to go to the palace at all, applied himself to his studies, and tried not to dream at night.

JEREMY MAKES A FOOL OF HIMSELF

26



WHEN JEREMY FIRST read Joseph's note he was so shocked and disappointed that he could hardly believe his eyes. He immediately decided that he would write again and demand to know how Joseph could be so poor-spirited, and let the family down so. Before he managed to get started, however, he had encountered his brother James and complained to him of what he called "Joseph's stupidity." James's comments on the subject at least made Jeremy give the matter a bit more thought.

"Did you really expect, *Joseph* to do such a thing?" James had asked him, he was amazed that even such a child as Jeremy could be so impractical.

"Of course I did! Didn't you?"

"Certainly not!" James said, "Joseph has more sense than that!"

"Sense!? You call this being *sensible*!?" Jeremy shouted in disgust, waving the offending note under his brother's nose.

"Well of course I do. In the first place, however highly *we* might regard Joseph's abilities, there is no guarantee that he would be able to give the Princess the answers she is looking for. No one else has. In the second place, if he did such a thing and failed to give the proper answers, he might lose the regard of the people he must depend upon to use their influence on his behalf in the future. It takes a great deal of influence to establish an academic career, and Joseph doesn't have the social advantages which most of the other University scholars have. He isn't very likely to risk advancement that he can pretty well depend upon now, and that he has already earned, for the sake of such a mad gamble. And in the third place, even if he did give the proper answers, there is no certainty that the Princess would favor him. She

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hasn't promised to marry just anyone who answers her questions, after all.

"Besides, if it comes to that, why are you so sure that Joseph would want to marry the Princess? He doesn't even know her" James pointed out.

"But she's the Princess!" Jeremy insisted.

"Exactly." James said, thinking, with his usual good sense that the difference in position between a King's daughter and a merchant's son should be obvious to anyone.


It was not obvious to Jeremy, however. He didn't consider it at all. Since their father was rich and the family lived extremely well, it had never occurred to Jeremy that being nobly born could actually be important on its own account. If he thought about it at all, he would have been vaguely aware that his parents' friends were all people who had no social contact at all with the King's court, apart from selling their wares to the Crown and the nobles who attended the Court. But Jeremy thought nothing of that. After all, his parents and their friends were always buying and selling things among themselves, and he would have been very surprised to discover that the nobility did not socially recognize people that they

bought things from. Instead, he merely concluded that he had never really understood Joseph — or James, either, and decided that *both* of his brothers were being very poor-spirited. If *he* were a student at the University he would not be so!

At that point Jeremy had a simply marvelous idea. Why shouldn't he go to the University as well? After all, his tutor was always telling him that he could "learn whatever he chose, if he would but *apply* himself." After all, it wasn't as though he were really needed in the family business — although it had always been generally expected that he would join his father and James in it someday. Why, he would go to the University instead, and *he* would marry the Princess!

This idea pleased him very much indeed, until it occurred to him that even with the best of effort it could be nearly two years before he would be ready for University, and the Princess might very well have married someone else by then.

Jeremy was quite miffed when he realized this. After all, he reasoned, it would be a very great shame if the poor Princess should have to marry someone that might not like nearly as well as him. For Jeremy had *no* doubt that the Princess would



like him better than any of her other suitors — if she only would wait to meet him. Everyone *else* had always done so.

Then Jeremy started thinking very foolishly indeed. In the end, he managed to convince himself that since it was so certain that he *could* enter the University, this was just as good as if he *had* entered the University.

So then he sat himself down and wrote a letter to the Minister in charge of the Princess's interviews saying that his name was Jacobson and since University students were permitted to be interviewed, he would like to know when it would be convenient for him to come to the palace.

The Minister's secretary's underclerk's assistant, who dealt with such letters, was not altogether careless. He did check the University enrollment list to see if there was a Jacobson, J. listed, and of course there was. But the underclerk's assistant did not think to investigate further. He had not recognized the name, Jacobson, but there were a great many nobles who did not regularly come to court so he didn't find that at all odd. That there was such a listing of the name in the University rolls was enough to satisfy him.

Nor did it strike him as odd that this Jeremy Jacobson (for Jeremy had signed his own name and never actually came out and claimed that he was a *current* University student, although he certainly tried to give that impression) had asked that the reply be sent to an address in the City rather than to the University itself. There were so many letters to go through and answer that the poor man was quite flustered, and he had given up trying to investigate them all.

By the date set for Jeremy's appointment, the Princess was very close to admitting that her father was right and she had, indeed, bitten off more than she could chew. She had been steadily interviewing suitors for nearly four months, two or three of them nearly every week, and it was only by good luck that she had managed to send them all away so far. It was not so difficult when the suitors she questioned were nobles of her father's court, for they were reasonably familiar to her and she had a very good idea of what sort of things most of them did or did not know.

So far, there had only been a handful of foreign nobles to deal with. That they had stayed at the court as guests (to draw her attention to them-

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selves, and to become better acquainted) before their interviews had been a tremendous help. But there had also been more than a dozen nobles who were not part of the court and who had simply come up from the country and been presented to her the day before their interviews. Those had been difficult. There had also been three University students, who had not even been presented ahead of time. She had been quite frightened of those. But they had turned out to be not so troublesome, since two of them had known very little outside of their primary subjects (one was a history student, the other jurisprudence) and while the third had learned a great deal in a lot of different fields, none of his learning went very deep. They were very ordinary sons of nobles after all, and none of them had been studying governmental skills since they were twelve years old, as she had.

But she was feeling the strain a great deal and was growing very tired of it. The proclamation had been made, however, and was now law. It would have been very difficult to go back on her stated intentions gracefully. Or not without a very good excuse — and she didn't think she was likely to be given one of *those*.

So, there she sat in her father's smallest council chamber with a lady-in-waiting for company, and a sergeant-at-arms for tradition, and a clerk to take down the questions and answers (since if any of these suitors came back she wanted a record of what she had asked them before.) and wished that she could be anywhere else.

Jeremy had dressed in his very best, which was very fine indeed. He had also made sure that he looked as handsome as possible (which was very handsome indeed). And although he was terribly impressed by how grand the palace was, once he was inside it, he was still feeling quite self-confident. After all, every young girl he had ever met had liked him very well once she got to know him, and the Princess was a young girl too, only one year older than he was.

Jeremy was announced. He entered the room. He made his very best bow, and smiled charmingly.

“Oh, how very beautiful you are!” He said ingeniously, “Even more than everyone always says! What would you like to ask me first?” He asked.

The Princess stared at him, altogether astonished. For poor, silly Jeremy had done almost everything wrong!

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It was not altogether his fault, for Jeremy had always been happy to properly learn anything which involved *doing* something. So, as a result, he danced and fenced and rode a horse very well indeed, and his very best bow was really excellent. But it wasn't a *court* bow. It was not *at all* a suitable bow to make to *Royalty*. No one had ever thought to teach Jeremy such a thing. No, nor Court etiquette either. Jeremy had simply entered the room and behaved as though he had been introduced to the daughter of one of his father's friends. The Princess had never encountered impertinence to equal it.

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Of course, if a young man, particularly a young man as handsome as Jeremy had bowed and smiled and spoken to her in exactly the same manner at a picnic or a garden party, she would probably have been amused and every bit as charmed as Jeremy had expected her to be. But not in her father's council chamber! She barely managed to conceal her indignation.

"To ask you first?" She said, "And no doubt you consider my questions a mere matter of form which you will breeze through without effort."

"Well, I shan't know that until I've heard them, shall I?" Jeremy said reasonably, smiling quite

angelically all the while.

The Princess was quite put out of temper.

"Well, suppose you start by telling us all what I am thinking of you this moment!" She said sharply, then caught herself, and flushed, and felt quite ashamed of herself. How could she have so disgraced herself as to publicly loose her temper at this stupid boy? And he *was* just a boy, she realized, taking a closer look at him. A silly boy, probably not even her own age, and every bit as conceited as her cousin Daniel! Ridiculous! How in the world had he pushed himself in here? Was this someone's idea of a joke? She collected herself. That was an idea; could it be? But the boy was much too handsome to be a jester. Perhaps someone had played a trick on *him*?

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Jeremy himself was quite speechless. He had stopped smiling and stood there looking foolish.

"Don't distress yourself with the effort." The Princess said more calmly, beginning to be amused. "Sergeant, will you take charge of this young man? I don't believe he is what he claims."

The sergeant clasped Jeremy by one shoulder with a very strong hand. Not that it was necessary, for Jeremy hadn't stirred a step.

“Lady Mary,” The Princess asked, “Will you see if Professor Sharpe or Professor Tuttle are to be found? This young man claims to be from the University, which I do not believe, and one or another of those gentleman might be able to help clarify this matter.”

Jeremy finally opened his mouth to explain.

“Now, now,” The sergeant told him, “You be quiet. We’ll hear what you have to say when we find out if the professor can identify you.”

“But...”

“Silence!” The sergeant ordered.

Jeremy subsided. This was not at all how he had imagined this interview to go.

Lady Mary found Professor Sharpe fairly quickly, considering the size of the palace.

“Please sir,” She said, “Could you come along to the interview chamber? Her Royal Highness wants your assistance.”

“At an interview?” The professor asked, startled, “What could she want of me for an interview?” He wondered aloud.

“It is a question of identification. Do you know of a university student named Jacobson?”

“Jacobson? Of course! He’s one of my finest stu-

dents. Is he here? I wouldn’t have thought it of him.” He said, with some disappointment.

“There seems to be some question as to whether the young man really *is* Jacobson. We would appreciate your help.”

“An impostor! Good heavens! Let’s see to this at once! But why on earth would he impersonate Jacobson?”

Of course as soon as Professor Sharpe took one look at Jeremy, who was thoroughly nervous by now, and said; “That? That isn’t Joseph Jacobson! Nothing like him at all!” it was the very last straw for Jeremy. He exclaimed; “Of course I’m not Joseph Jacobson! I’m *Jeremy* Jacobson! Joseph is my oldest brother — and he ought to have come here himself, but he didn’t seem to want to!” with such an air of aggrieved bewilderment that the Princess had little choice but to either take insult and to become very angry indeed, or to find the whole thing altogether ridiculous and laugh.

Fortunately she laughed.



JEREMY IS MADE AN EXAMPLE



38


HERE WAS, OF COURSE, a tremendous uproar. People roared at the Minister's secretary's underclerk's assistant who had answered Jeremy's letter. They also roared at the counselors who had drafted the proclamation without having taken into account that there were (a few!) sons of quite common men at the University. But chiefly they roared at Jeremy. Jeremy, who was not accustomed to being roared at, found this quite unnerving. He flinched and stammered and looked more foolish than ever.

All of this had been bad enough at the very beginning when everyone but Professor Sharpe still assumed Jeremy to be a well-born younger son of a noble family who was pushing in where he had no business to be for another year or two. When it was made clear that his father was a mere merchant and not even a gentleman — well! They roared even louder and Jeremy was locked in a cell in the palace prison tower until they could decide what to do with him. Then the King, his daughter and the Council all met in the largest council chamber to roar at each other.

39

The Princess, by this time, was finding the situation sillier and sillier. The Princess, after all, was the only person who knew that the whole parade of interviews was just an elaborate excuse for her not to have to marry anyone. Therefore, of all the people in the chamber, she was the least upset and, although her opinion of Jeremy was very low, she was no longer cross with him, personally.

"After all," She said, "He's just a silly boy showing off. If the interview process had been properly arranged in the first place, he would never have gotten as far as the palace gates. In fact," She added, having already realized that this incident was a



very valuable one, “I, for one, am almost grateful to him for making this flaw in the proclamation so obvious so quickly, and I think we ought to correct this matter, first, before someone decides to take advantage of it who is not a harmless child.”


40 That got everyone’s attention and they all spent several hours arguing over what was to be done. to fix the flaw in the proclamation. At the Princess’s suggestion, a second proclamation was drafted stating that anyone intending to be interviewed by the Princess must first be presented at court, and then must be prepared to stay at court until their background could be thoroughly investigated. It was pointed out that this alone would tend to discourage any other commoners’ sons from getting ideas so far above themselves. It did not make it absolutely impossible, of course, for once a proclamation is made publicly, it becomes law, and the law now stated that (apparently, *all*) students and graduates of the university were eligible contenders. But a commoner would now have to be able to afford to stay at the court — which was likely to be quite expensive — while having his background thoroughly looked into, and to find someone already accepted at court who was willing

to sponsor him as well. It would have been very difficult. A man would have had to be even more conceited, or considerably more foolish, than Jeremy to attempt it.

