

BATES ARLO, PUTNAM ELEANOR

**PRINCE VANCE:
THE STORY OF A
PRINCE WITH A
COURT IN HIS BOX**

Eleanor Putnam

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Eleanor Putnam, Arlo Bates Prince Vance: The Story of a Prince with a Court in His Box

Dear son, this twisted, tangled web of whims
For you was woven while you scarcely knew
The simplest speech men use; but infant limbs,
That round and smooth in dimpled fairness grew,
Waved for all word in a babe's perfect glee,
So wondrous sweet to see.

It is not stranger than this world must seem
To one who its vagaries first does scan;
It is less weird than the enchanted dream
Which life may change to ere you be a man.
Such as it is, take it for this alone, —
That it is all your own.

Those who together wrought its colors gay,
And its fantastic warp and woof entwined,
May not again for you in work or play
Together labor. Yet the loving mind
In which they then were one will still be one
Till life and sense be done.

I

It was certainly not strange that Prince Vance was so stupefied with astonishment that he sat for a full half-hour foolishly staring before him, without an effort to move a muscle or to stir from his seat. Indeed, it is probable that any other prince in the same circumstances would have been equally struck dumb with amazement, – as any one may see who will attend while I go back to the beginning, and relate what had happened.

By the beginning is meant the birth of Prince Vance, when the powerful fairy Copetta had been chosen his godmother, since which time she certainly had not devoted herself to being agreeable to the Prince. She had insisted, for instance, that her godson should pay attention to his lessons; that he should show respect to his tutors; and, what was most outrageous of all, that he, Prince Vance, only son of his parents and sole heir to the kingdom, should learn to obey. She had coolly informed her godson, moreover, that if he did not obey her willingly, it would certainly be the worse for him; since learn he must, by harsh means, if no others would move him.

All this seemed to Vance a most unpleasant and unreasonable sort of talk, and, as may be imagined, it did not increase his love for his godmother. So things had gone on from bad to worse between them until Vance was a fine, lusty lad beginning his teens, when one day the Blue Wizard came to court.

Vance had been having a remarkably unpleasant scene with his godmother that morning. She had come popping into the school-room, in a disagreeable way she had of appearing when she was least expected; and, of course, nothing would do but she must come at the exact moment when the Prince was engaged in boxing his tutor's ears (without boxing-gloves), because the poor old man wanted him to learn the boundaries of what would some day be his own kingdom.

"You shall see the boundaries by travelling over them all on foot," the fairy had said crossly. "You are growing up idle, selfish, and disobedient; a shame to your godmother and a disgrace to your family. You will be associating with the Blue Wizard next, I dare say!"

"Yes, so I will," the Prince answered stubbornly; for though he really had never heard of the Blue Wizard before, he would have said anything just then to vex his godmother, – "so I will. I should like to see him. I really wish he would come this very day!"

"As for me, you evil boy!" Copetta said, more angrily yet, striking her cane sharply upon the ground, "you shall want me badly enough before you find me, I promise you; and sorrow shall have made you wiser before you look upon my face again."

"Not that I shall miss you much, with your scoldings and fault-findings!" replied the saucy Prince; and as she vanished before his eyes, according to her startling custom, he began shying his books at the head of his tutor, to the great discomfort of that unhappy man, who thought that his lot in life was indeed a sad one, and wished himself a wood-cutter in the royal forest, or indeed anything rather than what he was.

When his pile of books was quite gone, and the blackboard erasers, the bits of crayon, and the pointer had been thrown after them, the Prince put his hands in his pockets and lounged to the window, whistling a tune he had caught from a hand-organ. His twelve younger sisters were just coming into the courtyard, two by two, returning from taking their morning airing with their governesses. The Princesses were quite as good as the Prince was bad, and there could certainly have been no prettier sight than that of the twelve royal little girls walking along so properly and primly. Each had a green velvet pelisse, a neat Leghorn bonnet, and a green fringed parasol; each wore nice buff mitts and a good-tempered smile, and each had a complexion like pink and white ice-cream, and eyes like pretty blue beads. It was therefore very naughty indeed of Prince Vance to shout "Boh!" so loudly that each Princess started and hopped quite one foot from the ground, and even the governesses put their hands to their hearts. This, however, gave much joy to the Prince; and after his sisters had

disappeared he stood by the window still whistling, with his hands in his pockets and a wicked grin on his face.

