

Inklings Forever: Published Colloquium Proceedings 1997-2016

Volume 10 *A Collection of Essays Presented at the Tenth Frances White Ewbank Colloquium on C.S. Lewis & Friends*

Article 83

6-5-2016

The Performance Text of “The Light Princess” with *Adela Cathcart* Frame


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Recommended Citation

Ricke, Joe; Palmisano, Abby; Hedges, Blair; and Strickland, Cara (2016) "The Performance Text of “The Light Princess” with *Adela Cathcart* Frame," *Inklings Forever: Published Colloquium Proceedings 1997-2016*: Vol. 10 , Article 83.

Available at: https://pillars.taylor.edu/inklings_forever/vol10/iss1/83

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The Performance Text of “The Light Princess” with *Adela Cathcart* frame

For this performance and text, the previous adaptation of “The Light Princess” by Cara Strickland was revised and adapted for performance by Dr. Joe Ricke based on research conducted by Abby Palmisano and Blair Hedges. It was performed in the Butz-Carruth Recital Hall of Taylor University on the evening of Friday, June 3rd. The Adela Cathcart “frame” material, with some slight alterations, is in italics. Stage directions and some dialogue are in bold. The characters and actors were as follows:

John Smith/ Narrator.....Joe Ricke
Adela/ The Light Princess.....Abby Palsimino
Doctor Armstrong/ The Prince.....Blair Hedges
Colonel Cathcart/ King.....Donald Williams
Queen.....Laura Schmidt
Mrs Cathcart(Adela’s Aunt)/ Witch...Sørina Higgins
Minister..... Shawn Denny
Nurse..... Alexis Colón

Narrator: Once upon a time, there was a girl whose life was gradually withdrawing itself—ebbing back as it were to its source. Whether this had a physical or psychological cause, it was impossible to tell. She was 21 years old. Her name was Adela Cathcart. Her father, the colonel, asked the advice of the local doctor.

Colonel: Well, Mr. Armstrong, what do you think of my daughter?

Armstrong: I do not think she is in a very bad way. Has she had any disappointment that you know of?

Col: None whatever.

Arm: Ah—I have seen such a case before. There are a good many of them amongst girls at her age. For the present, my conviction is that the best thing that can be done for her is to interest her in something if possible. Does she take pleasure in anything?

Col: She used to be very fond of music.

Smith: May I be allowed to speak?

Col&Arm: Most certainly.

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Smith: With your permission, I will tell you a plan I have been thinking of. Perhaps the interest she cannot find for herself, we might be able to provide for her, by telling stories. If we once got her interested in anything, it seems to me that the tide of life might begin to flow again. She would eat better, and sleep better, and think less about herself. It would be beginning from the inside, would it not?

Arm: A capital plan. And I know my brother, the minister, would want to help. She is in his charge as well as mine, for she is in one of his flock. Besides, he can tell a tale better than anyone I know.

Col: There can be no harm in trying it, gentlemen. And thank you for your interest in my poor child.

Arm: You must not let her know that the thing is got up for her.

Col: Certainly not. Come and dine with us, then. This Christmas-tide gives good opportunity for such a scheme.

Smith: Bravo, Colonel. And I am quite willing to open the entertainment with a funny kind of fairy tale which has been growing in my brain for some time.

Col: Very well. And now we will go to church.

.....

Smith/Narrator: Finally, the day came, the dinner came, the after-dinner came. Unfortunately, Mrs. Cathcart, Adela's aunt came as well.

Mrs. Cathcart: I trust it is a story suitable to the season, Mr. Smith.

Smith: Yes, very, for it is a child's story, a fairy tale, though I confess I think it fitter for grown children than for young children. If Adela has no objection, I will read it.

Adela: I shall be delighted, uncle.

Mrs. C: So, you approve of fairy-tales for children, Mr. Smith?

Smith: Not for children alone, madam; for everybody who can relish them.

Mrs. C: But surely not at a sacred season like this?

Smith: If I thought that God did not approve of fairy-tales, I would never read nor write one whatever the season. Would you madam?

Mrs. C: I never do.

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Smith: I feared not. . . . But I must begin. [clears throat] Title: The Light Princess. Second Title: A Fairy Tale without Fairies.

Mrs. C: I must be very stupid, Mr. Smith, but I can't make head or tail of it.

Smith: Give me leave madam, this is my office. . . . May I?

Narrator: Once upon a time, so long ago that I have quite forgotten the date, there lived a king and queen who had no children.