As to what was to be done with Jeremy, that was harder to decide. All that everyone could agree upon was that he should be kept in custody until they could all find something else to agree upon. They also had to thoroughly investigate his family to make sure that he really was nothing more than the silly boy he seemed.

41 This was a mortifying embarrassment for the Jacobsons. Jeremy’s father roared as loudly as a Counselor and his mother took to her bed in tears. James shook his head and sighed, and Joseph was so ashamed that Professor Sharpe had to expend considerable effort in order to talk him out of leaving the University altogether. In any case, Joseph went home to stay with his family during the worst of the ordeal.

Professor Sharpe, to his own surprise, found himself a little ashamed of himself, although he had no reason to be. Actually, what he was ashamed of was for having felt so disappointed for that short moment when he had thought that it



had been Joseph who had applied for an interview. Now he was a little sorry that Joseph hadn't done so, since, if he had, this fool of a brother would have left matters alone and there wouldn't be all of this excitement. Besides, commoner or not, Joseph would have been perfectly within his legal rights to be there.

Except, of course, that he never actually would have done so — or, to be practical about it, never actually *should* — have done so. And clearly was well aware of as much. Professor Sharpe promised himself that he would make this up to Joseph somehow.

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The officers investigating the Jacobsons finally came to the conclusion that all they had done wrong was to raise one very foolish, very spoiled boy. Deciding what they ought to do about Jeremy himself took several weeks. First, the lawyers had to make up their minds over just what to accuse Jeremy of, since what Jeremy had thought he was doing, and what he had intended to do, and what he actually had done were all different things entirely. And to make matters even worse, what the law could have *said* that he had tried to do was something else altogether. Potentially several very serious somethings, in fact!

Jacob Jacobson was so angry over the whole affair that he told the King's lawyers they could do what they pleased with the boy and he wouldn't say a word to stop them. Mrs. Jacobson wept and wept. Joseph and James were horribly embarrassed and upset, and became quite angry with Jeremy themselves, and they couldn't help but wonder if there had been *anything* that they might have done which would have kept him from behaving so heedlessly.

As horrible as it all seemed — and Jeremy had never been so frightened in all his short life — Jeremy had really been very lucky, so far.

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First; the Princess had chosen to find him funny. This was painful to his dignity, but it made it rather difficult for the rest of the court to be as angry and insulted as they almost certainly would have been had she chosen to take offense. In fact, had the Princess done that, there were no less than four very serious crimes that the lawyers could have charged him with and there would have been very little that he could have said in his defense. In the second place; Jeremy was only seventeen years old. Legally, that meant he was still to be considered a child. A grown man charged with the crimes that the lawyers could have



brought against him might have gotten himself hanged. As a child, nothing *all that* terrible could be done to him. His father, Jacob, had been quite well aware of this. (He wasn't at all as heartless as he sounded, just very angry.) But this made the counselors even more annoyed.

The King found the incident considerably less funny than the Princess did but he was willing to let her take charge of what was, after all, her own business concerning what was turning out to be very much a tempest in a teapot. If he thought that she was making a major mistake he would have called it to her attention.

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Some of the Councilors, however, were stubbornly determined to punish Jeremy quite harshly for his presumption. A good deal of which just serves to show just how basically unfair the world is, even in little kingdoms which *are* just a bit too good to be true. For, if Jeremy had really been the well-born younger son that people had at first thought him, the Councilors would not have been so vindictive. His father would have had to pay a heavy fine, more or less for not having kept him under control (although they would have called it something more dignified) and his father would

have had to leave court until the scandal died down. Jeremy himself would probably not have been permitted at court for several more years, but eventually he would have been accepted, and his father could have returned as soon as the gossips found something else to chatter about.

The Princess privately thought that locking the boy up and frightening him out of his wits for all those weeks was probably quite severe enough of a punishment to teach him his lesson, and they might just as well charge his father with a moderate fine and let him deal with the matter. This would not do for the Council however. Some of the Councilors were inordinately indignant over Jeremy's humble birth, and they would not be swayed by reason, mercy, or any other consideration.

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The Princess was able to dissuade them from taking their offense out on Jeremy's family, pointing out that a simple, honest family of merchants, such as the investigators had shown them to be, could hardly be blamed for failing to anticipate that one of their children would do such a mad thing. After a good deal of debate, Jeremy's father was charged much the same sort of fine that a noble in such a case might have been charged with. He

paid it without protest, and was rich enough not to mind the money nearly as much as the disgrace. But as for Jeremy himself, the Princess's pointing out that it was hardly justice to punish him for being a commoner was in vain.

In the end, despite the Princess's opposition, it was decided that Jeremy should be kept in custody for one more month. And, as an example, every day at noon he would be marched out to the square in front of the palace, locked in a pillory to be built there especially for that purpose, and left to stand there under guard until sunset, when he would be conducted back to his cell.

The Princess declared that this was an unnecessary piece of spitefulness and refused to attend the court session where the sentence would be given. The King agreed that the sentence was quite unsatisfactory and in private commented that the boy should either be sentenced to a specific term in prison, or let go. Public humiliation was in excess of the requirements of seeing justice done. The King also did not attend the session and left it to the Chief Minister to read the Council's decision.

Jeremy's family shook their heads when they heard, and, upon the whole, felt that they had

been let off lightly. Jacob, who had been intending to send James abroad with one of his ship's captains on his next trading venture, decided to send Jeremy off instead. For, as he pointed out, while he doubted the boy would learn anything much, it would get him out of the way until the scandal died down and, besides, he had to start learning the trade eventually. The family was resigned to having to go through a very disagreeable period until people began to forget Jeremy's folly.

Whereupon Jeremy proceeded to make a bad situation worse by escaping from prison.



FLORA



THE PALACE PRISON

tower that Jeremy had been locked up in was not a common jail. This was where any State prisoners such as traitors or spies or rebellious royal relatives would have been held. So, since anyone who might be locked up there would probably be very well-born, and could possibly turn out to be innocent after all, it was really fairly comfortable, though the rooms were small and plain, and the windows were too small to climb out of. The Kingdom had, in general been so well-run for so long that it had been many years since

anyone had been imprisoned there.

The prison tower, (or "The Tower" as it was generally referred to) was under the authority of the Lord Gaoler. The Lord Gaoler really was a Lord and his office was an hereditary one. He and his family lived in a very nice house adjoining the Tower. The current Lord Gaoler was a very easy-going, kindly sort of man who was not outstandingly bright. He had a wife, two grown sons, and one young daughter. Neither of the Lord Gaoler's sons were at court just then. The eldest was off learning to manage their family's country estates. The younger son was visiting relatives. This left their little sister very lonely. There had never been many other children at court and just then there were none at all. With her brothers gone as well, she was left quite alone.

The Lord Gaoler's daughter was named Flora, and she was *almost* fourteen years old. She was a pretty girl, neither remarkably clever nor remarkably silly, and she had been very much sheltered. To the point that she had very little real experience of the world. Her nature was sweet and trusting. Although her home was next to a prison, her father had always kept her separate from that,

and her life was comfortable and generally happy. Nothing really ugly had ever crossed her path yet, and she was so much younger than her brothers that they made rather a pet of her.

Flora's mother viewed all of this with disfavor. She believed that Flora was sure to be horribly spoiled by all of this attention and tended to be rather harsh with her in order to counter it.

Flora's mother was a very proud lady, the daughter of an earl, who was just a little too aware being quicker-witted than her husband. Unfortunately, quick wits do not guarantee good judgment, nor accurate observation. Flora was a very affectionate and confiding child and not at all spoiled by her father and brothers attention. The only result of her mother's harshness had been to make Flora rather afraid of her.

In addition to her other lessons, Flora's mother was teaching her court etiquette, for she intended that Flora should become one of the Princess's ladies-in-waiting when Flora was a little older, as she herself had been to the late Queen.

Flora applied herself to her studies obediently enough, but she didn't really enjoy them. She found the deportment which these lessons taught


to be depressingly stiff and unnatural. When she ventured to complain of this to her mother, she received very little sympathy. All her mother said to her was; "Well, Missy, court life *is* stiff and unnatural, so you might as well accustom yourself to it." Flora had subsided, crushed, and made no further protests. But she also made no further attempts to tell her mother her how she felt about things either.

At first, when Jeremy was locked in the tower he saw no one but his guards and the investigators. He saw far too much of them.

Almost every day he was marched into an interrogation room where investigators roared questions at him. Then, scowling guards would march him back to his cell. During all this time he was allowed no messages and no visitors other than whatever lawyers his father might have hired. Since his father hired none, Jeremy saw no one from outside the palace at all.

This went on and on for all the weeks that the crown's officers were investigating Jeremy and his family in order to find out who he was and what he had thought he was doing.

Jeremy wasn't able to be much help at this. Once Jeremy had been roared at for several hours,



he could no longer have told himself what he had thought he had been doing.

By the time Jeremy had reached the palace for his interview he had been so lost in pretty daydreams of all the wonderful things he would do for all his friends and family when he was married to the Princess (his father and brothers would all be Lords, and Joseph would become Chief Minister) that it would have been impossible to have got any sort of sense out of him. That the Princess had taken one look at him, seen straight through his pretensions, and even *laughed* at him, had been a rude awakening. When he was marched off to the tower, locked up and roared at, he felt as if his daydreams been exchanged for a nightmare that he couldn't wake up from.

What upset Jeremy most of all, although he never actually thought this out and realized it, was how horribly different everything was from what he had expected, and that he was *used* to. Jeremy was accustomed to being *liked* and spoiled and made much of by nearly everyone he met. That is the way he thought the world *was*. Now he was locked in a little room in a huge palace and surrounded by hundreds of people, none of whom showed any

signs of liking him at all! It was a terrible shock and he was quite shaken and very bewildered by it. It wasn't until the investigations had ended and the Council settled down to debate what to do with him, that he was left to himself to recover.

In a pocket of space between the palace wall, the Lord Gaoler's house and the tower itself, there was a pretty garden. Prisoners were sometimes permitted to take some exercise there (under guard) if they behaved themselves and the Lord Gaoler thought it safe. After the investigators decided that they had learned as much from Jeremy as they were ever going to and left him alone, the Lord Gaoler looked in on him and decided that he was so young, and so subdued, and seemed so harmless, that he told the guards that Jeremy could certainly spend time in the garden if he wished, which, of course, he did.

Thereafter, Jeremy spent part of each day outdoors, when the weather was good. Even though a guard was always somewhere about, the peace and quiet were very soothing. It was in this manner that he came to meet Flora.

Flora had been doing needlework with her mother and decided that she wanted a sprig of



honeysuckle to copy. She put her needle and frame aside and, without giving the matter any consideration, or thinking to tell her mother, went out to the garden to clip some.

She walked briskly down the path, and, rounding the arbor, nearly bumped into the handsomest young man she had ever imagined.

“Oh!” She said, startled, “I didn’t know anyone was here.”

“Hullo!” Said he, quite as startled as she was, “Whoever are you?”

“I’m Flora of course.” She told him, looking at him curiously. He was very handsome, if a little pale, and, although his clothes were rather rumpled and creased, they were very fine. He gave her a quizzical look and then smiled the most enchanting smile she had ever seen.

“Well, I suppose I ought to have expected to find flora in a garden.” He said, “But I never had her introduce herself before. I’m Jeremy, by the way. Are you a lily or a rosebud?”

She giggled. “I’m just Flora.” She said, curtsying.

“Oh, see here!” He said, “I’m sure you needn’t curtsy to me.” he gave her a rueful grin. “I’m not nearly grand enough. In fact, I suspect it should

be the other way around." Upon which he swept her a charming, but not at all formal, bow which Flora found very friendly. When he straightened up, some unhappy idea must have occurred to him, for he suddenly looked quite sober.

"Actually, I suspect I ought not to be talking with you at all" He said, "So I'll go away and leave you to what you were doing. My guard will probably be along any moment and it wouldn't do for him to find us both here."

Flora was astonished.

"Are you a prisoner?" She asked, fascinated.

"I am that," He replied, wrinkling his nose in distaste, "Do you see that little window, half hidden by the lilac bush? That's my cell. I've been there for weeks

"Is it horrible?"

"The cell? No, not really. But I'm locked in except when I'm out here. And I wish I could take a proper bath."

"I never met a prisoner before." She confided.

"I should hope not." He said, with considerable disapproval. "Oh. I've only just thought of it! Why are you here? Do you live in that house over there?"

"Yes. My father is the Lord Gaoler."

"Oh, I see. Now I'm sure I ought not to be seen here talking with you. Your father wouldn't like it at all."

"I suppose not. Mama will miss me soon. Good-by."