"Your Royal Highness," began the tutor, meekly, "your Highness really must not put your Highness's hands in your Highness's trousers pockets, and whistle that dreadful tune. If her Royal Highness the Queen should hear you, she would certainly have me beheaded."

"Why should I care for that?" asked the Prince, carelessly; and just at that moment he caught sight of the Blue Wizard himself coming into the court below.

II

Whatever else might be said of the Blue Wizard, nobody would ever think of calling him a beauty. His nose and his chin were long and pointed, his eyebrows big and bushy, his teeth sharp and protruding from his mouth; and everything about him – skin, hair, teeth, and dress – was as blue as a sky on a June afternoon when not a cloud is to be seen. He had, too, a way of perking his head about, which was most unsettling to the nerves; twitching and twisting it constantly from side to side, like a toy mandarin. He came boldly into the courtyard of the palace, quite as if the whole place belonged to him; and catching sight of Prince Vance at the window above, he raised one finger, long and skinny and blue as a larkspur blossom, and beckoned for him to come down.

The Prince hesitated. Certainly the Blue Wizard was not so charming in his looks as to make one wish to get any nearer to him, but Vance happened to remember that his godmother had seemed to disapprove most highly of this very wizard; so with an idea of displeasing Copetta, the Prince obeyed the beckoning finger and went down.

At a nearer view the Wizard looked even uglier than from a distance. His very lips were blue, and when he opened his mouth his tongue was seen to be blue also.

"Come," he said to the Prince, in rather an injured tone, "you keep me waiting long enough, I hope, when I only came to teach you a droll trick."

"That is good," answered Vance, growing interested at once. "I do like droll tricks. What is it?"

"It is in here," the Blue Wizard said, holding out a pretty gold bonbon box. "Just make anybody eat one of these, and then you shall see what you shall see."

The Prince took the box in his hand and opened his lips to ask another question; but before he could speak a single word the Blue Wizard had vanished quite away, and he stood alone.

He went slowly and thoughtfully upstairs, wondering what the trick could be.

"I'll try it on the tutor first," he concluded, "because I'm sure I don't care what happens to him, and I really must know what the droll trick is."

So he went smilingly up to his tutor and offered the open box; and the simple old gentleman, suspecting nothing, bowed and simpered at the great honor his Royal Highness did him, and quickly swallowed one of the little bonbons.

And this is what happened. Pouf! The unfortunate tutor shut up like a crush-hat, and shrunk together until he was as short as a pygmy and as plump as a mushroom. Really one might just as well have no tutor at all as to have one so tiny. How Prince Vance did laugh! Of all the wizards he had ever known – and for one so young his Highness had known a great many wizards; he almost always met more or less of them when he played truant by climbing out of a back window and going into the woods fishing – he thought the Blue Wizard was the most amusing and had invented the very drollest trick.

"Dear me, your Highness!" said the poor tutor, in so tiny a voice that it was quite all the Prince could do to hear him. "Dear me! what is the matter? I certainly feel very queer; I do, indeed."

"You look even queerer than you feel, I fancy," replied the naughty Prince, chuckling with glee.

He picked up the poor tutor, and putting him on the window-sill laughed at him till his sides were fairly sore. Then he began to consider how he could get the most fun and make the most mischief out of his bonbons, for there were not a great many of them; and, being a shrewd young rascal, he at last contrived the plan of putting them into the ice-cream which was then being frozen for the royal dinner. Then everybody would be sure to get a taste at least of the magic potion; and slipping down into the kitchen, the wicked young Prince succeeded in carrying out this evil and dangerous plan.