And the king said to himself:

King: All the queens of my acquaintance have children, some three, some seven, and some as many as twelve; and my queen has not one. I feel ill-used. [**crosses arms over chest**]

Narrator: So he made up his mind to be cross with his wife about it. But she bore it all like a good patient queen as she was. Then the king grew very cross indeed. But the queen pretended to take it all as a joke.

King: Why don't you have any daughters, at least? I don't say sons; that might be too much to expect.

Queen: I am sure, dear king, I am very sorry.

King: So you ought to be.

Queen: You must have patience with a lady, you know, dear king.

Narrator: The king tried, but he succeeded very badly. It was more than he deserved, therefore, when, at last, the queen gave him a daughter—as lovely a little princess as ever cried.

When a princess is born, there must be a christening, and of course, somebody was forgotten. This wouldn't have been so bad, except that the King forgot to invite his own sister.

She was a sour, spiteful creature. The wrinkles of contempt crossed the wrinkles of peevishness, and made her face as full of wrinkles as a pat of butter.

What made it highly imprudent in the king to forget her was that she was awfully clever. In fact, she was a witch.

Therefore, she made up her mind to go without an invitation, and make the whole family miserable. As I said, she was a witch.

So she went to the palace and was kindly received by the happy monarch, who forgot that he had forgotten her.

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When the christening water was applied to the princess' face, the witch turned round in her place three times, and muttered the following words, loud enough for those beside her to hear:—

Witch: Light of spirit, by my charms,

Light of body, every part,

Never weary human arms—

Only crush thy parents' heart!

Narrator: They all thought she had lost her wits, and was repeating some foolish nursery rhyme; but a shudder went through them all notwithstanding [**all shudder**].

The baby, on the contrary, began to laugh and crow; while the nurse gave a start because she could not feel the baby in her arms.

Minister: Bravo, Mr. Smith. An excellent beginning because I have no idea what you are driving at!

Mrs. C: One thing I must object to. That is, introducing church ceremonies into a fairy tale.

Minister: Why, Mrs. Cathcart. Do you suppose the church to be such a cross old lady that she will not allow her children to take a few liberties with their mother? She's able to stand that surely?

Smith: May I continue?

All: Of course . . . by all means . . . carry on my good man . . . please do Mr. Smith, etc.

Narrator: Well, the atrocious aunt had deprived the child of all her gravity. So, the moment the nurse began to bounce the baby, she flew towards the ceiling.

There she remained, kicking and laughing amazingly. The nurse got a ladder, and had to stand upon the very top, before she could catch the baby's dress. Of course, this all caused a terrible commotion in the palace.

The king stood staring up in speechless amazement. At last, turning to the queen, who was just as horror-struck as himself, he said, gasping, staring, and stammering,—

King: She can't be ours, queen!

Narrator: Now the queen was much cleverer than the king, and had

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begun already to suspect what had happened.

Queen: I am sure she is ours. But we ought to have taken better care of her at the christening. People who were never invited ought not to have been present.

King: Oh, ho! [**tapping his forehead with his forefinger**] Now, I have it. I've found her out. Don't you see, queen? My sister has bewitched her.

Queen: [**yawn**] That's just what I say.

King: I beg your pardon, my love; I did not hear you.

Narrator: One day, after breakfast, the king went into his counting-house, and counted out his money. The operation, though, gave him no pleasure.

King: To think that every one of these gold sovereigns weighs a quarter of an ounce, and my real, live, flesh-and-blood princess weighs nothing at all!

Narrator: The queen was in the parlour, eating bread and honey. But at the second mouthful she burst out crying, and could not swallow it.

The king heard her sobbing. Glad of anybody to quarrel with, he rushed into the parlour.

King: What is all this about? What are you crying for, queen?

Queen: I can't eat it. [**with mouth full**]

King: No wonder! You've just eaten your breakfast—two turkey eggs, and three anchovies.

Queen: Oh, that's not it! It's my child, my child! [**with mouth still full**]

King: Well, what's the matter with your child? After all, it is a good thing to be light-hearted, I am sure, whether she be ours or not.

Queen: [**swallows**] It is a bad thing to be light-headed,

King: 'Tis a good thing to be light-handed,

Queen: 'Tis a bad thing to be light-fingered,

King: 'Tis a good thing to be light-footed,

Queen: 'Tis a bad thing—

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King: In fact, in fact, it is a good thing altogether to be light-bodied.

Queen: But it is a bad thing altogether to be light-minded.

Narrator: This last answer quite discomfited his Majesty, who turned on his heel to go. But he was not quite gone when the voice of his queen overtook him.

Queen: And it's a bad thing to be light-haired!

Minister: Oh really, Mr. Smith, you bury us with puns, and not very good ones.

