

"MY poor flowers are quite dead!" said little Ida. "They were so pretty yesterday, and now all the leaves hang withered. Why do they do that?" she asked the Student, who sat on the sofa; for she liked him very much. He knew the prettiest stories, and could cut out the most amusing pictures: hearts, with little ladies in them who danced; flowers, and great castles in which one could open the doors; he was a merry student. "Why do the flowers look so faded to-day?" she asked again, and showed him a nosegay, which was quite withered.

"Do you know what's the matter with them?" said the Student. "The flowers have been at a ball last night, and that's why they hang their heads."

"But flowers cannot dance!" cried little Ida.

"O yes," said the Student, "when it grows dark, and we are asleep, they jump about merrily. Almost every night they have a ball."

"Can children go to this ball?"

"Yes," said the Student, "quite little daisies, and lilies of the valley."

"Where do the beautiful flowers dance?" asked Ida.

"Have you not often been outside the town gate, by the great castle, where the king lives in summer, and where the beautiful garden is with all the flowers? You have seen the swans, which swim up to you when you want to give them bread crumbs? There are capital balls there, believe me."

"I was out there in the garden yesterday, with my mother," said Ida; "but all the leaves were off the trees, and there was not one flower left. Where are they? In the summer I saw so many."

"They are within, in the castle," replied the Student. "You must know, as soon as the king and all the court go to town, the flowers run out of the garden into the castle and are merry. You should see that. The two most beautiful roses seat themselves on the throne, and then they are king and queen; all the red coxcombs range themselves on either side, and stand and bow; they are the chamberlains. Then all the pretty flowers come, and there is a great ball. The blue violets represent little naval cadets; they dance with hyacinths and crocuses, which they call young ladies; the tulips and great tiger-lilies are old ladies who keep watch that the dancing is well done, and that everything goes on with propriety."



"But," asked little Ida, "is nobody there who hurts the flowers, for dancing in the king's castle?"

"There is nobody who really knows about it," answered the Student. "Sometimes, certainly, the old steward of the castle comes at night, and he has to watch there. He has a great bunch of keys with him; but as soon as the flowers hear the keys rattle they are quite quiet, hide behind the long curtains, and only poke their heads out. Then the old steward says, 'I smell that there are flowers here,' but he cannot see them."

"That is famous!" cried little Ida, clapping her hands. "But should not I be able to see the flowers?"

"Yes," said the student: "only remember, when you go out again, to peep through the window; then you will see them. That is what I did to-day. There was a long yellow lily lying on the sofa and stretching herself. She was a court lady."

"Can the flowers out of the Botanical Garden get there? Can they go the long distance?"

"Yes, certainly," replied the Student; "if they like they can fly. Have you not seen the beautiful butterflies—red, yellow, and white? They almost look like flowers; and that is what they have been. They have flown off their stalks high into the air, and have beaten it with their leaves, as if these leaves were little wings, and thus they flew. And because they behaved themselves well, they got leave to fly about in the day-time too, and were not obliged to sit still upon their stalks at home; and thus at last the leaves became real wings. That you have seen yourself. It may be, however, that the flowers in the Botanical Garden have never been in the king's castle, or that they don't know of the merry proceedings there at night. Therefore I will tell you something: he will be very much surprised, the botanical professor, who lives close by here. You know him, do you not? When you come into his garden, you must tell one of the flowers that there is a great ball yonder in the castle. Then that flower tell it to all the rest, and then they will fly away: when the professor comes out into the garden, there will not be a single flower left, and he won't be able to make out where they are gone."

"But how can one flower tell it to another? For, you know, flowers cannot speak."

"That they cannot, certainly," replied the Student; "but then they make signs."