III

Everybody looked at the Prince when at dinner he declined ice-cream. It was unheard of. Nobody had ever known him to do such a thing before. The twelve young Princesses, though much too well bred to remark upon it, stared at their brother with their twenty-four beady blue eyes, and made their twelve little mouths as round as penny pieces in their surprise.

Now the King, being fond of ice-cream, happened to eat quite steadily for some moments without stopping; so that when he did look up he beheld his Queen already shrunk to the size of a teaspoon, and every moment growing smaller.

"My dear," said he, gravely, "really I don't think you ought, – before the children too; just consider what a bad example you are setting them."

"I'm sure, Sire," replied the Queen, rather crossly, for the sudden shrinking had given her quite a giddy feeling, – "I'm sure I cannot imagine what you are talking about. Bad example, indeed! You had better be looking to your own behavior. What the children will think of you for growing so very small, I'm sure I cannot imagine."

At this moment the royal pair looked about on their daughters. They were about the size of lucifer matches! They ran their eyes down the long table; every person there was a pygmy.

Horror and fear filled every mind save that of Prince Vance. He nearly went wild with joy over the great success of his trick. He had, it is true, run out of the dining-hall at first, from his old habit of starting off whenever he had performed any of his abominable jokes; but he soon ventured to come back again, and round and round the table he went, laughing as if he would kill himself at the tiny people sprawling helplessly in their big chairs.

The Prince helped himself to fruit and cakes and bonbons from the table. He seated his royal mother on top of the sugar-bowl, and put the poor old King in the salt-cellar. As for the Lord Chancellor, whom he especially hated, Vance dumped the bewigged old fop into the pepper-box, where he would really have sneezed himself to death in another minute, had not the Blue Wizard fortunately appeared and given the unhappy man a sudden bath in a finger-bowl.

"It worked well, didn't it?" the Blue Wizard observed with a grin, as he put the Lord Chancellor, very white and limp, on the window-seat to dry in the sun.

"Oh, awfully well!" Vance replied briskly, although secretly he was more than a little afraid of this particular wizard, who seemed to be much more sudden in his way of appearing and disappearing than the common sort of wizards to which the Prince was accustomed.

"The worst of it is," remarked the Wizard, thoughtfully, pulling his bushy eyebrows with his long blue fingers, "you can't change 'em back."

"What!" exclaimed the Prince, in his confusion dropping his father into the pudding sauce and entirely ruining the royal robes. "Can't change them back? But you must change them back if I tell you to."

"Oh, as to that," the Blue Wizard answered carelessly, giving the king in turn a bath in the finger-bowl, "what you say isn't of the least consequence any way. In the first place, no wizard is bound to obey anybody who does not himself know how to obey; and in the second place, nobody can undo this particular charm but the Crushed Strawberry Wizard."

"Very well, then," said Vance, imperiously, paying no attention whatever to the first part of the Blue Wizard's remark; "go and get the Crushed Strawberry Wizard."

"Get him yourself!" was the answer. "I don't want him. It is nothing to me, you know; this isn't my family."

"But where does the Crushed Strawberry Wizard live?" asked the Prince, more humbly.

"I'm sure I've no idea," the Blue Wizard replied lightly; "and now I think of it, I don't believe I care. I'm sure I don't see why I should."

"But it's all your fault," blubbered Vance, beginning to cry, and sitting down upon his uncle, the Duke Ogee, without even noticing him till the Duke wriggled so that Vance jumped up in a fright, thinking he had sat down upon a frog. "I'm sure you got me into the scrape."

"Now you're getting tiresome," said the Wizard, yawning. "I never liked tiresome people myself."

"But I don't know what to do-oo!" sobbed the Prince.

At this the Wizard only gave a terrible laugh and vanished quite away again, leaving the naughty young Prince to get out of his trouble as best he could.

IV

For a few moments Prince Vance continued to cry rather noisily, though it must be confessed that it was more because he was so vexed at the Blue Wizard than because he was at all sorry for what he had done. Indeed, he did not even now realize that the trick was likely to turn out a very serious thing; and after a while he dried his eyes, and having collected his wits proceeded to collect also all the little people and put them together at one end of the royal dining-table.

