

## **The Enchanted Lute**

**By Claire Falconer**

Once upon a time, there was a noble king who ruled over a peaceful kingdom. As the king aged, the time came for him to select an heir to the throne. The wise king saw that his eldest child, Cadalia, was not fit for ruling, so he selected his second eldest, Reginald, to be his successor. This decision enraged Cadalia, but she dared not defy her father, so she ran away from the kingdom to bide her time and plot revenge.

When the old king died, the people of the kingdom mourned greatly. Then Reginald and his lovely wife were crowned king and queen. A year of prosperity passed in which the queen gave birth to a lovely daughter. The young princess, Lynelle, brought joy to her parents and the entire palace.

Once, when Princess Lynelle was eight years old, King Reginald invited the entire kingdom to a party at the castle. A great banquet was prepared and the halls were decked with bouquets of flowers and colorful banners. Sunlight streamed in through the palace windows and brightened the rooms. The halls overflowed with merry villagers, who had arrived for the feast, and a troupe of excellent musicians played for entertainment.

Amidst the flurry of preparation, Princess Lynelle slipped away and ran to the sunny meadow to gather wildflowers to decorate the feasting tables. No one noticed her departure, and the party continued without her.

When all of the guests were settled in the banquet hall, King Reginald stood in order to propose a toast. But before a word left his mouth, the hall doors flew open with a deafening bang. The unceremonious intruder was Cadalia, the cruel sister of the king, who had returned to take her revenge. Her dress was brilliant green, like poison, and she wore a sash which was as red as blood. Her dark eyes flashed with anger at the sight before her.

“You are a traitor and usurper!” she screeched at the king. “How dare you seize the throne that is rightfully mine!”

All eyes were upon her as she glided to the center of the room. “I have come to avenge myself, for I am now a powerful enchantress.”

She turned upon a terrified musician and snatched a lute out of his quivering hands. “Beware the music of the lute,” she hissed, “for within its notes an enchantment brews!”

As she spoke, she began plucking the strings of the lute. An enchanting strain of notes wove its way around the room. The spell of music hung thickly in the air, casting everyone in the palace into an enchanted sleep.

Meanwhile, Princess Lynelle still gathered flowers in the meadow, completely unaware of what was taking place at the castle. As she stooped to pick a lovely pink snapdragon, she heard a soft flurry of wings above her head and looked up to see three fairies hovering over her. The fairies wore shimmering silver dresses and had wavy golden hair. Their transparent wings glittered in the sunlight.

“My dear princess,” the first fairy said in a voice that tinkled like silver bells, “we are the fairies of this meadow, and we have come to present you with three gifts.”

“Thank you,” said the bewildered princess, “but why, if you please?”

“They will prove quite useful in your near future,” the fairy replied. She handed Lynelle a delicate white rose. “Keep this rose with you and it will protect you from all evil enchantments.”

Lynelle took the rose with a grateful smile. The second fairy gifted Lynelle with an ornate mirror which reflected all for what it truly was. The third fairy handed the princess a small silver box, saying, “This box can capture any sight or sound you wish to contain.”

Before Lynelle had time to fully express her thanks, the three fairies disappeared in a puff of mist. Grateful, pleased and slightly perplexed, Lynelle carefully tucked the three gifts into her girdle. Suddenly, the sky became overcast and there was an ominous clap of thunder. Carefully sheltering her gifts from the rain, Lynelle hurried back toward the castle.

By the time she reached the servant’s entrance to the palace, she was soaked through. Expecting a scolding, Lynelle was relieved to find that the back halls were empty. But her relief soon gave way to anxiety, for each room she passed, which was usually full of bustling servants and courtiers, was silent and abandoned.

As the princess neared the banquet hall, an eerie strain of music met her ears. Filled with a sudden sense of urgency, Lynelle rushed to the hall doors and flung them open. A dreadful sight met her eyes.

The king and queen, along with all of the courtiers, servants, guests and minstrels were spread throughout the banquet hall, cast into an enchanted slumber. In the corner of the room sat a maiden, playing a lute. Her long black hair cascaded over her shoulders, and her dark eyes glittered in the dim light.

“My dear niece, I have been waiting for you,” the enchantress called in a sweetly flattering voice. She expected the princess to give way to the enchantment immediately, and was surprised that Lynelle remained wholly unaffected.

Lynelle also wondered at this, but then remembered the white rose which the fairies had given her, as well as the other two gifts. Although she was frightened, this remembrance gave her courage. Bravely, Lynelle stepped into the banquet hall. Her bright eyes sparkled with fierce determination.

The puzzled enchantress strummed the lute faster and louder, but to no avail.

Lynelle was not sure from where the enchantment was coming, but after glancing through the mirror which the fairies had gifted to her, she perceived that the music, which was reflected as a visible pale green smog, was the source of the enchantment.

Pulling out the small silver box, Lynelle opened its lid. "I wish for you to catch and contain the enchanting music," she commanded it.

Instantly, the enchantment lifted as the music rushed into the little box and the lid snapped shut. The storm outside ceased, and a shaft of golden sunlight streamed into the hall. The spell was broken.

As if awaking from a deep slumber, the king, queen, courtiers, servants, guests and musicians staggered sleepily to their feet.

With a terrible screech, the enraged enchantress flung her lute into the air. The enchanted lute revolved twice in the air and then plummeted down upon the enchantress's head, killing her and shattering itself simultaneously.

Princess Lynelle was joyfully reunited with her parents, and the banquet which followed was the greatest the kingdom had ever seen. The food was delicious, the speeches engaging and the dancing lively. The entire kingdom praised the princess for her bravery, and the three fairies of the meadow were acknowledged with much thankfulness.

With the threat of the enchantress gone, the three gifts from the fairies were stored in the castle treasury where they would be kept safe till some other trouble should arise.

King Reginald and his wife became the kindest and wisest rulers of their time, and Princess Lynelle grew into a graceful and clever maiden. And so the king, queen, and princess lived happily ever after.

The End