"Good-by." Jeremy said with another smile, and turned down one of the paths.

Flora snipped her sprig of honeysuckle and went thoughtfully back to her embroidery.

At twilight, as Jeremy sat alone in his cell, he heard a rustling and snapping of twigs in the lilac bush, and then a voice whispered, "Jeremy?"

"Flora! You shouldn't be here!"

"My brothers are both away and there's nobody to talk to."

"Won't your parents miss you?"

"No. I come out here in the evening a lot. They don't mind. There isn't anyone else here then. I'll go back before it's time for supper."

"Well, if you're sure." Jeremy said doubtfully.

"Is your guard listening outside the door?"

"Oh. No. They look in on me a couple of times in the night, but there's nobody there usually. How old are you, Flora?"

"Almost fourteen. How old are you, Jeremy?"

“Seventeen.”

“That doesn’t seem very old for a prisoner. Are you very wicked?”

Jeremy was thoroughly ashamed of himself by this time, and somehow he couldn’t bear to tell Flora the whole story of how foolish he had been for fear that she would dislike him as much as everyone else seemed to. Jeremy was enormously grateful for Flora’s attention. She was the first person he had seen in weeks who had neither scowled nor roared at him. He sighed .

“I told some fibs to get into the palace and talk to the Princess” He said at last

“Why didn’t you wait to talk to her until you came to court?” She asked him.

“I probably wouldn’t have ever come to court.” He told her.

“Why not? I shall. I’m going to be a lady-in-waiting.”

“My father’s only a merchant. We don’t get presented at court.”

“Oh.” Flora thought a while. “That still doesn’t sound wicked to me.” She said

“The investigators seem to think I might have been trying to do something else. Something worse

than I did do. They don’t believe me when I tell them I wasn’t. Well, I suppose that’s fair enough. I had fibbed before.” He admitted, ruefully.

“Oh. I see. I have to go now. I’ll come back tomorrow, if I can.”

After this, on most evenings, Flora hid in the lilac bush and talked with Jeremy. He told her about his brothers. About brilliant Joseph, who ought to have come himself, and about sensible James, whom Jeremy ought to have paid more attention to. Flora told him of her brothers and of her father and mother.

Jeremy spoke of his parents and of his father’s ships, and the family business. Truth to tell, Jeremy knew considerably more about selling and trading than anyone in his family gave him credit for. Like dancing and fencing and horseback riding, it was one of those subjects that involved *doing* something, and Jeremy had always been interested in those.

Flora was very impressed, for this all sounded wonderfully new and adventurous to her. She told Jeremy about the court, of which she knew a great deal, although she was still too young to take part in it. She told him about her lessons in court eti-

quette and deportment, as well as how little she liked them. From this sort of thing, Jeremy soon realized that the Princess had seen through him because his bow was all wrong. He suddenly felt very humble and ashamed of his ignorance.

It didn't take Flora very long to discover just why Jeremy had wanted to see the Princess. She was not at all offended. In fact, she thought Jeremy so handsome and charming and clever that she was rather sorry that the Princess had not let him answer her questions and married him.

Jeremy tended to cling to Flora, for her visits were the brightest spot in his days, and he became very fond of her for her own sake as well.

Flora, for her part, rather lost her heart to Jeremy.



CHAPTER 6:

THE PALACE SQUARE



AFTER JEREMY WAS sentenced, he was permitted to have visitors. As soon as this was allowed, James went to the Tower to speak to him. He brought a basket of fruit and some money. Everything was inspected before James was allowed to take it to Jeremy, and a guard came along and stayed in the cell with them to hear everything that was said. Jeremy was very grateful for the fruit, since the prison food was all soups and stews and porridge and bread, and although it was wholesome

enough, it didn't taste at all interesting since no one uses expensive seasonings on food for prisoners. Prisoners with money could have the guards purchase nicer food for them, but Jeremy had brought almost no money with him to the palace, and had spent the few pence he had on candles, a comb, a toothbrush and a cake of soap.

James gave him messages from the rest of the family and asked what he would like for them to send him.

"Clean clothes, please. I've been in these since I got here and I never want to see them again." Jeremy said.

"I'll bring them tomorrow. I'll bring a towel, and extra underwear as well."

Jeremy hung his head.

"I'll be in the palace square tomorrow." He said.

"I'll come in the morning. The day after as well."

"I'm scared, James." He admitted.

James pitied him.

"Well," He said at last, "It will probably be pretty nasty. But it will be over at the end of the month and then you can come home."

"What will Father do then?"

"He says he'll send you out with Captain Petros

on his next venture as soon as possible. Get a chance to learn about trading abroad."

"Get me out of the way, you mean "

"Just during the worst of it. By the time you get back people will have found something else to be scandalized by. He had been going to send me, you know. We both have to learn."

"Oh. Yes." Jeremy said unhappily, realizing that he had managed to cheat his brother out of an opportunity without even meaning to. "I'm sorry."

"That's all right. I'll go next time."

The next morning, when James brought him fresh clothes, Jeremy was nervous but still looked reasonably well. He had given his guards some money to bring him a tub and hot water and told James that, with a proper bath, he felt better than he had in weeks. James told him that he would bring enough money to cover the cost of bathing regularly during the rest of his imprisonment.

When James arrived the third morning, Jeremy was shaking. He looked very pale and ill. He had several bruises and a nasty cut in his scalp. He had changed into his clean clothes. His once best suit was ruined and quite filthy.

"A rock?" James asked, eyeing the cut.

Jeremy shuddered and nodded. James made a wry face.

"I don't know why none of us considered that. You should have a doctor see to it."

"I'll have it seen to tonight." Jeremy said, in a low voice.

"That's a long time to wait. Should I bring another suit?" James asked him.

"No. I might as well wear that when I'm out there. It's ruined already. Oh James, it was worse than I ever imagined!" Jeremy wailed, even though the guard was right there, listening. He didn't care how he sounded to other people any more.

"The court?"

Jeremy shook his head.

"The court mostly just threw nasty comments. Or stared and turned up their noses. That made me feel bad enough, but I expected that. There were also a few young fellows. I don't know if they were from the court or not. They were well-dressed. They threw filth. Some of them. It was urchins and beggars mostly. There were also some loutish townsmen who jeered and threw more garbage. But the worst of it was a group of apprentices. They run in a pack, like dogs. If the guards



hadn't been standing there they'd have been on me with sticks, but the guards were there, so they kept their distance and threw rocks. They yelled that they would be back. And I know that they will."

There wasn't very much that James could say to calm him, but he promised to talk to Joseph who would probably have come across something to the purpose in his legal studies.

When Joseph was told of the apprentices and the rocks he grew very angry. In a tight, hard voice he recited a page of legal gibberish which, in plain speech, translated into a statement that as a Crown prisoner, Jeremy's welfare was the responsibility of the Crown and its officers. Furthermore, that any corporal punishment administered to a Crown prisoner must be covered by a specific sentence and administered by the Crown's appointed executor. And that furthermore, any other injury incurred by a prisoner while in custody was the Crown's responsibility and could be construed as a dereliction of duty on the Crown's part.

In plainer language yet, Jeremy's guards had a great deal to answer for, and they should be notified of this fact at once.

"Although," Joseph pointed out angrily, "Walking

up to them and telling them so isn't likely to have much effect. We will have to have this written up by a lawyer and notarized, along with the doctor's testimony. You say he hasn't had it looked at yet?"

"No, but he said he would this evening. I don't know which doctor though."

Joseph waved this away as unimportant.

"There will be an official doctor who sees to Tower prisoners. We won't be able to get his testimony today though. He won't be seeing Jeremy until after sunset when the Tower is closed to outsiders. We can take care of the lawyer today however, and he can send a summons to the doctor's house this evening and have him give his testimony first thing tomorrow morning. If everything goes smoothly, you should be able to take the official complaint with you by the time they allow visitors in tomorrow." He said with satisfaction, then frowned briefly.

"Of course," He admitted, with some regret, "Nothing can be done about the jeers and insults, and the guards will still probably turn a blind eye to people flinging garbage. But at least we should be able to put an end to the throwing of rocks."

Now that Jeremy stood in the palace square until

sunset, Flora wasn't able to visit him at her usual time. It wasn't until the evening of his second day in the Square that she managed to slip away after supper and made her way to the lilac bush.

Jeremy had already bathed and changed and had the doctor look over his bruises and bandage the cut. That day had been every bit as bad as the one before. The apprentices had, indeed, come back, but, luckily, the rocks had been smaller. He hadn't yet lit his candle, and was sitting in the dark.

"Jeremy?" Flora whispered, "It's me. I tried to come yesterday morning, but someone was here. Was that your brother?"

"Yes, that was James. Just a minute, let me light this."

"Jeremy!" She cried when the candle was lit, "What happened to your head?"

"A rock." He said His eyes were dark-circled and frightened and he was very pale. "They throw rocks. And other nasty things. The nasty things are bad enough, but the rocks are dangerous. Sooner or later someone is going to hit me where it breaks something." He was shaking and his voice was unsteady. "They could kill me if they're not careful. And they're *not* careful. They

want it to hurt. It's horrible, and it's going to go on all month, and I don't know how I can bear it!" And he went on in a rush, all about the urchins and the beggars and the louts. And of the terrible, terrible apprentices. Flora was horrified, She had never in all her life heard anything like this! She listened, white-faced with shock, her eyes growing rounder and rounder. Until she couldn't bear it any more.

She gulped, sobbed, clapped her hands over her ears, crashed through the lilac bush and ran back to her own pretty room in her father's safe, comfortable house.



JEREMY'S ESCAPE



WELL BEFORE DAY-
break, while the house-
hold was still asleep, Flora
dressed herself and crept
softly down the stairs
to her father's study.

A little while after
that, she quietly let herself out of
the house, into the garden and
carefully made her way to the
lilac bush.

Jeremy was asleep. He didn't
wake up when she whispered and
she had to toss a pebble against
the wall above his cot. He woke
with a frightened whimper in the dark.

"Jeremy," She whispered, "It's me.
I've brought you the keys."

"What?" He asked, half-asleep. "Flora? What?
What time is it?" he yawned.

"I don't know. Real early, anyway. I've brought
the keys."

"Keys?" He sat up. "What keys?"

"Shh. My father's keys. I had to take them off
the ring because it rattled so. This one, I know, is
to the garden portal. I've seen him use it. I think
this other opens the cells."

"I have to dress."

"I've put them on the window sill. Bring them
out with you. I have to put them back. I'll wait by
the portal and let you out the stable gate."

Fortunately, or possibly unfortunately, the
guard was off on his usual patrol and Jeremy
managed to get from his cell to the portal without
being seen or heard.

He locked the portal behind him and gave Flora
the keys. They dodged across the garden. Then
Flora took his hand and led him through the silent
house. They crept through a side door and into
the stable yard. Flora carefully unlatched the gate.

"The alley comes out in the market road behind
the palace. Do you know where that is?"

"Yes." Jeremy said. He took both her hands and

kissed them. "Thank you, Flora." He said, "I'll remember you all my life. Your brothers are a pair of lucky dogs. I wish I had such a sister." She drew a long breath and shivered in the dark.

"I'd let you take my pony but I don't think he's big enough for you. And someone might hear."

"No, this is best." He told her, and turned to go. He turned back and gave her a hug. "Good-by, Flora." he said.

"Good-by, Jeremy." She said in a thin little voice. "Good luck."

72 Jeremy went carefully down the alley. When he reached the end he turned and waved. Then he went round the corner and Flora couldn't see him any more. Flora re-latched the gate, blinking back tears. She was glad that she'd been able to let Jeremy go but she was sure that now she would never see him again. She went back into the house. She put her father's keys back on the ring, then she tiptoed back upstairs to bed.


When the guard brought Jeremy's breakfast porridge, he found the cell locked, but there was nothing in it but Jeremy's ruined suit.

As one might imagine, the uproar Jeremy created by fibbing himself into the palace was noth-

ing to the uproar he created by escaping from it. This was only to be expected, since it was a far more serious offense. His fibs had been presumptuous and uncalled for, but escaping from a legally imposed sentence was a piece of direct defiance of the crown, *and* of the law. Things went very hard on the Jacobson family as a result.

73 When James, bringing good news for Jeremy, and an official complaint for the Lord Gaoler, came to the Tower the next morning, he was arrested and questioned every bit as harshly as Jeremy had been. He managed himself better than Jeremy had, pointing out that a guard had heard everything he had ever said to Jeremy and that everything he had brought had been inspected. Besides, why would he have come to file a complaint on Jeremy's behalf today unless he expected Jeremy to still be there? In addition, all of his family's actions for the day before could very easily be accounted for. They had had a very busy day with their lawyers. Nevertheless, for all that he had managed fairly well, James had still been quite frightened.