Smith/Narrator: [Stopping him] *Shhh!* The queen's hair was black as night, and his daughter's was, golden. But it was not this reflection on his hair that upset him; it was the double use of the word *light*. For the king hated all witticisms, and punning especially.

King: My dear queen, duplicity of any sort is exceedingly objectionable between married people; and the most objectionable form duplicity can assume is that of punning.

Queen: Oh, I am the most unfortunate woman in the world!

Narrator: She looked so rueful, that the king took her in his arms; and they sat down to consult.

King: Can you bear this?

Queen: No, I can't.

King: Well, what's to be done?

Queen: Perhaps, we can wait till she is older. She may then be able to suggest something herself. She will know at least how she feels, and explain things to us.

King: But what if she should marry?

Queen: Well, what of that?

King: Just think! If she were to have children! In the course of a hundred years the air might be as full of floating children.

Queen: Well, that is no business of ours!

Narrator: Meantime, notwithstanding awkward occurrences, and griefs that she brought upon her parents, the little princess laughed and grew. She reached the age of seventeen, without having fallen into any worse scrape than a chimney.

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Nor, thoughtless as she was, had she committed anything worse than laughter at everybody and everything.

For, you see, she never could be brought to see the serious side of anything. When her mother cried, she said,—

Princess: What queer faces mamma makes! And she squeezes water out of her cheeks? Funny mamma!

Narrator: And when her papa stormed at her, she laughed, and danced round and round him, clapping her hands.

Princess: Do it again, papa. Do it again! It's SUCH fun! Dear, funny papa!

Narrator: After a long avoidance of the painful subject, the king and queen resolved to hold a council of three upon it; and so they sent for the princess.

King: My dear child, you must be aware by this time that you are not exactly like other people.

Princess: Oh, you dear funny papa! I have got a nose, and two eyes, and all the rest. So have you. So has mamma.

Queen: Now be serious, my dear, for once.

Princess: No, thank you, mamma; I had rather not.

King: Would you not like to be able to walk like other people?

Princess: No indeed, I should think not. You only crawl.

King: How do you feel, my child? [after a pause]

Princess: Quite well, thank you.

King: I mean, what do you feel like?

Princess: I feel like a princess with such a funny papa, and such a dear pet of a queen-mamma!

Queen: Now really!

Princess: [interrupting] Oh Yes, I remember. I have a curious feeling sometimes, as if I were the only person that had any sense in the whole world. [violent laughter]

King: But is there nothing you wish for?

Princess: Oh, dear papa!—yes.

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King: What is it, my darling?

Princess: Will you promise to let me have it?

Narrator: The king was on the point of saying *Yes*, but the wiser queen checked him with a single motion of her head.

King: Tell me what it is first.

Princess: No no. Promise first.

King: I dare not. What is it?

Princess: Mind, I hold you to your promise.—It is to be tied to the end of a string—a very long string indeed, and be flown like a kite! **[laughter]**

Narrator: A fit of laughing checked her; and she would have been off again over the floor, had not the king started up and caught her just in time. Seeing nothing but talk could be got out of her, he rang the bell, and sent her away.

King: Now, queen, what IS to be done?

Queen: There is but one thing left, Let us consult the college of Metaphysicians.

King: Bravo! We will.

All: No! What? No metaphysics. I thought this was a fairy tale. Really Mr. Smith.

Mr. Smith: Well, if you say so. Let me try this. [clears throat] Perhaps the best thing for the princess would have been . . . to fall in love.

All: Yes. That's more like it. A little more of that. Now you're back on track!

Narrator: May I? As I was saying, perhaps the best thing for the princess would have been to fall in love. But how a princess who had no gravity could fall into anything is a difficulty—perhaps THE difficulty.

Now, the palace was built on the shores of the loveliest lake in the world and the moment the princess got into it, she recovered the natural right of which she had been so wickedly deprived—namely, gravity. **[She makes the sounds one would make if one would fly]**

The passion of her life was to get into the water, and she was always the better behaved and the more beautiful the more she had of it.

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Summer and winter it was quite the same; only she could not stay so long in the water when they had to break the ice to let her in.

It must have been about this time that the son of a king set out to look for the daughter of a queen. He travelled far and wide, but as sure as he found a princess, he found some fault in her. Of course he could not marry a mere woman, however beautiful; and there was no princess to be found worthy of him.

Whether the prince was so near perfection that he had a right to demand perfection itself, I cannot pretend to say. All I know is, that he was a fine, handsome, brave, generous, well-bred, and well-behaved youth, as all princes are.

