

#### **4. Prince Marvel**

It is easy to imagine the astonishment of the three girls at hearing this strange request. They gazed in a bewildered fashion upon the kneeling fairy, and were at first unable to answer one word. Then Seseley said--sadly, for she grieved to disappoint the pretty creature:

"We are but mortal children, and have no powers of enchantment at all."

"Ah, that is true, so far as concerns yourselves," replied the fairy, eagerly; "yet mortals may easily transform fairies into anything they wish."

"If that is so, why have we never heard of this power before?" asked Seseley.

"Because fairies, as a rule, are content with their lot, and do not wish to appear in any form but their own. And, knowing that evil or mischievous mortals can transform them at will, the fairies take great care to remain invisible, so they can not be interfered with. Have you ever," she asked, suddenly, "seen a fairy before?"

"Never," replied Seseley.

"Nor would you have seen me to-day, had I not known you were kind and pure-hearted, or had I not resolved to ask you to exercise your powers upon me."

"I must say," remarked Helda, boldly, "that you are foolish to wish to become anything different from what you are."

"For you are very beautiful NOW," added Berna, admiringly.

"Beautiful!" retorted the fairy, with a little frown; "what does beauty amount to, if one is to remain invisible?"

"Not much, that is true," agreed Berna, smoothing her own dark locks.

"And as for being foolish," continued the fairy, "I ought to be allowed to act foolishly if I want to. For centuries past I have not had a chance to do a single foolish thing."

"Poor dear!" said Helda, softly.

Seseley had listened silently to this conversation. Now she inquired:

"What do you wish to become?"

"A mortal!" answered the fairy, promptly.

"A girl, like ourselves?" questioned the baron's daughter.

"Perhaps," said the fairy, as if undecided.

"Then you would be likely to endure many privations," said Seseley, gently.

"For you would have neither father nor mother to befriend you, nor any house to live in."

"And if you hired your services to some baron, you would be obliged to wash dishes all day, or mend clothing, or herd cattle," said Berna.

"But I should travel all over the island," said the fairy, brightly, "and that is what I long to do. I do not care to work."

"I fear a girl would not be allowed to travel alone," Seseley remarked, after some further thought. "At least," she added, "I have never heard of such a thing."

"No," said the fairy, rather bitterly, "your men are the ones that roam abroad and have adventures of all kinds. Your women are poor, weak creatures, I remember."

There was no denying this, so the three girls sat silent until Seseley asked:

"Why do you wish to become a mortal?"

"To gain exciting experiences," answered the fairy. "I'm tired of being a humdrum fairy year in and year out. Of course, I do not wish to become a mortal for all time, for that would get monotonous, too; but to live a short while as the earth people do would amuse me very much."

"If you want variety, you should become a boy," said Helda, with a laugh, "The life of a boy is one round of excitement."

"Then make me a boy!" exclaimed the fairy eagerly.

"A boy!" they all cried in consternation. And Seseley added:

"Why--you're a GIRL fairy, aren't you?"

"Well--yes; I suppose I am," answered the beautiful creature, smiling; "but as you are going to change me anyway, I may as well become a boy as a girl."

"Better!" declared Helda, clapping her hands; "for then you can do as you please."

"But would it be right?" asked Seseley, with hesitation.

"Why not?" retorted the fairy. "I can see nothing wrong in being a boy. Make me a tall, slender youth, with waving brown hair and dark eyes. Then I shall be as unlike my own self as possible, and the adventure will be all the more interesting. Yes; I like the idea of being a boy very much indeed."

"But I don't know how to transform you; some one will have to show me the way to do it," protested Seseley, who was getting worried over the task set her.

"Oh, that will be easy enough," returned the little immortal. "Have you a wand?"

"No."

"Then I'll loan you mine, for I shall not need it. And you must wave it over my head three times and say: 'By my mortal powers I transform you into a boy for the space of one year'."

"One year! Isn't that too long?"

"It's a very short time to one who has lived thousands of years as a fairy."

"That is true," answered the baron's daughter.

"Now, I'll begin by doing a little transforming myself," said the fairy, getting upon her feet again, "and you can watch and see how I do it." She brushed a bit of moss from her gauzy skirts and continued: "If I'm to become a boy I shall need a horse, you know. A handsome, prancing steed, very fleet of foot."

A moment she stood motionless, as if listening. Then she uttered a low but shrill whistle.