That James had come to file the complaint and to visit his brother was a point in his favor, but



only a small one. Investigators have nasty, suspicious minds and they pointed out that James may have known of Jeremy's escape and come to the tower to throw them off the scent. Still, they knew of absolutely nothing which could indicate that James had had anything to do with the escape and finally let him go home.

Investigation turned up another, rather larger point in James's favor by showing that there were no scratches or other signs of damage on the lock of Jeremy's cell. Therefore, the investigators had to conclude that it had been opened with a key. They were forced to admit that there was no way that James could have come by a key to Jeremy's cell. The investigators then turned their attention to the guards, thinking that one of them may have been bribed. This part of the investigation lasted five days.

A further search of the area found only two things out of the ordinary. The lilac bush outside Jeremy's window had some broken branches, and the ground between it and the tower was very hard and the grass had been worn away. Since James had entered the tower only from the main entrance, and Jeremy had always been under (at least casual) guard while in the garden, and since

no one could get into the garden except through the Tower or the Lord Gaoler's house, the investigators and the Lord Gaoler could not make any sense out of this.

Investigation of the whole Jacobson family was resumed and was much more thorough and even more unfriendly than before. Although the officers in charge reluctantly decided that the Jacobsons could not have gotten Jeremy out of his cell, they still thought it very likely that they, or their friends, were helping to hide him or to smuggle him away. All of Jacob's warehouses and ships were searched, but Jeremy was not in any of them. The constables searched the Jacobson house as well, and gradually widened their search to the houses and warehouses of Jacob's associates. Jeremy still was not found. Orders were given that all ships in the harbor were to be searched before they could leave, but Jeremy was not hidden in any of the ships either.

In fact, the Crown's officers concentrated so heavily on Jeremy's family and their friends and the harbor that it was nearly three days before they started a detailed search of the other ways out of the City. Almost at once they turned up reports of a boy answering to Jeremy's description travel-

ing inland, and alone. They sent officers after him, but they discovered that he had purchased a horse with his bath money and appeared to be heading for the border.

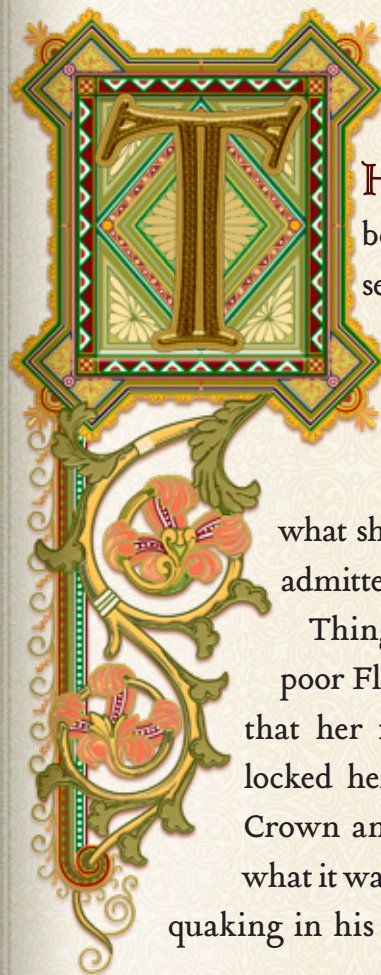
The officers followed with all possible speed and were able to trace his progress quite easily. But they had started their pursuit too late. By the time they reached the border themselves, they found that he had sold the horse, and crossed the border where, legally, they could not follow. They returned to the City for further orders.

76 Since the investigators could find nothing against the Jacobson family, they withdrew their inquiries. But the family was still viewed with suspicion. The Crown had already canceled a large order for merchandise which it had made with Jacob Jacobson's firm several months before the beginning of all the unpleasantness. The news of this got around and business suffered from this. It took over a year for it to begin to recover.

It was nearly a week after Jeremy's escape before the Lord Gaoler took his key ring out of his desk and realized that the keys were in the wrong order. Then he remembered the lilac bush and was able to make sense of it.

CHAPTER 8:

THE PRINCESS WINS A BATTLE



77 THE LORD GAOLER

began by questioning his servants, but it did not take long to discover the culprit. Flora was a very truthful girl and, when she was directly asked what she knew of the matter, she admitted everything.

Things went very badly for poor Flora then. I'm sorry to say that her father whipped her and locked her in her room until the Crown and Council should decide what it wanted done with her. Then, quaking in his boots, he went to report

who had been responsible for Jeremy's escape.

Poor Flora! Horrid as it is to think about, she had heartily earned that whipping. What she had done was far, far worse than any of Jeremy's foolishness or even his defiance. Flora had deliberately helped one of the Crown's prisoners to escape. She had set her own judgment above that of the authority of her country's King and all his laws. And all for no better reason than that she found Jeremy charming, and was frightened for him because of what he told her.

Only think!

78 What if the charming prisoner she met had not been foolish, frightened Jeremy, but a real villain? Perhaps some traitor who wished to overthrow the King and set himself in the King's place as a tyrant. All other things being equal, Flora might have done exactly the same. All he would have had to do is tell her a pitiful story that she believed — and given how little she knew of the world, that wouldn't have been all that difficult! Flora could have brought down the Kingdom with her tender heart.

As it was, she had only managed to ruin her family. The King, quite understandably, was very angry. To let his prisoners go was an act of treason. Even taking the most lenient view of it, a Lord Gaoler

whose family helps prisoners to escape is not doing his job. If the office of Lord Gaoler had not been an hereditary one, the King would certainly have taken it away from them altogether. A King who had no respect for the law would have done so anyway. A tyrant might have made sure of the office's vacancy by arresting all of the Lord Gaoler's family and chopping off their heads. Such things have been done, and done more than once, in this unhappy world.

79 This King was no tyrant, and he respected the law. By his decree, the Lord Gaoler was to immediately turn his office over to his elder son — who otherwise would not have received it until his father's death — and to remove himself to his country estate in disgrace. He was also fined, far more heavily than Jacob Jacobson had been, and could spare it less. Flora was not to be presented at court for as long as she lived under her family's protection. (This meant that if she were someday to marry, and her husband chose to take her to court, it might be another story, depending upon who her husband was.) The Lord Gaoler's family was given a month in which to make the changeover.

That things had not gone worse for them was

80

due to the Princess. To lose a prisoner so publicly made the Crown and the Council look decidedly foolish. The Council was in a mood to be nasty and the King was too angry to very much care. The Princess was also extremely angry, but she was angry at the Council, upon whom she blamed the entire debacle and about whose behavior she was quite scathing. She stated that they were a lot of spiteful old men who had provoked the whole situation by insisting upon making a public example of one foolish boy, expressly against her wishes and over her clearly stated objections (and without, she pointed out, her father's active support). That, if she had been permitted to conduct her own business without interference, the boy would have been released to his father's keeping and the Crown would not now be publicly embarrassed through the Council's unnecessary insistence on exacting vengeance over what was essentially a breach in palace security. And, do they now, she asked with icy sweetness, plan to further their progress by continuing to vent their spleen upon an even younger and even more helpless child?

The several underlying grains of truth in her charges, as well as the fact that Flora at least, *was*

nobly born, gave them pause, and, after consideration, they agreed upon the milder punishment, which although certainly unpleasant, was reasonably fair. It also, although they did not like it, made them realize that the Princess was a force to be reckoned with in her own right, rather than just someone who must be listened to for the sake of her position, before doing exactly as they chose.

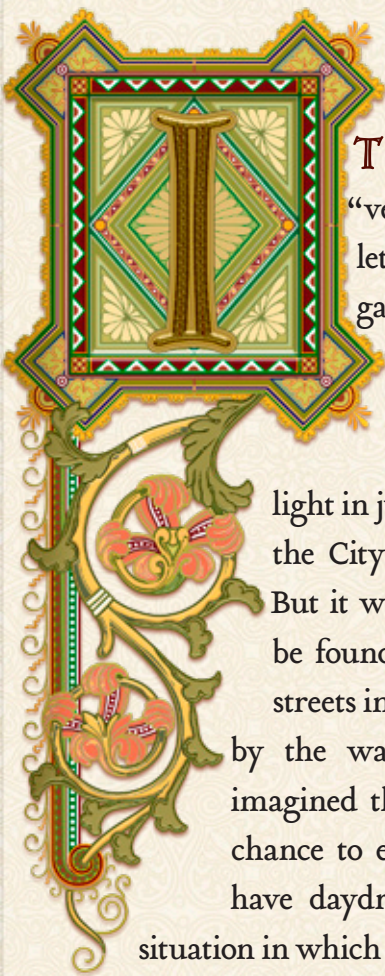
The Princess was very glad to have such a point to bring up on future occasions when the Council might persist in being stubbornly wrongheaded. She did not hesitate to do so either.

81

Long after, when she was Queen, one of her favorite jests was to declare that it was a fine thing when a crowned and anointed monarch owed her authority to a pair of naughty children.



JEREMY LEAVES THE KINGDOM



IT WAS INDEED

“very early” when Flora let Jeremy out the stable gate. But it was nearing midsummer. The sun rises early in midsummer. It would be day-

light in just a few hours, and then the City gates would be opened. But it wouldn't do for Jeremy to be found wandering around the streets in the night and be stopped by the watch. Jeremy had never imagined that he might be given a chance to escape, so he didn't even have daydream-level plans for the situation in which he now found himself.

After tucking himself into a rickety shed off an alley, out of sight, he spent the rest of the time before daybreak drafting and dismissing various plans for making himself safe. Some of these plans were every bit as foolish as anything he'd done already. Some were even more so. Eventually he realized that most of these plans were impossibly foolish, and would be no help to him whatsoever.

It also belatedly occurred to him, that being caught now would be *much* worse than anything that had happened to him already. And probably not just for himself, but for anyone who might possibly have helped him.

He needed to get away. James had already explained some of the trouble that his foolishness had brought down onto his family, and he did not want to make things worse for them than he already had. So he couldn't let himself be found anywhere that they might have hidden him. He resolved to stay well away from his family's home, warehouses, and ships. And, for that matter, to keep well away from the port itself. His family was much too well known there. It was also clear that he needed to avoid all of his or his family's friends, and, indeed, everyone who he knew him

well enough to recognize him.

He finally decided to take things one at a time. He would need to be out of the City before the guards brought his breakfast and discovered him gone. That wouldn't be right at daybreak, but it would be within an hour or two afterwards.

There was also no point in just running, unless he had someplace to run *to*.

He would probably need to leave the country. No, there was no "probably" about it. He needed to get completely out of the kingdom. The closest border was a bit over a week away by trading caravan. But a single rider should be able to get there faster than the wagons would.

So. He needed a horse. One with riding tack.

He counted the money that James had brought him. It was a reasonable amount. Certainly enough for bath water to be brought in and hauled away several times, and clothing to be washed, as well as some better food, and gratuities, for the rest of the month he was to have been held in the prison tower.

He wasn't sure if it was enough to buy a horse. Or, not a horse *and* tack. Jeremy understood a lot about trading and bargaining in theory, but he didn't really know how much a lot of things

actually cost. He did know that one could hire the use of a horse, but then there was the business of getting the horse back to where it belonged. Or however people managed that. He hadn't traveled outside the City enough to be sure of how such things were done. His family maintained its own horses. And grooms to care for them.

It would probably be safest to have his own horse. He did know how to take care of a horse, at least.

So. First, he would have to find someone who would sell him a horse.

Finally the City began to stir, so he made as much haste as he could toward the City gate which opened onto the road he would need to travel to reach the border. He bought a stuffed bread roll from a baker who was setting out his wares, and he purchased a document case of the sort that messengers used, for his toothbrush, comb, and spare underwear, and slung it over his shoulder.

Circumstances were working in Jeremy's favor. The clothing that James had brought him was not his second-best suit, which might have called attention to him by its fineness, but a set of plain, well-made everyday clothing. With the addition of the messenger case, he attracted little attention,

apart from those who took note of his good looks.


Circumstances continued to work in his favor as he reached the district built up around the City gate. There was a market setting up where a number of the outlying farmers and their families had come into the City as soon as the gate had been opened, and had were setting out booths and tables from which they would sell cheese, and sausages, and fresh produce to the servants of the local well-off households, as well as the wives and families of the various shopkeepers and laborers.

86 These people included a man with some livestock, which he had clearly been hoping to sell to the other farmers. He had a horse. It wasn't young, nor was it lively, but, still, it was a horse. It seemed to be healthy, and it didn't seem to be evil-tempered. The stockman claimed that; yes, it was a riding horse. There was no tack.