In his wanderings he had come across some reports about our princess; but as everybody said she was bewitched, he never dreamed that she could bewitch him. Besides, what could a prince do with a princess who had lost her gravity? Who could tell what she might not lose next?

She might lose her visibility, or her tangibility; so that he should never be able to tell whether she was dead or alive. Therefore, he made no further inquiries about her.

After traveling for a long while, he found a footpath which led him to the side of a lake. Along this path the prince pursued his way through the gathering darkness. Suddenly he paused, and listened.

Strange sounds came across the water. It was, in fact, the princess laughing. Now there was something odd in her laugh, for a real hearty laugh requires gravity. Perhaps this was how the prince mistook the laughter for screaming.

Looking over the lake, he saw something white in the water; and, in an instant, he had plunged in. He soon reached the white object, and found that it was a woman. There was not light enough to show that she was a princess, but quite enough to show that she was a lady, for it does not want much light to see that.

Now I cannot tell how it came about,—whether she pretended to be drowning, or whether he frightened her, but certainly he brought her to shore in a fashion ignominious to a swimmer, and more nearly drowned than she had ever expected to be.

At the place to which he bore her, the bank was only a foot or two above the water; so he gave her a strong lift out of the water, to lay her on the bank. But, her gravitation ceasing the moment she left the

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water, away she went up into the air, scolding and screaming.

Princess: You naughty, naughty, NAUGHTY, NAUGHTY man!

Narrator: No one had ever succeeded in putting her into a passion before.

Princess: I'll tell papa.

Prince: Oh no, you won't!

Princess: Yes, I will. What business had you to pull me down out of the water, and throw me to the bottom of the air? I never did you any harm.

Prince: Pardon me. I did not mean to hurt you.

Princess: I don't believe you have any brains; and that is a worse loss than your wretched gravity.

Narrator: The prince now saw that he had come upon the bewitched princess, and had already offended her. But before he could think what to say next, she burst out angrily, giving a stamp with her foot that would have sent her aloft again but for the hold she had of his arm,—

Princess: Put me up directly.

Prince: Put you up where, you beauty?

Narrator: He had fallen in love with her almost, already; for her anger made her more charming than any one else had ever beheld her; and, as far as he could see, which certainly was not far, she had not a single fault about her, except, of course, that she had not any gravity.

Prince: Put you up where, you beauty?

Princess: In the water, you stupid!

Prince: Come, then.

Narrator: The condition of her dress, increasing her usual difficulty in walking, compelled her to cling to him; and he could hardly persuade himself that he was not in a delightful dream, notwithstanding the torrent of musical abuse with which she overwhelmed him. [**abuses him**]

Finally, they came upon the lake at quite another part, where the bank was twenty-five feet high at least; and when they had reached the edge, he turned towards the princess, and said,—

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Prince: How am I to put you in?

Princess: That is your business. You took me out—put me in again.

Prince: Very well.

Narrator: And, catching her up in his arms, he sprang with her from the rock. The princess had just time to give one delighted shriek of laughter before the water closed over them.

When they came to the surface, she found that, for a moment or two, she could not even laugh, for she had gone down with such a rush, that it was with difficulty she recovered her breath.

Prince: How do you like falling in?

Princess: Is that what you call FALLING IN? [panting]

Prince: Yes. I should think it a very tolerable specimen.

Princess: It seemed to me like going up.

Prince: My feeling is certainly one of elevation too.

Narrator: The princess did not appear to understand him, for she repeated his question:—

Princess: How do YOU like falling in?

Prince: Beyond everything, for I have fallen in with the only perfect creature I ever saw.

Princess: No more of that: I am tired of it.

Minister: Perhaps she shared her father's aversion to punning.

All: Shhhhhh!

Prince: Don't you like falling in then?

Princess: It is the most delightful fun I ever had in my life. I never fell before. I wish I could learn. To think I am the only person in my father's kingdom that can't fall!

Prince: I shall be most happy to fall in with you any time you like.

Princess: Thank you. I don't know. Perhaps it would not be proper. But I don't care. At all events, as we have fallen in, let us have a swim together.

Prince: With all my heart.

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Narrator: And away they went, swimming, and diving, and floating, until at last they heard cries along the shore, and saw lights glancing in all directions. It was now quite late, and there was no moon.

Princess: I must go home. I am very sorry, for this is delightful.

Prince: So am I. And I have no other home.

Princess: I wish I hadn't one either!—You see where that green light is burning? That is the window of my room. Now if you would just swim there with me very quietly, and when we are all but under the balcony, give me such a push—up you call it—as you did a little while ago, I should be able to catch hold of the balcony, and get in at the window.