They made such a pretty sight, with their little court robes and tiny jewels, that Vance was charmed with them and declared them to be more interesting than white mice or even guinea pigs. He could hear them, too, if he listened very closely indeed, quarrelling and blaming one another for what had befallen them; and this was so vastly funny to the wicked Prince that he rubbed his hands and fairly danced again with glee. It was only when the palace cat, pouncing upon the Lord Chancellor as he lay upon the window-sill, snatched him and carried him off in her mouth, that Vance began to be a little frightened, and to realize that, having made the whole family unable to protect themselves, it had now become his duty to care for them and see that they came to no harm. He just managed to save the Lord Chancellor from the lantern jaws of the royal cat, and then proceeded at once to set his small family in safe places for the night. Some he put in the crystal lily-cups of the chandeliers; others in the crannies of the golden mouldings on the wall; while for the King and Queen and the twelve little Princesses, he found a lovely chamber in a pink porcelain shell which hung from the ceiling by silver chains, and was commonly used for the burning of perfumes and spices to make the air of the dining-hall sweet and delightful. All this being attended to, the Prince betook himself to bed; but the palace seemed very lonely and silent, and the Prince was so dull and so frightened that he might not have gone to sleep at all, save for the cheering thought that at least there was no danger of lessons on the morrow, as the tutor was too small to teach, and his father and mother far too little to make him obey.

"I will go to the preserve closets," he murmured to himself as he was dropping off to sleep. "There is now nobody to stop me. I shall begin with the damsons and the honey in the morning, and I shall have all the wedding cake and macaroons that I can possibly eat."

But, alas for the Prince! when morning came he found that affairs were turning out differently indeed from the way in which he had planned. When he came down to breakfast, with his foolish head full of visions of ordering the cook to send up pigeon pot-pie, curry of larks, strong coffee, – which was a forbidden delight to the Prince except upon his birthdays, – and unlimited buttered toast and jam, what a downfall to all his hopes was it to find, pacing the dining-hall, the fierce and cruel General Bopi, who, luckily for himself, had been out hunting the day before, and so missed the fatal dinner, and was still quite as large as life if not larger. He had discovered the state of affairs at the palace; and so far from making himself unhappy about this, he was evidently in great good spirits, and, to say the least, was disposed to make the best of matters instead of the worst. He had put on the King's very best crown which was kept to be worn only on great occasions, and with a cloak of royal ermine on his shoulders was strutting boldly up and down, enjoying his new splendors and the feeling of power which they brought.

How it happened Vance never was quite able to tell, but the first thing he knew, his dreams of having his own way and ordering the servants about to his heart's content were shattered, and he found himself somehow pushed and hustled outside on the palace steps, – himself, the Prince, and heir to the royal throne, turned away from his own door and ordered to leave the kingdom on pain of death.

"But my family!" cried Vance; "I hid them from the cat, and now they will starve. Nobody can find them but me!"

"As for their starving," the General replied indifferently, "I don't know that I care for that; but I would rather the palace should be rid of the whole vermin race of them, so you may come in and gather them up. But be quick about it, or I'll set the royal bloodhounds on you!"

Thus roughly treated, the poor Prince made haste to collect his scattered family from the nooks and crannies where he had hidden them. He was cramming them into his pockets with very little thought for their feelings, when he happened to remember his sister's baby-house, which not only had parlors, bedrooms, and dining-rooms in plenty, but was well furnished with everything which the heart of little people could desire. This he begged very humbly of the new king, and having it granted him he packed his family into it, making them as comfortable as their reduced circumstances would allow. A grinning footman strapped the box on the back of the Prince as an organ-grinder carries his organ; then he helped him out of the palace with a sudden push which had nearly sent him headlong down the steps. Laughing pages ran before him, and the Prince recalled the many times he had tweaked their noses and stuck pins in the calves of their legs. Everybody seemed heartily glad to see him go.

"Good riddance to bad rubbish!" quoth the palace hound; "you will never again put my meat up a tree where I cannot get it."

