"Yon maid's wanting in respect," grumbled the old woman.

There was a sound of horses' hooves clattering down the cobblestones, and the crowd hushed.

"The King! The King!" whispered one to the other, and suddenly the King appeared, riding on a white charger, his fair hair gleaming more brightly than the gold of his horse's trappings.

His flashing silver lance made one line with his slim, erect body.

A great shout arose, "Long live the King!"

As the King neared the end of the line, he became aware of a child with bent head, her banner lying at her feet—no words of greeting on her lips.

"A little rebel," he mused and chuckled softly to himself. He knew the feeling only too well, he to whom a carpenter's bench was more desirable than a crown.



When the King had passed, a soldier seized the child roughly by the arm.

"Get thee to thy hut, thou art naught but a disloyal maid, and it will be thy fault if the townsfolk lose the royal charter."

Shaking with sobs, the little girl left the crowd.

Then the people became aware that the King had wheeled his charger round. He rode up to the mayor and said:

"I would speak to the little maid, she who unfurled not her banner."

A murmur went through the crowd.

"'Tis to the dungeons he will order her."

"Nay, she ought to be burnt at the stake," said Elgiva.

"I trow it is a whipping through the streets His Majesty will order," muttered one of the soldiers.

The mayor, trembling with wrath, led the way to the hut. After inquiring the little girl's name, the King motioned the mayor to leave him.

Alone he entered the hut, where in a corner Joanna crouched sobbing.

"My child, why didst thou not unfurl thy banner, nor yet shout with the crowd?"

"Wilt not thou tell me what is troubling thee?" Gently the King raised the little girl to her feet, and took from his tunic a piece of silk, a lily on a background of green, so delicately perfumed that the embroidered flower seemed real. He began to dry the child's eyes.

Then he led her towards a high wooden bench standing in the corner of the hut, and the next minute Joanna felt a pair of strong hands lift her on to it, and the King, with a graceful leap, came and sat next to her, just like a big brother.

Something snapped in the child's heart, and she found she could tell the King the thing she had not been able to explain to either the old woman or the soldier.

"The King is dead, 'tis not any other King I want . . . I loved him right dearly."

Sobs shook her and the King waited patiently until they had abated. He held one little hand in his and noticed how reddened were the knuckles. Then deeply moved, he asked:

"Why didst thou love my father so much? Hast thou ever spoken to him?"

Then Joanna told him how one day, nigh on four years ago, the King had ridden past her hut. She was lying sick of the fever . . . three days before the plague had carried off her father and having no mother there was none to tend her. The King had entered the hut and found her crying bitterly.

He went outside again, tethered his horse to the tree, and then with his own hands fetched water from the well and bathed her head. Then he made a medicine of herbs to cool the fever and before he left filled the gold horn with goat's milk and gave it to her to drink. Then he had kissed her, just as her own father used to do. At this memory Joanna's sobs overcame her again, and the King waited until she grew quieter. Then he held out his hand.

"I thank thee little maid for what thou hast told me. Yet... others forget so soon," he mused, gazing out of the hut with a sad expression on his face.



Meet the bride and bridegroom. Mr. and Mrs. John Binge, of Boggabilla.