Prince: With more obedience than pleasure. **[after delivering her]** Will you be in the lake to-morrow night?

Princess: To be sure I will. I don't think so. Perhaps.

Narrator: The prince was intelligent enough not to press her further; and merely whispered, as he gave her the parting lift.

Prince: Don't tell.

Narrator: The only answer the princess returned was a roguish look that seemed to say, "Never fear. It is too good fun to spoil that way."

So perfectly like other people had she been in the water, that even yet the prince could scarcely believe his eyes when he saw her ascend slowly, grasp the balcony, and disappear through the window. All night long he dreamed that he was swimming with the princess.

Mrs. Cathcart: All this is very improper—to my mind!

Adela: But you must remember that this is Fairyland, Auntie. We must not judge the people in fairy tales by precisely the same conventionalities we have. They must be good in their own way.

Mrs. C: Conventionalities! Humbug!

Narrator: Excuse me? When the prince woke up the next morning, he saw the princess already floating about in the lake, attended by the king and queen. It was a very bright day, and soon the prince, burned up with the heat, began to long for the cold water and the cool princess.

But he had to endure till twilight. Then the prince began to sing.

Prince:

Lady fair,
Swan-white,
Lift thine eyes,
Banish night
By the might
Of thine eyes.

Snowy arms,
Oars of snow,
Oar her hither,
Plashing low.
Soft and slow,
Oar her hither.

Cling about her,
Waters blue;
Part not from her,
But renew
Cold and true
Kisses round her.

Lap me round,
Waters sad,
That have left her.
Make me glad,
For ye had
Kissed her ere ye left her.

Narrator: Before he had finished his song, the princess was just under the place where he sat, and looking up to find him.

Prince: Would you like a fall, princess?

Princess: Ah! there you are! Yes, if you please, prince.

Prince: How do you know I am a prince, princess?

Princess: Because you are a very nice young man, prince.

Prince: Come up then, princess.

Princess: Fetch me, prince.

Narrator: The prince reached for her hand, gave a pull and she was beside him. This rock was much higher than the other, and the splash and the dive were tremendous. The princess was in ecstasies of delight.

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Mrs. C: MISTER SMITH!!

Night after night they met, and swam about in the dark clear lake. The prince often fancied that he was swimming in the sky instead of the lake. But when he talked about being in heaven, the princess laughed at him dreadfully. [**scoffing laugh**]

The prince soon found out that while in the water the princess was very like other people. And besides this, she was not so forward or pert at sea as on shore. Neither did she laugh so much; and when she did laugh, it was more gently. She seemed altogether more modest and maidenly in the water than out of it.

But when the prince, who had really fallen in love when he fell in the lake, began to talk to her about love, she always turned her head towards him and laughed. [**laughter**] After a while she began to look puzzled, as if she were trying to understand what he meant, but could not—As soon as ever she left the lake, she was so altered, that the prince said to himself,

Prince: If I marry her, I see no help for it: we must turn merman and mermaid, and go out to sea at once.

Narrator: The princess's pleasure in the lake had grown to a passion, and she could scarcely bear to be out of it for an hour. Imagine then her consternation, when, diving with the prince one night, a sudden suspicion seized her that the lake was not so deep as it used to be.

Next day she made many observations, which, alas! strengthened her fears. She saw that the banks were too dry; and that the grass on the shore, and the trailing plants on the rocks, were withering away.

The poor princess nearly went out of the little mind she had. It was awful to her to see the lake, which she loved more than any living thing, lie dying before her eyes. It ebbd away, slowly vanishing.

She could not bear to swim in the lake any more, and began to ebb away herself. People said she would not live an hour after the lake was gone. *But she never cried.*

A Proclamation was made to all the kingdom, that whosoever should discover the cause of the lake's decrease, would be rewarded after a princely fashion.

King: Whoever shall discover the cause of the lake's decrease will be rewarded after a princely fashion.

Narrator: The fact was that the old witch was at the root of the mischief. When she heard that her niece found more pleasure in the water than out of it,

she went into a rage. [**rage noises**]

Witch: But, I will soon set all right. The king and the people shall die of thirst; their brains shall boil and frizzle in their skulls before I will lose my revenge. [**laughs like a witch**]

Narrator: She went to an old chest in the room, and took out what looked like a piece of dried seaweed. She threw it into a tub of water with some powder, and stirred it with her bare arm, muttering over it words of hideous sound, and yet more hideous import.

Soon, out from the tub came a huge gray snake.

It grew out of the tub, waving itself backwards and forwards with a slow horizontal motion, till it reached the witch. She drew it all out of the tub, and wound it round her body.