With a small amount of haggling, the horse turned out to not be as costly as Jeremy had feared (it was a fairly old horse and he probably paid a bit too much for it), so his next stop was to a livery stable, which, with a bit more haggling, sold him some old but usable tack.

The horse made no objection to being saddled





up, and by the time the palace guard brought his breakfast, Jeremy was out the gate and on his way.

Jeremy had certainly ridden better horses in his short life (his father's groom, would have probably acted very offended at being expected to include such a "broken down old nag" in his stable), but although the beast wasn't speedy, it was steady, and for a long journey, Jeremy suspected that steady might be better.

Now he only needed to worry about whether he was being pursued, and whether what was left of his money would hold out until he reached the border.

88

It would be very tempting to spin a fine tale of adventure concerning Jeremy's dashing ride to the border. But it wasn't dashing at all. After two days with no signs of pursuit, Jeremy's fears stopped constantly nipping at him, and the trip became more tiring and uncomfortable than anything else. After a couple of days, he grew used to being in the saddle for longer periods than he had ever needed to before, and he was careful about taking good care of the horse. Brushing it down, checking it for saddle galls, and tending to its feet, seeing that it got enough to eat.

He went on rather short rations himself, to make his money last as long as he could.

He soon found himself daydreaming of food.

To say nothing about getting another proper bath.

His money ran out a day before he reached the border. The only reasonably valuable thing he had which he could sell was the horse and tack. So he did. The money he raised did allow him to get a decent meal and spend that night at an inn, and in the morning, he managed to beg a ride in a wagon of goods for the rest of the way.

The King's officers made the trip faster, but Jeremy's 3-day head start saw him out of the country a day and a half before they arrived at the border town.

Jeremy, meanwhile, had continued on with the carter to the next town. So he was safe.

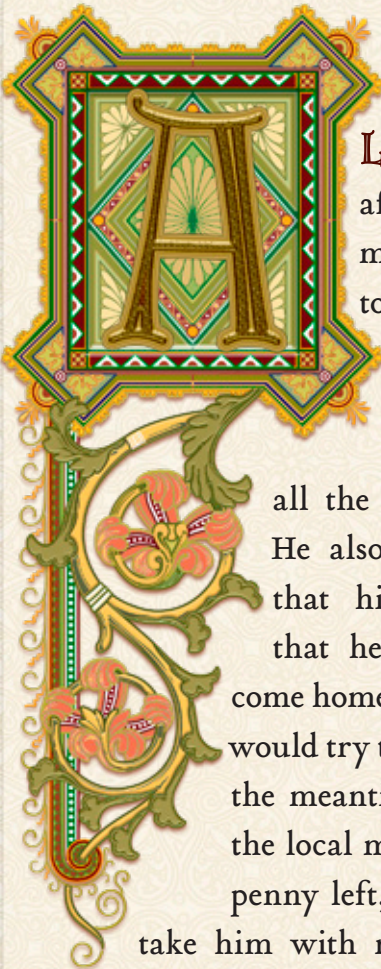
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Well, he was safe from the King's officers, at least. He wasn't necessarily safe from anything else. Still, nobody knew him there. Nobody there was looking for him. Nobody there had ever heard of his family. He was seventeen years old, and completely on his own.

He had nothing but the clothes on his back, a change of underwear, a toothbrush and comb, and a small amount of money, which by now he knew wasn't going to last him for long.

He needed to find a paying job.

JAMES LEARNS THE TRUTH



ALMOST A MONTH

after Jeremy's escape, a message found its way to the Jacobsons. Jeremy had written to tell them that he was really really sorry for

all the trouble he had caused. He also said that he realized that his running off meant that he could probably never come home, and that, therefore, he would try to make his own way. In the meantime, he had enlisted in the local militia, since he hadn't a penny left, and the militia would take him with no questions asked. He

had enlisted under a false name. He supposed that would do at least as well as anything else until he had a better idea of what he wanted to work toward, and of what was possible. If they could see their way clear to do so, he would appreciate it if they could send him some money since he owed for his equipment and had left a small debt at the last inn he had stayed at before enlisting. It would be some time before his pay could start making much of a dent in these debts, since it had to go for maintenance. Money could be sent directly to the inn if they wished, and he told them the name he had used there. The other debt was to a new friend, who said he could wait for repayment.

He included a bit more as well. Although he did not explain *how* he had managed his escape, he stated that he realized that it must have taken them by surprise. He went on to tell them how he had made his way to the border. All of these statements made it clear that he had had no outside help once beyond the palace walls.

Jacob discussed this message with his wife and sons and they agreed that the crown must be informed of it, if only to reduce the suspicion that they must still be under. The Jacobsons and the

rest of the common people had not been told that the manner of Jeremy's escape had already been discovered by the Crown's officers.

The next morning James took the letter to the Lord Gaoler's house. He wasn't in the least happy about this errand for he realized that if the Crown really wanted Jeremy back in prison, it would now have the information of where to find him. He hated having to betray his brother's whereabouts, but to fail to do so would be another serious offense. Of which there had already been far too many.

92 He found the household in a state of some turmoil which surprised him, but the Lord Gaoler agreed to speak with him in his study. He read the letter over and gloomily thanked James for bringing it so promptly. He said that dealing with it would be another person's responsibility and that he would forward it to the proper channels.

James said that he regretted that the letter could shed no light on the manner of the actual escape.

The Lord Gaoler had stared at him from under his brows and told him grimly that he need not concern himself with that, and rang for a servant to show James out. James followed the servant, feeling rather mystified.

As he walked along the terrace which stretched along the front of the house, a voice called softly; "Oh, stop! Please, Mr. Jacobson! Please!"

He stopped short and looked to the house, where the voice had seemed to come from. There was a movement behind one of the windows. He crossed the terrace and saw that the window looked out from a small sitting room. In the room was a pretty little girl with a sad face and pleading, big blue eyes.

"Oh please, sir, have you heard anything about Jeremy?" She begged him. James was confused and very curious.

"Why yes," He told her, feeling somewhat confused, "We got a letter from him yesterday."

"Is he all right? Has anything happened to him?"

93 "No, he made his way out of the country altogether. He has joined the militia." The girl gave a gasp.

"The militia!" The big blue eyes filled with tears. "Then he will be killed, and it was all for nothing." She mourned. James was more confused than ever.

"Excuse me," He said, "I'm afraid I don't understand."

"It was I." Flora told him sadly, for, of course, this was she.

"I beg your pardon?" James asked, still confused.

“I helped him escape.” She said, the tears brimming over.

“Oh dear.” Said James, appalled.

Flora gave a sob. “Papa whipped me, and I can’t ever go to court now, and Papa has to go to the country and my brother Thomas has to be Lord Gaoler instead and it was all for nothing.” She was weeping quite freely by now. James was quite alarmed.

“Oh see here, miss, stop, please! Really, Jeremy is quite all right. They aren’t at war with anyone. The militia will mostly just be guarding things, I think. Don’t cry, please, or at least not over him. He’s in no danger. Look, I’m terribly sorry for everything.” James babbled, thoroughly dismayed.

From what James could make out from between her sobs, he was quite horrified to realize that this child’s world had been brought down about her ears for the sake of his graceless brother... the family banished from court and the child whipped! If Jeremy had been to hand James would have cheerfully whipped *him!* “Please,” He begged helplessly, “Isn’t there anything at all that I can do?”

Flora gradually brought her sobs under control. “Oh please, if you hear anything more from him, will you tell me?”

“Well, of course I will, if I can.” He said uncertainly, “But if you are away in the country I don’t see how...”

“Oh, I won’t be in the country” She explained, “Mama arranged for me to go to a school until I’m grown. It’s the one at the cathedral. She was there when she was a girl. She says it’s all right,” She added doubtfully. “We aren’t locked up or anything. Mama thinks it would be best if I’m not at home just now. Anyone can visit the gardens there on Sundays,” She assured him, when he looked skeptical.

“I promise that I’ll come and tell you any news that we get.” He agreed, and paused. “It may be quite some time before we hear anything further though.” He warned her.

Flora nodded. “I’ll be there a long time. Maybe I’ll become a nun.” She mused, then shook her head. “No, they wouldn’t either.” She said to herself, frowning unhappily.

“Wouldn’t either what?” James asked.

She stared at him silently for a moment before answering. “Mama told me that father used my dowry to pay the fines. So I haven’t got one anymore. No one will have me without one.”

Both James and Flora were silent for a moment.

“Excuse me,” Flora said, very dignified, “I have to pack things.” She turned to leave.

“Wait, miss,” James called, “You haven’t told me your name.”

She turned back to him.

“It’s Flora.” She told him, “You’re James, aren’t you?”

“Yes, how did you know?”

“I saw you once before. Jeremy told to me about you.” She said, and left the room, leaving James standing at the window.




AFTERWARDS AND MORE

BY THE TIME JAMES reached home he was too angry to trust himself to speak to his father or mother. Therefore, it was Joseph who had to listen to the worst of his fury, and Joseph who relayed the message to Jacob.

James — once his anger was somewhat under control — wrote such a letter to Jeremy as that young man had never before seen the like — and hoped never to again.

Jacob sent enough money to cover the debts which Jeremy had incurred but



no more. He also sent a message describing the damage which had been done to the family business, but stated that the family, at least, was no longer under suspicion.

Jeremy's mother sent her love and a rather tear spotted letter containing predictable messages which have no bearing here.

Joseph sent no messages. He applied himself to learning more of the family business, about which he already knew a great deal, for Jacob had been training him in it before it was decided that he should go to University. Joseph had come to a decision. After this scandal of Jeremy's making, there wasn't much likelihood of *his* ever getting a government post, so he might as well stay home and make himself useful.

The Crown, this time under the Princess's guidance, admitted that the sentence from which Jeremy had escaped was too minor a matter to be worth the sort of international negotiating which would be needed to bring him back. They dropped the subject entirely and went on to more important business.


The Lord Gaoler and his wife removed to their country estates, and if the truth is to be told, his

Lady regretted the move far more than he did. Indeed, he settled quite comfortably into the life of a country nobleman, and, except for the shame of his dismissal, soon had hardly any regrets at all.

His elder son, who was twice Flora's age, stepped into the office of Lord Gaoler and was perfectly competent in it. The new Lord Gaoler's younger brother traveled freely between court and country, as he always had.

Flora, of course, went to school. Her mother was right. It wasn't so bad, but she did burst into tears during the classes in court etiquette more than once. Gradually, Flora made friends there. Most of her friends were the daughters of country nobles, gentlemen, and wealthy tradesmen. There weren't many other daughters of court nobles at the school at that particular time, but there were a handful. They often were deliberately unkind. Flora bore this as patiently as she could and the teachers put a stop to it whenever they noticed.

After a couple of months, Professor Sharpe wrote to Joseph, wishing to know when he intended to return to school and continue his studies. After receiving Joseph's discouraging reply, the professor traveled down to the City and arrived on the



Jacobson doorstep, intending to argue the matter in the street if necessary. He was very favorably impressed with the Jacobsons (who were certainly impressed with him). He finally convinced Joseph that there was nothing whatsoever standing between him and an academic career, scandal or no scandal, and swept him off to the university again, where Joseph soon settled back down and was as comfortable as it was possible for him to be.

It wasn't until a Sunday afternoon nearly six months afterward that James went, feeling rather out of place, to the cathedral gardens to seek Flora out.

100 "You've heard from Jeremy!" She cried when she saw him. "Is he all right? Is he still in the militia?" She asked anxiously.

"No," James told her, "Jeremy has decided to sign on as a crewman on a trading ship. He seems to have made himself very popular among his fellow militiamen while he was with them. Of course, Jeremy could be depended upon for that! Even his officers liked him. But I gather that he didn't care for the life, and saw little chance of advancement from the ranks. At least trading is something he knows something about. He's gone back to using his own name, too."

"Jeremy knows a lot about trading! He told me about his father's — your father's — ships, and where they go and what they bring from foreign lands and *everything!* All about how you have to be careful about what you pay for things because the prices change so, and sometimes when you get them home things have become so common you can't sell them."

101 "Did he really?" James said, surprised. They spoke for some time about what Jeremy had and had not known about trading. James admitted that he hadn't realized that Jeremy had paid so much attention to the business, and expanded upon the details which Jeremy had missed. Flora was very interested indeed, and they spent a very pleasant afternoon together, among Flora's friends, several of whom were merchants' daughters.