"Get out with you!" snapped the royal cat. "I'm glad you are turned out of the house. Let us hope a body can take a nap in comfort now, without having her tail stepped on or snuff sprinkled in her face."

"Don't trouble yourself ever to come back," screeched the peacock, hoarsely. "For my part, I'm tired of having my handsomest tail-feathers snatched out by the handful. I'm sure I trust I shall never set eyes on you again."

So it was with all the animals in the royal gardens. The deer, the emus, the gazelles, the swans, the flamingoes, the parrots, even his own particular white mice and spotted guinea pigs, declared that they were glad he was going, and hoped he might never come back any more. Not a creature did anything but rejoice as the royal beggar was tumbled rudely out from his own father's gardens and left standing alone in the highway, already heartily sorry for his prank, and quite at his wits' end as to what to do with the Court which he carried in his baggage.

V

Considering that Prince Vance had never done anything at all for himself, not even so much as to tie his own shoe-strings, it was a pretty hard lot for him to be turned out into the world to get his own living, and take care of the whole Court besides. At first he was almost tempted to throw away the box and all his relatives with it; but although of course he could not be expected to think so much of his father and mother now that there was so very little of them to be fond of, still under all his follies Vance had a good sort of heart, and so he trudged away with the troublesome little Court strapped tightly to his shoulders. I am not perfectly sure that he did not take some pleasure in jolting it about, for I have more than once seen little folk bang and jerk bundles they were made to carry against their wills. At any rate, the King and the Queen and the Court came very near being seasick upon dry land, from the jolting and rocking of this new manner of travelling.

Prince Vance had not the least idea where he was going. He knew, of course, that he wanted to find the Crushed Strawberry Wizard, but he did not know where that individual lived, or how to go to work to find him; so he only made his best pace to get away from the palace as fast as he could, being afraid that the new king might repent of not having taken his head from his shoulders, and send somebody after him.

It was about sunset when he came to a beautiful field which lay along the banks of a wide dark river; and Vance, who by this time was half starved, was delighted that wild strawberries grew here in great plenty, making the ground quite red. He first looked about for somebody to pick them for him, but naturally he found no one; so he set down his luggage and fell to helping himself, eating very fast and paying very little attention to the rules of good society.

It was not until he had stuffed himself to the throat that he happened to think that his travelling companions might also be hungry. He opened the box and let them out, and found much pleasure in watching their funny antics as they stumbled over tiny pebbles or became entangled in the grass and struggled helplessly as if caught in some horrible thicket. Two or three would seat themselves around one ripe berry, and dine from it where it was growing; others drank drops of the evening dew, which already shone in the clover leaves and buttercups; while the Lord Chancellor, who seemed to be always getting into trouble, picked some sort of quarrel with a large green grasshopper, – and so terrible did the battle become that there is no telling who would have come out of it alive had not Vance gone to the poor Lord's help and frightened the insect away.

Under all these trying circumstances the poor nobles kept something of their court manners; and their smiles and stately movements, their bowings and courtesies, seemed to Prince Vance so droll that he went into violent fits of laughter and rolled about on the grass.

As it grew dark he did indeed stop laughing and think longingly of his soft bed with its silken pillows and down coverings, but in truth he was so tired he could hardly keep his eyes open at all; and as soon as he had picked his small relatives and friends out of the damp grass and put them safely into their box, he lay down under a spreading beech-tree and fell into a sound and delicious sleep.

The morning found the Prince somewhat refreshed and gave him a fresh determination. He resolved to set out at once on the search for the Crushed Strawberry Wizard, leaving no means untried until he discovered him and prevailed upon him to change the transformed Court to its former condition. He shouldered his box and started bravely on the road, not knowing at all where he was going, and already beginning to regret that he had not paid to his lessons at least sufficient attention to have learned in which direction his own kingdom extended.

He had walked an hour or two when he saw by the roadside a man engaged in gathering the down from the tall thistles that grew by the way.

"Hallo!" cried the Prince; "what do you expect to do with that?"

"Beds," answered the man, shortly, and without stopping his work.

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