The three girls, filled with eager interest, watched her intently.

Presently a trampling of footsteps was heard through the brushwood, and a beautiful deer burst from the forest and fearlessly ran to the fairy. Without hesitation she waved her wand above the deer's head and exclaimed:

"By all my fairy powers I command you to become a war-horse for the period of one year."

Instantly the deer disappeared, and in its place was a handsome charger, milk-white in color, with flowing mane and tail. Upon its back was a saddle sparkling with brilliant gems sewn upon fine dressed leather.

The girls uttered cries of astonishment and delight, and the fairy said:

"You see, these transformations are not at all difficult. I must now have a sword."

She plucked a twig from a near-by tree and cast it upon the ground at her feet. Again she waved her wand--and the twig turned to a gleaming sword, richly engraved, that seemed to the silent watchers to tremble slightly in its sheath, as if its heart of steel throbbed with hopes of battles to come.

"And now I must have shield and armor," said the fairy, gaily. "This will make a shield,"--and she stripped a sheet of loose bark from a tree-trunk,--"but for armor I must have something better. Will you give me your cloak?"

This appeal was made to Seseley, and the baron's daughter drew her white velvet cloak from her shoulders and handed it to the fairy. A moment later it was transformed into a suit of glittering armor that seemed fashioned of pure silver inlaid with gold, while the sheet of bark at the same time became a handsome shield, with the figures of three girls graven upon it. Seseley recognized the features as those of herself and her comrades, and noted also that they appeared sitting at the edge of a forest, the great trees showing plainly in the background.

"I shall be your champion, you see," laughed the fairy, gleefully, "and maybe I shall be able to repay you for the loss of your cloak."

"I do not mind the cloak," returned the child, who had been greatly interested in these strange transformations. "But it seems impossible that a dainty little girl like you can ride this horse and carry these heavy arms."

"I'll not be a girl much longer," said the little creature. "Here, take my wand, and transform me into a noble youth!"

Again the pretty fairy kneeled before Seseley, her dainty, rounded limbs of white and rose showing plainly through her gauzy attire. And the baron's daughter was suddenly inspired to be brave, not wishing to disappoint the venturous immortal. So she rose and took the magic wand in her hand, waving it three times above the head of the fairy.

"By my powers as a mortal," she said, marveling even then at the strange speech, "I command you to become a brave and gallant youth--handsome, strong, fearless! And such shall you remain for the space of one year."

As she ceased speaking the fairy was gone, and a slender youth, dark-eyed and laughing, was holding her hand in his and kissing it gratefully.

"I thank you, most lovely maiden," he said, in a pleasant voice, "for giving me a place in the world of mortals. I shall ride at once in search of adventure, but my good sword is ever at your service."

With this he gracefully arose and began to buckle on his magnificent armor and to fasten the sword to his belt.

Seseley drew a long, sighing breath of amazement at her own powers, and turning to Berna and Helda she asked:

"Do I see aright? Is the little fairy really transformed to this youth?"

"It certainly seems so," returned Helda, who, being unabashed by the marvels she had beheld, turned to gaze boldly upon the young knight.

"Do you still remember that a moment ago you were a fairy?" she inquired.

"Yes, indeed," said he, smiling; "and I am really a fairy now, being but changed in outward form. But no one must know this save yourselves, until the year has expired and I resume my true station. Will you promise to guard my secret?"

"Oh, yes!" they exclaimed, in chorus. For they were delighted, as any children might well be, at having so remarkable a secret to keep and talk over among themselves.

"I must ask one more favor," continued the youth: "that you give me a name; for in this island I believe all men bear names of some sort, to distinguish them one from another."

"True," said Seseley, thoughtfully. "What were you called as a fairy?"

"That does not matter in the least," he answered, hastily. "I must have an entirely new name."

"Suppose we call him the Silver Knight," suggested Berna, as she eyed his glistening armor.

"Oh, no!--that is no name at all!" declared Helda. "We might better call him Baron Strongarm."

"I do not like that, either," said the Lady Seseley, "for we do not know whether his arm is strong or not. But he has been transformed in a most astonishing and bewildering manner before our very eyes, and I think the name of Prince Marvel would suit him very well."

"Excellent!" cried the youth, picking up his richly graven shield. "The name seems fitting in every way. And for a year I shall be known to all this island as Prince Marvel!"