Jeremy's second letter had again asked for money, since it would be necessary for him to buy himself out of his contract with the militia. He had also delicately touched upon his need for something to cover traveling expenses to the port. Although, he claimed that he had managed to stay out of debt, it seemed his pay never happened to stretch very far.

James saw no reason to pass this information on to Flora. To his father, he had pointed out that since Jeremy had never had to practice economy, it was somewhat of a miracle that he had managed to survive for six months on a militiaman's pay without landing in debt in the first place. Jacob had grumbled a little, admitted that he had expected a good deal worse, and sent a generous sum with messages from the family.

"Mr. Jacobson," Flora had finally said, worriedly, "I don't like to think of Jeremy all alone on a ship in the middle of the ocean."

102 "He would hardly be alone. There are a great many crewmen on a ship. And a great many ships on the ocean, Flora, very few of them are lost."

"Really and truly?"

"Really and truly. My name is James, you know."

"Yes."

"I'd rather you used it. 'Mr. Jacobson' just sounds stuffy."

"All right." She said doubtfully.

"It can't be that hard," He said grinning, "After all, I can't be older than your own brothers."

"How old are you?"

"Twenty."

"Is that all? My brothers are older than that. Both of them." Said she, surprised.

"Do I seem so very old?"

"No... just older than Jeremy."

"I will be on a ship too, in a few weeks."

"You will?"

"Yes indeed. My father is sending me out with one of his captains to learn about trading abroad first hand."

"Are you sorry?"

"No. I've been looking forward to it."

"How long will you be gone?"

103 "About six months. Longer, perhaps, if we get bad weather."


Flora looked at him wistfully. "Would you tell me about it?"

"When I get back." He promised. Flora gave him a delighted smile.

"Perhaps there will be another message from Jeremy by then!" She said hopefully.

"Perhaps." He told her.

The trading venture proved to be successful and the weather favorable. It was just over five months later when he appeared in the cathedral gardens on another Sunday afternoon. There had been no



word from Jeremy during this time, but there was no reason to think that any ill had befallen him. Flora was fascinated by James's reports of foreign lands, and they passed another pleasant afternoon discussing trade, the Jacobsons' ships, the type of ship Jeremy might be on, what his life was probably like, sailing in general, what James would be doing next, and whether Flora was happy at school.

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Three months later James called again, with not one but three pieces of news. Word had come from Jeremy who, to no one's real surprise, had made such a good impression upon the ship's captain that the captain had pointed him out to his Master, who was one of the most influential merchants in all of that country's capital city. This merchant, learning of Jeremy's talents and background, and, knowing something of the Jacobsons — from having done business with them more than once — had taken Jeremy on as a general clerk and trainee in his business.

James's second bit of news concerned himself. This was the news that now that he was over twenty-one, his father had taken him into partnership. Flora was delighted with both pieces of news and they could easily have spoken of them

alone for the rest of the afternoon. However, it was the third piece of news which commanded both of their attentions, and Flora's astonishment was as great as the Jacobsons', for, contrary to everyone's expectations, Joseph was going to court!

The Princess, who was now approaching twenty-one years of age herself, had, since Jeremy's uproars, shown herself a capable and commanding presence of no mean ability. Her voice carried progressively more weight in her father's Councils and a few of his older Councilors and Ministers, who would very much have preferred to be able to regard her as a mere child were far from happy with this new manner of doing things.

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After repeated minor-level obstructionism from these officials she requested, and received, royal permission from her father to form her own staff of advisors to assist her in preparing her own proposals for governmental policy.

This council, the Petty Council, as it became known, consisted of various nobles and other authorities who had been personally selected by the Princess herself. These officials, in turn, were to select their own personal staffs of secretaries and clerks. It surprised no one at all that the Prin-

cess should chose as one of these advisors, her old tutor, Professor Sharpe.

“Your Highness,” The professor said, upon his acceptance of the post, “There is a young man whom I would very much like to choose as my chief secretary about whom I am afraid there may be some difficulty.”

“Surely you are not proposing a young man of revolutionary tendencies.” The Princess mocked, for she and the professor were, of course, on the easiest of terms. He smiled.

“By no means. But his background may be, to say the least, awkward.”

“We shall have his family thoroughly investigated.” She told him with a tolerant smile, “That ought to satisfy the Council, even if not the gossips.”

“I’m afraid that that particular detail has been taken care of already.” He said with a rueful grin. “The lad’s name is Jacobson.”

The Princess stared in surprised recognition, then gave a clear peal of laughter.

“Brother-Joseph-who-should-have-come-himself!” She cried merrily, “But didn’t seem to *want* to!” She added in an excellent mimicry of Jeremy’s aggrieved bewilderment.

“The very same.” Professor Sharpe agreed. “You do understand the difficulty.”

The Princess smiled and thought for a moment.

“Yes. Do bring him,” She said at last, “I should like to meet this paragon.”

“Paragon indeed.” The professor told her proudly, “If I may say so, young Jacobson is one of the two most promising scholars it has ever been my privilege to teach.”

The Princess returned his look, smiling but serious.

“How very interesting.” She said, “We can’t very well do without him, then, can we?” Then she gave another laugh. “Only, I beg of you, do, for all our sakes, see to it that he is able to perform a proper court bow!”



HOW THEY ALL FARED

108



SO JOSEPH WENT off to court, stepping immediately into the post to which he had always aspired; that of chief Secretary to a Royal Councillor. That this Councillor should be his old professor and friend was a further cause for rejoicing.

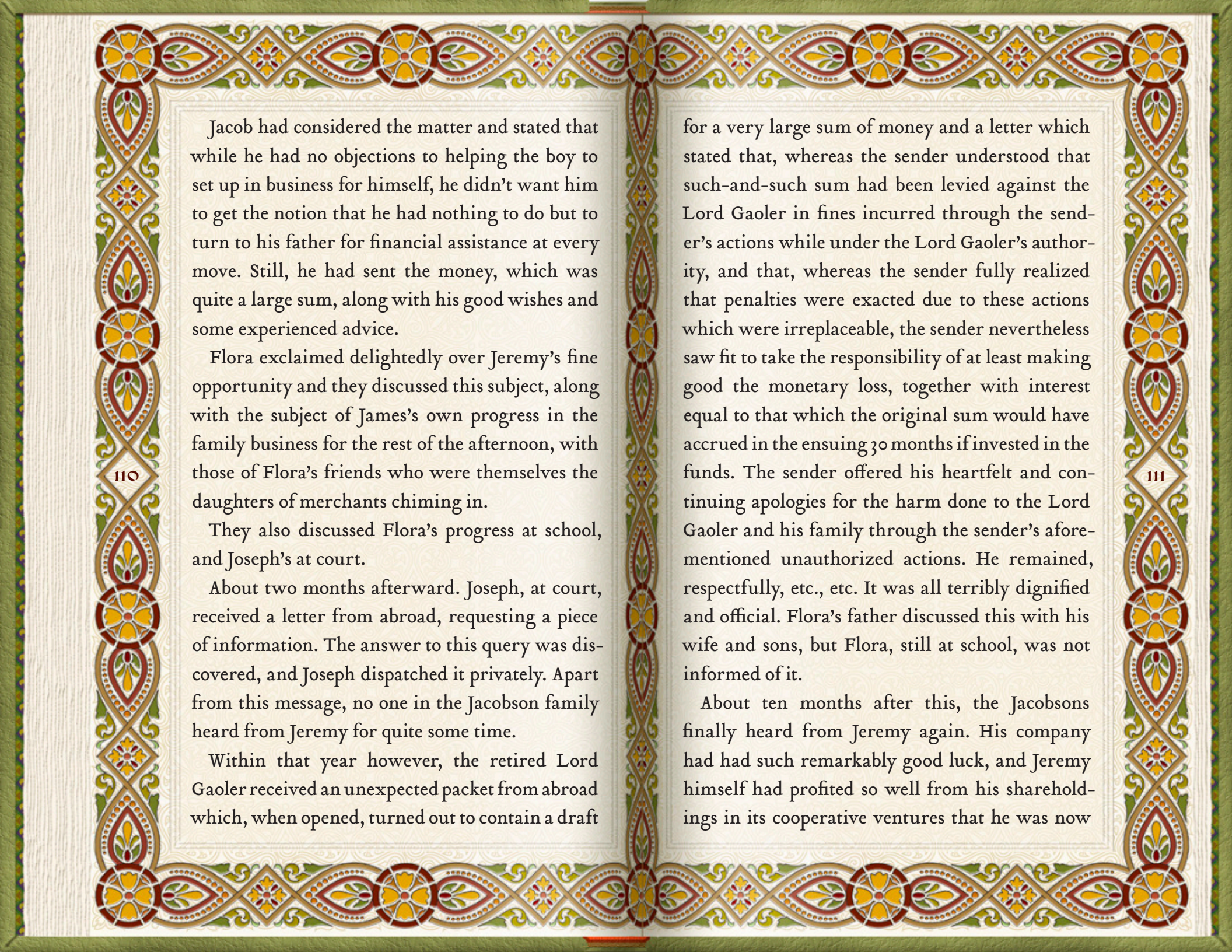
To be sure, many of the courtiers were determined to be hostile toward him at the outset for his family's sake. And several managed to sustain this attitude over quite a long period of time, as well, but Joseph's modest demeanor and dis-

tinguished good looks made a favorable impression upon nearly all of the others, even many of his "enemies", and his ability and unquestionable brilliance (and the clear favor of his sponsor) soon silenced those who would have objected to his presence by reason of his birth, or out of remembrance of his brother's scandals.

A few months after Joseph took up his post, a large order was placed with the Jacobson firm (now known as Jacobson & Jacobson) by the Crown's agents. Business improved as soon as the news of this order made the rounds among the trading community, and was soon as good as it had ever been.

Four months after James had last visited Flora in the cathedral gardens, he again sought her out with news of Jeremy. It turned out that Jeremy's Master had commissioned a ship, which, now due to some temporary financial reverses, he was unable to pay for. Therefore, if Jeremy could prevail upon his father to loan him the money necessary to buy into the project, Jeremy was proposing to enter into a partnership with a group of other men who were proposing to buy the ship, intending to finance her ventures themselves.

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Jacob had considered the matter and stated that while he had no objections to helping the boy to set up in business for himself, he didn't want him to get the notion that he had nothing to do but to turn to his father for financial assistance at every move. Still, he had sent the money, which was quite a large sum, along with his good wishes and some experienced advice.

Flora exclaimed delightedly over Jeremy's fine opportunity and they discussed this subject, along with the subject of James's own progress in the family business for the rest of the afternoon, with those of Flora's friends who were themselves the daughters of merchants chiming in.

They also discussed Flora's progress at school, and Joseph's at court.

About two months afterward. Joseph, at court, received a letter from abroad, requesting a piece of information. The answer to this query was discovered, and Joseph dispatched it privately. Apart from this message, no one in the Jacobson family heard from Jeremy for quite some time.

Within that year however, the retired Lord Gaoler received an unexpected packet from abroad which, when opened, turned out to contain a draft

for a very large sum of money and a letter which stated that, whereas the sender understood that such-and-such sum had been levied against the Lord Gaoler in fines incurred through the sender's actions while under the Lord Gaoler's authority, and that, whereas the sender fully realized that penalties were exacted due to these actions which were irreplaceable, the sender nevertheless saw fit to take the responsibility of at least making good the monetary loss, together with interest equal to that which the original sum would have accrued in the ensuing 30 months if invested in the funds. The sender offered his heartfelt and continuing apologies for the harm done to the Lord Gaoler and his family through the sender's aforementioned unauthorized actions. He remained, respectfully, etc., etc. It was all terribly dignified and official. Flora's father discussed this with his wife and sons, but Flora, still at school, was not informed of it.

About ten months after this, the Jacobsons finally heard from Jeremy again. His company had had such remarkably good luck, and Jeremy himself had profited so well from his shareholdings in its cooperative ventures that he was now

able, with the sale of these holdings, to purchase his own small, second-hand ship and go into business completely on his own.

For once, he didn't ask for money. But he did invite advice. Since James had, by now, fallen into the habit of visiting with Flora every few weeks or so, he carried the news to her at once. Flora was very pleased with the news of Jeremy's success and they spoke of that for a while, and then they spoke rather longer of James's present business ventures, Joseph's doings at court, and Flora's lessons and school friends who had finished school and married.

112

Throughout this period, the Princess had maintained a quiet interest in Joseph Jacobson's capabilities and (having never personally dealt with people from the merchant class) was rather surprised to discover that, probably due to his family's background in foreign trading, his outlook was far more international in scope than that of the rather more parochially-minded nobles. This pleased her very much, and, having, as we have seen, a finely developed instinct for turning circumstances to her own advantage, appointed him her advisor on matters of trade. From the time of this appointment — which was every bit as con-

troversial as you might imagine — Joseph's contribution to and influence upon royal policy became more direct and ever more highly valued.