Then she went down to her cellar; and as she unlocked the door she said to herself,—

Witch: This is worth living for!

Narrator: Locking the door behind her, she descended and entered a vast cave, the roof of which was supported by huge natural pillars of rock. Now this roof was the under side of the bottom of the lake.

She untwined the snake from her body, and held it by the tail high above her. The hideous creature stretched up its head towards the roof of the cavern, which it was just able to reach. It began to move its head backwards and forwards, as if looking for something.

At last the snake made a sudden dart, and clung to the roof with its mouth.

Witch: That's right, my beauty! Drain it dry.

Narrator: She sat down on a great stone, and she began to knit and mutter awful words. The snake hung like a huge leech, sucking at the stone.

After seven days and nights, the serpent suddenly dropped from the roof and shriveled up again like a piece of dried seaweed.

The witch looked up at the roof. One drop of water was trembling on the spot where the snake had been sucking. As soon as she saw that, she turned and fled, followed by her cat. Shutting the door in a terrible hurry, she locked it, and muttered some frightful words. Then she sat down on the floor listening with malicious delight to the rushing of

the water.

Meanwhile, the prince was pining for the princess, as she was pining for her lake. So he disguised himself and went to the palace where he was made shoeblick to the princess. It was rather cunning in the prince to request such an easy post, for the princess, rarely touching the ground, could hardly soil her shoes.

The princess kept to her room, with the curtains drawn to shut out the dying lake. But she could not shut it out of her mind for a moment. She felt as if the lake were her soul, drying up within her, first to mud, then to madness and death.

As for the prince, she had forgotten him. However much she had enjoyed his company in the water, she did not care for him without it.

At length the lake was all but gone.

It happened one day, as it should in such a story, that a party of youngsters found a plate of gold in the lake bed, covered with writing. They carried it to the king. On one side of it stood these words:—

King: “Death alone from death can save.
Love is death, and so is brave—
Love can fill the deepest grave.
Love loves on beneath the wave.”

Narrator: Now this was enigmatical enough to the king, but when he turned it over, this is what they saw on the reverse side:—

Queen: If the lake should disappear, you must find the hole through which the water ran. But it is useless to try to stop it by any ordinary means. Only the body of a living man can stanch the flow. AND, the man must give himself of his own will. Besides, if the nation cannot not provide one hero, it is time it should perish anyway.

Narrator: This was a very disheartening revelation to the king—not that he was unwilling to sacrifice a subject, but he was hopeless of finding a man willing to sacrifice himself. Still, the king caused the contents of the wonderful plate of gold to be published throughout the country.

No one came forward.

When the prince heard the announcement, he sat down and thought,—

Prince: She will die if I don't do it, and life would be nothing to me without her; so I shall lose nothing by doing it. And life will be as pleasant to her as ever, for she will soon forget me. And there will be so much more beauty and happiness in the world!—To be sure, I shall not see it. [**Here the poor prince gave a sigh.**] How lovely the lake will be in the moonlight, with that glorious creature sporting in it like a wild goddess!—It is rather hard to be drowned by inches, though. Let me see—that will be seventy inches of me to drown. [**Here he tried to laugh, but could not.**] The longer the better, however, for can I not bargain that the princess shall be beside me all the time? So I shall see her once more, kiss her perhaps,—who knows?—and die looking in her eyes. That will be no death. All right! I am ready.

Narrator: He hurried to the king's apartment, resolving to carry off the whole affair with nonchalance. He knocked at the door of the king's counting-house, where it was all but a capital crime to disturb him.

When the king heard the knock, he opened the door in a rage. Seeing only the shoeblack, he drew his sword. This, I am sorry to say, was his usual mode of asserting his regality.

Prince: Please your Majesty, I'm your butler.

King: My butler! you lying rascal! What do you mean?

Prince: I mean, I will cork your big bottle.

King: Is the fellow mad?

Prince: I will put a stopper—a plug—what you call it, in your leaky lake, grand monarch.

Narrator: Despite his rage, the king thought it would be great waste to kill the only useful man in the present emergency, especially since, in the end, the insolent fellow would be dead either way.

King: Oh! In that case, thank you. Have a glass of wine.

Prince: No, thank you.

King: Then we will go and look for the hole at once.

Prince: Stop, please your Majesty, I have a condition to make.

King: What! A condition! With me! How dare you?

Prince: As you please. Good morning your majesty.

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King: You wretch! I will have you put in a sack, and stuck in the hole.

Prince: Very well, your Majesty. But what good will that do you? Please remember that the oracle says the victim must offer himself.

King: Well, you have offered yourself.

