

26. The End of the Year

The girls sat upon the green moss and waited. Prince Marvel stood silent beside his horse. The silver armor was as bright as the day he donned it, nor was there a dent in his untarnished shield. The sword that had done such good service he held lightly in his hand, and the horse now and then neighed softly and turned to look at him with affectionate eyes.

Seseley began to tremble with excitement, and Berna and Helda stared at the prince with big round eyes.

But, after all, they saw nothing so remarkable as they expected. For presently--and it all happened in a flash--Prince Marvel was gone from their midst, and a handsome, slender-limbed deer darted from the bower and was quickly lost in the thick forest. On the ground lay a sheet of bark and a twig from a tree, and beside them was Lady Seseley's white velvet cloak.

Then the three girls each drew a long breath and looked into one another's eyes, and, while thus engaged, a peal of silvery laughter sounded in their ears and made them spring quickly to their feet.

Before them stood a tiny and very beautiful fairy, clothed in floating gossamer robes of rose and pearl color, and with eyes sparkling like twin stars.

"Prince Marvel!" exclaimed the three, together.

"No, indeed!" cried the fairy, with a pretty little pout. "I am no one but myself; and, really, I believe I shall now be content to exist for a few hundred years in my natural form. I have quite enjoyed my year as a mortal; but after all there are, I find, some advantages in being a fairy. Good by, my dears!"

And with another ripple of laughter the pretty creature vanished, and the girls were left alone.