Joseph himself felt quite dizzy with shock at first. That he, Joseph Jacobson, commoner, barely twenty-five years old, and by birth not even a gentleman, should now sit on a Royal Council (even if it was the Petty Council) and help to decide policy quite took his breath away! He became accustomed in time, but could never quite rid himself of the feeling that he was dreaming and that it would soon all come crashing down.

The firm of Jacobson & Jacobson could not help but profit from this association.

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About a year after the news of Jeremy's first very own ship, there came a lengthy letter and a packet of money paying off the earlier loan from his father (together with interest) and the information that his business had shown such considerable success over the year that his old Master had taken even greater interest in him, and, having no sons of his own, had proposed taking him into partnership. (Perhaps in order to avoid future competition, Jeremy had shrewdly added.)

Which, as Jeremy pointed out, he would be a

fool to refuse, since however fortunate he might be by his own efforts, it was improbable that he, in one lifetime, would be able to build his own little business up into a firm of as great a stature as that which his senior partner already enjoyed, and with the wider base which the partnership would make available to him, he could then concentrate his energies into consolidation and expansion. In connection with which, he had a proposition to make which his father might be interested and which he believed might well be to their mutual advantage.

Henceforth, Jacobson & Jacobson, and Jeremy and his senior partner's firms had a great many and highly profitable dealings together.

When Flora was told of this, at James's next weekly visit, she clapped her hands and said "How splendid!" and asked James how this would affect the family firm and how his own latest venture abroad had profited.

Some eight months later, James was again bringing Flora news of Jeremy's doings, and this time he was hesitant to do so, for he feared she might perhaps be hurt. Flora's bright smile of welcome faded when she saw his serious expression and she went to him.

"James, what is it? Something has happened."

He took her hand and led her away from the others to one of the cloister passages. Flora seated herself on the low wall and turned to him with concern. James took a deep breath and looked anywhere but directly at her.

"Flora, Jeremy has just written to us." He paused, "Concerning his recent... marriage."

He turned to her reluctantly, as though he was afraid of what he might see. Flora first looked blank, then mildly surprised, and finally, rather amused.

"Jeremy is married?" She said in some wonder. "How odd to think of Jeremy as a married man. I suppose I've always gone on thinking of him as just a young boy." She laughed.

James let go the breath he found he was holding, in some wonder himself. She had laughed!

"Whom did he marry?" She asked him. "What does he say of her?"

"He has married his partner's only daughter." Was James's rather dazed reply, "I gather that she is a pleasant, handsome, lively girl, and that she is quite a belle in their city. Her name is — or rather, it was — Margaret Porter, and Jeremy sounds very attached to her." He added hesitantly.

Flora listened, but it was plain that she was not attending to the message, but to the messenger.

“James,” She said softly, “Why does it pain you to tell me this? This is happy news, but you don’t seem to be taking any enjoyment in telling me of it.”

James fell silent. After a moment he said, quietly, “I have always understood that you cared very much for Jeremy.” He said at last.

“And so I did.” Flora told him. “But only think, James, that was nearly five years ago. And even then, once I had helped him to escape, I knew that I would never see him again.”

“Indeed,” she continued, “Although I should hope that my family will never learn of this, and despite all of the trouble that followed, I have never actually regretted letting Jeremy go. He was truly in fear for his life, and I could not, at least not then, bear to know that such a thing could be. That Jeremy has made such a success of himself is a delight to me, and truly, I bear him the best of my good will,. But my enjoyment in hearing of Jeremy’s progress has, for some time now, not been only for his sake.”

“For whose sake then, Flora?” James asked her with hope.



Flora smiled mischievously. Flora, at eighteen, was not such a striking beauty as the Princess had been at such an age, but she had grown into a very pretty girl indeed.

“Silly man,” She said, “You know the answer to that.” She stood and looked up at him, and held out her hands. “My parents have sent for me to return home.” She said, “May I be allowed to hope that you will call on us?”

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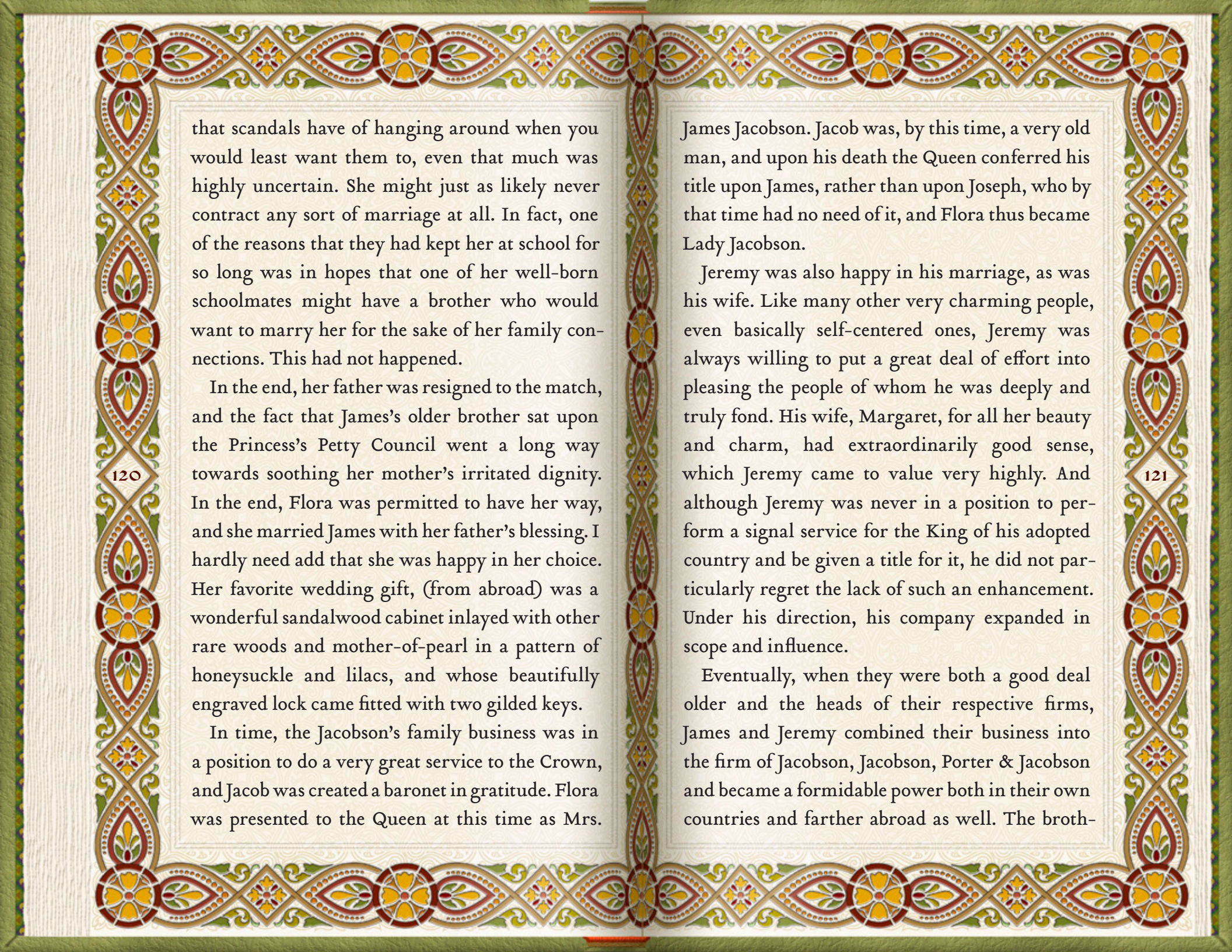
CHAPTER 13:

CONCLUSION

F COURSE JAMES and Flora were married. Flora's parents were of two minds about this. On the one hand, as nobles, they couldn't be best pleased that their only daughter chose to marry a merchant, particularly not when the merchant in question was one of the Jacobsons.

On the other hand, although they could now afford to give her a dowry, they could never present her at court themselves, and the memory of her disgrace would have made the likelihood of her contracting anything more than a merely respectable match negligible. And, given the way

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that scandals have of hanging around when you would least want them to, even that much was highly uncertain. She might just as likely never contract any sort of marriage at all. In fact, one of the reasons that they had kept her at school for so long was in hopes that one of her well-born schoolmates might have a brother who would want to marry her for the sake of her family connections. This had not happened.

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In the end, her father was resigned to the match, and the fact that James's older brother sat upon the Princess's Petty Council went a long way towards soothing her mother's irritated dignity. In the end, Flora was permitted to have her way, and she married James with her father's blessing. I hardly need add that she was happy in her choice. Her favorite wedding gift, (from abroad) was a wonderful sandalwood cabinet inlaid with other rare woods and mother-of-pearl in a pattern of honeysuckle and lilacs, and whose beautifully engraved lock came fitted with two gilded keys.

In time, the Jacobson's family business was in a position to do a very great service to the Crown, and Jacob was created a baronet in gratitude. Flora was presented to the Queen at this time as Mrs.

James Jacobson. Jacob was, by this time, a very old man, and upon his death the Queen conferred his title upon James, rather than upon Joseph, who by that time had no need of it, and Flora thus became Lady Jacobson.

Jeremy was also happy in his marriage, as was his wife. Like many other very charming people, even basically self-centered ones, Jeremy was always willing to put a great deal of effort into pleasing the people of whom he was deeply and truly fond. His wife, Margaret, for all her beauty and charm, had extraordinarily good sense, which Jeremy came to value very highly. And although Jeremy was never in a position to perform a signal service for the King of his adopted country and be given a title for it, he did not particularly regret the lack of such an enhancement. Under his direction, his company expanded in scope and influence.

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Eventually, when they were both a good deal older and the heads of their respective firms, James and Jeremy combined their business into the firm of Jacobson, Jacobson, Porter & Jacobson and became a formidable power both in their own countries and farther abroad as well. The broth-

ers were referred to behind their backs as “The Merchant Princes.”

The Princess, as a matter of course, eventually became Queen. And immediately stopped interviewing prospective suitors. She was deeply concerned with the problem of a suitable heir, however, for, to her disappointment, although hardly to her surprise, her cousin Daniel did *not* improve as he grew older. Fortunately, he did make an excellent marriage and when, to the Queen’s great regret, his wife died, leaving him with an infant son, she proposed that this small cousin should be educated under her guidance. Daniel was far too self-indulgent to raise any objections to this, and when he was thrown from a horse and broke his neck two years later, she privately heaved a sigh of relief.

Joseph remained a Royal Advisor after the dissolving of the Petty Council when the Princess became Queen, serving her in turn as Minister of Trade, Chancellor of the Exchequer and, finally, as Chief Minister, and her right hand. Much of the education of Daniel’s small son was undertaken under Joseph’s direction, and much of it was in company with Joseph’s two eldest nephews, James and Flora’s sons. Joseph himself was created first

a viscount, and, later, an earl in recognition of his tireless service and unswerving loyalty, both public and personal, to the Crown. (And, consequently, he had no need for his father’s little baronetcy.) The Queen, who went down in history as one of the greatest rulers of her dynasty, valued his opinion above that of all the rest of her court and would not willingly have been without his counsel on any matter of policy. Or his friendship, for that matter. Upon any consideration.

It never occurred to either of them over the years that of all the hundreds of questions with which the Princess had dismissed her unwanted suitors, she had discussed every one of them with Joseph at least twice over and never failed to be satisfied with his replies.

Joseph never married. Nor did his Queen.

In time, Joseph’s earldom went to his eldest nephew. And, eventually, it was a young King’s decision again to confirm a baronetcy upon a second son.

«THE END»

AFTERWORD:

& AN EMBARRASSINGLY AMORAL MORAL

124

ALTHOUGH IT IS POSSIBLE to draw a satisfactorily conventional moral from this history (namely, that there is no major action of ours which will not have profound and unplanned effects upon other peoples' welfare, and that nothing is ever as simple as it seems) it is very hard to make a more specific denunciation of Jeremy's foolishness or to point to any piece of lasting and severe damage that took place as a direct result of it.

Which is rather remarkable, to tell the truth. But then, as was stated at the outset, everything in this story is just a bit too good to be true. Even confined to teapots, tempests do tend to generate a lot of ripples.