Prince: Yes, but upon one condition.

King: Condition again! Well, what is your condition?

Prince: That the princess shall go with me, feed me with her own hands, and comfort me. As soon as the water is up to my eyes, she may go and be happy, and forget her poor shoeblack.

Narrator: Here the prince's voice faltered, and he very nearly grew . . . sentimental.

King: Why didn't you tell me before what your condition was? Such a fuss about nothing!

Prince: Do you grant it?

King: Of course, my boy.

Prince: Very well. I am ready.

Narrator: The prince went to dress for the occasion, for he was resolved to die like a prince.

When the princess heard that a man had offered to die for her, she was so transported that she jumped off the bed, feeble as she was, and danced about the room for joy. She did not care who the man was.

They bore her across to the stone where they had already placed a little boat for her. The water was not deep enough to float it, but they hoped it would be, before long. In a few minutes the prince appeared. The princess recognized him at once, but did not acknowledge him.

Prince: Here I am.

Narrator: He put both his legs into it, sitting on the stone, and, stooping forward, covered the corner that remained open with his two hands. In this uncomfortable position he resolved to abide his fate. Presently a little wave flowed over the stone, and wetted one of the prince's knees. But he did not mind it much.

Princess: This is very kind of you, prince. **[eyes shut]**

Prince: I am sorry I can't return the compliment. **[to himself]** But you

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are worth dying for, after all.

Narrator: Again a wavelet, and another, and another flowed over the stone, and wetted both the prince's knees; but he did not speak or move. Several hours passed in this way, the princess apparently asleep. But the prince was much disappointed, for he had none of the consolation he had hoped for.

At last he could bear it no longer.

Prince: Princess!

Narrator: But at that very moment up started the princess, crying,—

Princess: I'm afloat! I'm afloat!

Prince: Princess!

Princess: Well?

Prince: Your papa promised that you should comfort me, and you haven't even looked at me once.

Princess: Did he? Then I suppose I must. But I am so sleepy!

Prince: Sleep then, darling, and don't mind me.

Princess: Really, you are very good. I think I will.

Prince: Please, just give me a glass of wine and a biscuit first.

Princess: With all my heart.

Narrator: She got the wine and the biscuit, and leaning over the side of the boat, she finally looked at him.

Princess: Why, prince, you don't look well! Are you sure you don't mind?

Prince: Not a bit. Only I shall die before I can save you unless I have something to eat.

Princess: There, then. [**holds out the wine to him**]

Prince: Ah! you must feed me. I dare not move my hands. The water would run away directly.

Princess: Good gracious!

Narrator: She began at once to feed him with bits of biscuit and sips of wine. As she did, he contrived to kiss the tips of her fingers now and then. She did not seem to mind it. But the prince felt better.

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Prince: Now for your own sake, princess. I cannot let you go to sleep. You must sit and look at me, else I shall not be able to keep up.

Princess: Well, I will do anything I can to oblige you. **[with condescension, looks at him]**

Narrator: The sun went down, and the moon rose, and, gush after gush, the waters were rising up the prince's body. They were up to his waist now.

Princess: Why can't we go and have a swim? There seems to be water enough. Just about here.

Prince: I shall never swim more.

Princess: Oh, I forgot.

Narrator: So the water grew and grew, and rose up and up on the prince. The princess sat and looked at him, feeding him now and then.

The night wore on. The waters rose. The moon rose and shone on the face of the dying prince. The water was now up to his neck.

Prince: Will you kiss me, princess?

Narrator: His nonchalance was all gone now.

Princess: Yes, I will. **[kisses him with a long, sweet, cold kiss]**

Prince: Now **[with a sigh of content]**, I die happy.

Narrator: He did not speak again. The princess gave him wine for the last time. Then she sat down again, and looked at him.

The water rose. It touched his chin. It touched his lower lip.

It touched between his lips. He shut them hard to keep it out. The princess began to feel strange. It touched his upper lip. He breathed through his nostrils. The princess looked wild. It covered his nostrils. Her eyes looked scared, and shone strange in the moonlight.

His head fell back; the water closed over it, and the bubbles of his last breath bubbled up through the water. The princess gave a shriek **[shriek]**, and sprang into the lake.

She laid hold of his legs, and pulled, but she could not move them. She struggled to breathe, and then suddenly realized that HE really could not breathe. She was frantic. She got hold of him, and held his head above the water, which was possible now his hands were no longer covering the hole. But it was of no use. He was past breathing.

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Love and water brought back all her strength. She got under the water, and pulled and pulled with her whole might, till at last she got one leg out. The other easily followed. How she got him into the boat she never could tell (and I certainly never shall).