To be sure, the Lord Gaoler and his wife were forced into an undeserved early retirement for their failure to anticipate and guard against Flo-

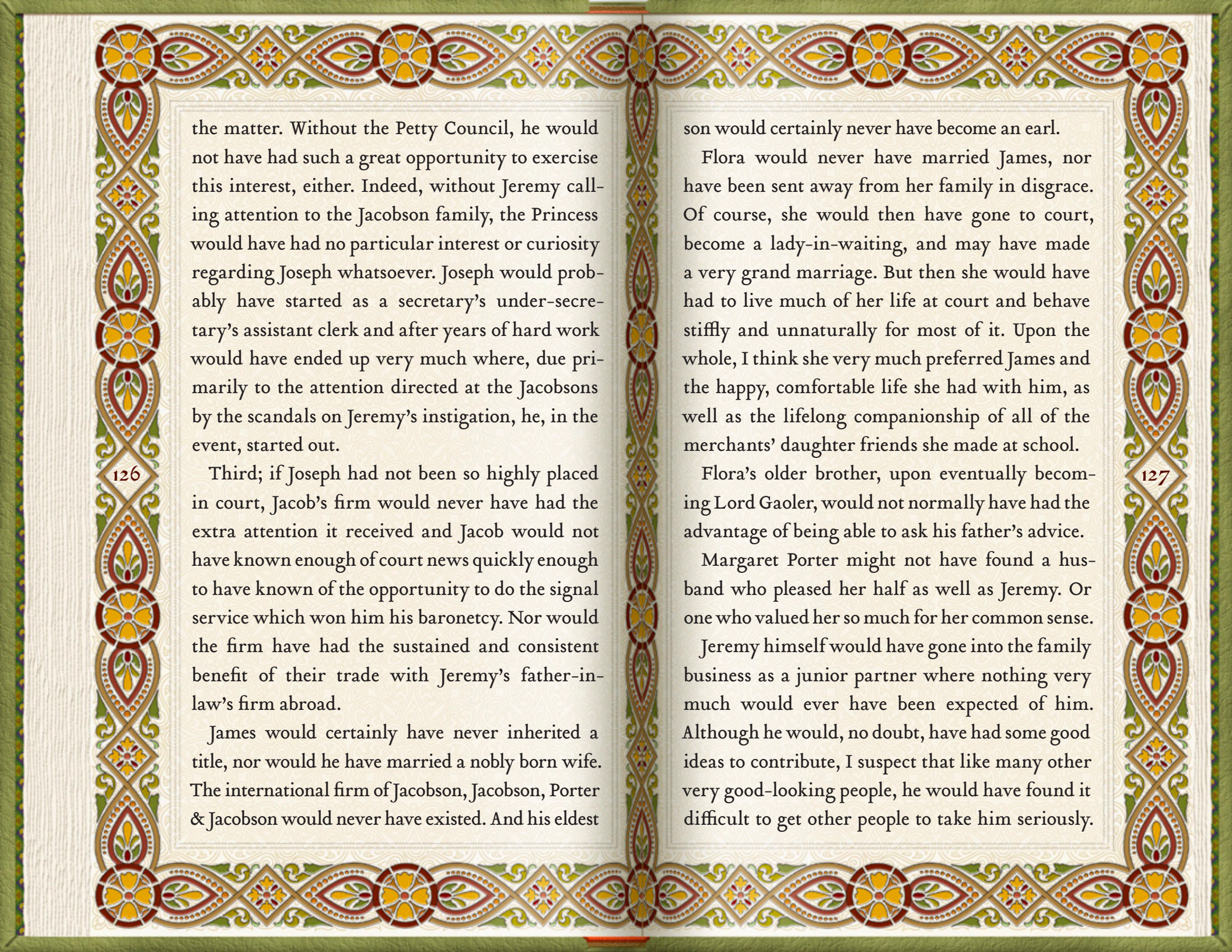
ra's act of high treason — which one should hope they could hardly have been expected to foresee! But as "severe damage" is reckoned, it does not really rate all *that* particularly high.

And, so far as one regards the results upon the rest of the persons whom Jeremy's actions affected:

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First; without the resulting uproar, the Princess would probably not have been able to grasp the opportunity to alter the interview process to her own advantage. She would, therefore, have had a far more difficult time dismissing her suitors, and might not have succeeded with all of them. She also might have had to wait several years before another opportunity rose to take the lead over her father's council and make them see her as a person to be reckoned with. The Petty Council, from which she gained a lot of valuable experience, might never have been formed, and she may have had a more difficult time establishing her authority when she became Queen.

Second; although Professor Sharpe would still have eventually set Joseph off on the road to a government post, without the little spur of his (unnecessary) guilty feelings, he would not have taken so active or so determined an interest in



the matter. Without the Petty Council, he would not have had such a great opportunity to exercise this interest, either. Indeed, without Jeremy calling attention to the Jacobson family, the Princess would have had no particular interest or curiosity regarding Joseph whatsoever. Joseph would probably have started as a secretary's under-secretary's assistant clerk and after years of hard work would have ended up very much where, due primarily to the attention directed at the Jacobsons by the scandals on Jeremy's instigation, he, in the event, started out.

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Third; if Joseph had not been so highly placed in court, Jacob's firm would never have had the extra attention it received and Jacob would not have known enough of court news quickly enough to have known of the opportunity to do the signal service which won him his baronetcy. Nor would the firm have had the sustained and consistent benefit of their trade with Jeremy's father-in-law's firm abroad.

James would certainly have never inherited a title, nor would he have married a nobly born wife. The international firm of Jacobson, Jacobson, Porter & Jacobson would never have existed. And his eldest

son would certainly never have become an earl.

Flora would never have married James, nor have been sent away from her family in disgrace. Of course, she would then have gone to court, become a lady-in-waiting, and may have made a very grand marriage. But then she would have had to live much of her life at court and behave stiffly and unnaturally for most of it. Upon the whole, I think she very much preferred James and the happy, comfortable life she had with him, as well as the lifelong companionship of all of the merchants' daughter friends she made at school.

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Flora's older brother, upon eventually becoming Lord Gaoler, would not normally have had the advantage of being able to ask his father's advice.

Margaret Porter might not have found a husband who pleased her half as well as Jeremy. Or one who valued her so much for her common sense.

Jeremy himself would have gone into the family business as a junior partner where nothing very much would ever have been expected of him. Although he would, no doubt, have had some good ideas to contribute, I suspect that like many other very good-looking people, he would have found it difficult to get other people to take him seriously.

His natural laziness would also have undermined his potential strengths, and without the challenge of having to make his own way, from the ground up, starting with nothing but charm, intelligence, resourcefulness, the proper background, unbelievably good luck, and every natural advantage a boy could ask for, he would never have realized his own capabilities.

He might very well still have married an heir-ess, but she would not have been Margaret Porter.

So, perhaps, in the end the Princess was right to view Jeremy's foolishness merely as a rather bad joke which happened to misfire. But, if so, it's increasingly difficult for me to say for certain just who that joke was on.

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AS PROMISED:

A GLOSSARY

THIS LIST OF WORDS IS PROBABLY INCOMPLETE, BUT IT IS A START. AFTER ALL, I DO NOT KNOW HOW OLD ANY OF THE READERS OF THIS TALE ARE, OR HOW FAMILIAR THEY ARE WITH ANY OF THE WORDS IN THE STORY.

So. If a definition says "as used here" that means that there are other definitions which the word might be used as, as well as the one in this story.

To begin:

- AFOREMENTIONED:** has been mentioned before
AGGRIEVED: feeling one has been treated unfairly
ANXIOUSLY: worried and uneasy
APPALLED: dismayed or horrified
APPRENTICES: young persons being trained in a craft
ASSOCIATES: people that you work or spend time with
AUBURN: dark red hair
BARONETCY: an hereditary knighthood
BEFALLEN: something bad happened to this person
BELLE: a very popular girl
BREACH: as it was used here, a gap
CARAVAN: a group of wagons traveling together for safety
CATHEDRAL: an important church where a bishop is in charge
CULPRIT: a person who is responsible for a misdeed

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CHANNELS: as used in this case, to tell the right people to pass the information on to the people who need to hear it

CIRCUMSTANCES: the situation as one finds it

COMMISSIONED: had arranged for something to be built to order

COMPETENT: able to do something that is needed without making a mess of it

CONSOLIDATION: to combine, or gather together more than one separate thing

DASHING: exciting and adventurous

DAZED: stunned or confused

DAZZLED: impressed to the point of being dazed

DEBACLE: An action or event which has been completely botched. A total failure

DEFIANCE: refusal to obey or behave

DEMEANOR: behaviour

DENUNCIATION: to speak out against something

DEPORTMENT: manners

DISCOURAGING: to lose confidence or enthusiasm, to argue against something

DISPATCHED: sent

DISUADE: the opposite of persuade

DOWERY: land, money, or other valuable assets which a woman's family sends with her to the family into which she marries

EARL: a nobleman of high degree

ERRAND: a task requiring a short journey to deliver or collect something

ESTATE: as used here, the land belonging to an

important family

ETIQUETTE: formal rules of manners

EXACTING: very particular, demanding (severely)

EXCHEQUER: a royal, or national treasury

EXPOSTULATED: expresses strong disapproval or disagreement

FOREIGN: from a different county

FRIVOLOUS: without serious purpose of value

GAOLER: this is the same thing as jailer. It's just spelled differently. A person in charge of a prison

GILDED: decorated with gold

GRATUITIES: tips. Monetary gifts given to people who do one a favor.

HAGGLING: bargaining

HEREDITARY: something that one inherits

HONEYSUCKLE: a vine with flowers that produce a sweet nectar. Also called woodbine.

IMPERTINENCE: rudeness

IMPRISONMENT: sent to prison

INFLUENTIAL: able to influence something or someone

INGENIOUSLY: clever or original. Well, Jeremy no doubt *thought* he was being clever and original.

INORDINATELY: excessively

INTERNATIONAL: dealing with, or composed of partners from more than one nation

JURISPRUDENCE: the theory or philosophy of law

LEVIED: as used, demanded or imposed as a fine

LIVERY: as used, a stable where people's horses are kept, or rented out

LOUTISH: ill-mannered

MERCHANDISE: goods to be sold
 MIMICRY: imitation
 MISCHIEVOUSLY: willing to be troublesome in a playful way
 MOCKED: made fun of
 MOURNED: regretted the loss of
 MYSTIFIED: bewildered
 NEGLIGIBLE: of no importance
 NOTARIZED: to have a document legally signed and witnessed by a notary (a person trained in verifying legal documents)
 OBSTRUCTIONISM: to deliberately hinder progress
 OUTLYING: at a distance from the center
 PARAGON: someone with a lot of good qualities
 PAROCHIALITY: showing only a narrow range of interests
 PENCE: pennies
 PETTY: as used, of secondary importance
 PORTAL: an entryway or door
 POOR-SPIRITED: cowardly
 PRESUMPTUOUS: over-confident and self-important
 PROFOUND: very great or intense
 PSALTRY: a musical instrument with strings, rather like a dulcimer
 RATIONS: a fixed amount of a particular commodity. In this case, food.
 RESIGNED: has accepted something unpleasant that one cannot do anything about
 RESOLVED: as used, has determined to do something

RICKETY: poorly made and likely to collapse
 RUINED: damaged beyond repair
 SANDALWOOD: a type of wood which has a distinct and very pleasant smell that lasts for years
 SCALP: the skin of one's head, where the hair grows
 SCANDALIZED: shocked and horrified by something improper
 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: an officer appointed to keep order at meetings
 SKEPTICAL: unconvinced
 SPITEFUL: deliberately unkind
 TACK (specifically riding tack): equipment needed in order to ride a horse (saddle, bridle, etc.)
 TESTIMONY: a formal written or spoken statement, especially when given in a court of law
 TERRACE: a level paved area next to a building, like a patio or veranda
 TURMOIL: uproar and disorder
 TYRANT: a cruel and oppressive ruler
 URCHINS: unsupervised children, usually poor ones
 VENGEANCE: revenge
 VINDICTIVE: showing a strong or unreasoning desire for revenge
 VIRGINALS: a musical instrument with strings, very much like an early form of piano
 VISCOUNT: a nobleman of reasonably high degree. Not so high as an Earl
 WHATSOEVER: at all
 WHEREABOUTS: a place where someone or something is to be found

COLOPHON

WHEREAS: a term used in legal statements meaning to take something into consideration
WRONGHEADED: showing bad judgement



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The layout and formatting of this document was done in Adobe InDesign. Interior decorations and the Red Hen Logo are adapted from Commercial clip art from the incomparable Marwan Aridi of Aridi Computer Graphics. Other images were produced in the DAZ Studio and postworked in Photoshop. Cover was created in Adobe Photoshop.

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