Presently, she seized the oars and rowed till she got to the landing. By this time people were on the shore, for they had heard her shriek. She made them carry the prince to her room, lay him in her bed, and send for the doctors.

Somehow, the doctors never came. So the princess and her old nurse were left with the prince.

They tried everything for a long time without success.

At last, when they had all but given it up, just as the sun rose, the prince opened his eyes.

The princess burst into a passion of tears, and fell on the floor. There she lay for an hour, and her tears never ceased. All the pent-up crying of her life poured out from her inside. And a rain came on, such as had never been seen in that country.

But something had happened, for when the princess tried to rise, she found, to her astonishment, that she could not. At length, after many efforts, she succeeded in getting upon her feet. But she tumbled down again directly.

Princess: Ouch!

Hearing her fall, her old nurse uttered a yell of delight, and ran to her, screaming,—

Nurse: My darling child! she's found her gravity!

Princess: Oh, that's it! is it? [**rubbing her shoulder and her knee alternately**] "I consider it very unpleasant. I feel as if I should be crushed to pieces.

Prince: Hurrah! If you've come round, princess, so have I. How's the lake?

Nurse: Brimful.

Prince: Then we're all happy.

Princess: That we are indeed! [**sobbing**]

Narrator: And there was rejoicing all over the country that rainy rainy

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day.

Of course the prince and princess were betrothed at once. But the princess had to learn to walk, before they could be married with any propriety. And this was not so easy for she could walk no more than a baby. She was always falling down and hurting herself. [ouch!]

Princess: Is this the gravity you used to make so much of? [**Prince raises her from the floor**] For my part, I was a great deal more comfortable without it.

Prince: No, no, that's not it. This is it.

Narrator: And with that, the prince took her up in his arms, and carried her about like a baby, kissing her all the time.

Prince: *This* is gravity.

Princess: That's better. I don't mind that so much.

Narrator: I fear she complained of her gravity more than once after this. It was a long time before she was fully reconciled to walking.

The only revenge the princess took upon her aunt was to tread very hard on her gouty toe the next time she saw her. But she was even sorry when she heard that the water had undermined the witch's house, and that it had fallen in the night, burying her in its ruins. There she lies to this day.

All (audience included): Hip Hip! Hooray!! (3)

Narrator: So the prince and princess lived and were happy; and had crowns of gold, and clothes of cloth, and shoes of leather, and children of boys and girls, not one of whom was ever known, on the most critical occasion, to lose the smallest atom of his or her due proportion of gravity.

All: Bravo! Capital! Very good, indeed. Three cheers for Mr. Smith!

Minister: I don't think the princess could have rowed, though, Smith. Without gravity I mean.

Adela: But she DID. And I won't have uncle's story found fault with. It is a very funny and very pretty story.

Mrs. C: But what is the Mooooowral of it?

Adela: That you need not be afraid of ill-natured aunts, though they are witches. [pregnant pause]

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Smith: No, my dear, that's not it. It is that you need not worry about forgetting your poor relations. No harm will come of it in the end.

Doctor [thoughtfully]: I think the moral is [pause] that no girl is worth anything until she has cried a little.

Smith: Adela gave him a quick glance, and then cast her eyes down. Whether he had looked at her I don't know. I should think not. It isn't proper, after all. Just before the doctor left, though, he went up to Adela and said.

Doctor: I am sorry to hear that you have not been quite well of late, Miss Cathcart. I am afraid you have may have caught a cold. May I feel your pulse?

Smith: She gave him her wrist directly.

Adela: I feel much better tonight, thank you.

Smith: He stood listening to the pulse for a long while, without consulting his watch, as if he was in immediate communication with the troubled heart itself. Now that his eyes were closed, Adela's eyes glanced up to his face, and rested there for half a minute. He gave her back her hand quite gently.

Doctor: I will send you something as soon as I get home. I presume you will go to bed soon?

Adela: If you think best, doctor.

Smith: And so they parted for the evening. But before we part, dear reader, perhaps you may have one question.

Reader/Armstrong: Pray, Mr. Smith, do you think it was your wonderful prescription of story-telling that wrought Miss Cathcart's cure?

Smith: How can I tell? I hope it had its share along with other things. The doctor's prescriptions, the curate's sermons, or her falling in love with the doctor, or the doctor falling in love with her, or her father's illness and his need for her help, or perhaps the cold weather suited her. In the present case, it is enough to know that Adela recovered. And my own conviction is that the cure was effected mainly from within.

Mrs. C: But really Mr. Smith, I don't understand. What is the Mooooowral?