A Spot of Indigestion
by Ana Mohan

Once upon a time, in a small vine clad house in the country, there lived a gentleman. To the passing farmer it might appear to be an ordinary house, and an ordinary gentleman, but the gentleman did not share this opinion. In fact, he had a high estimation of his own wisdom and position in life. The gentleman's pride and joy was his small private library, which held large imposing folios with titles like, *The Paleolithic Evolution of Parasitical Creatures,* or, *Is There a Necessary Being of Beings? By Lord Mendleboro*. Having read several of these books, he knew without a shadow of a doubt all the secrets of the universe.

With such settled opinions, the gentleman lived a very settled life. He spent leisurely summer afternoons sitting and reading in a parlor window overlooking the road and watching passers by. With pitying eyes he spied the farmer whistling as he passed with a new plowshare, and the milkmaid chatting gaily with her friends. How little they must know of the world around them! For dinner he ate salad and porridge and warm milk, which he considered the only acceptable dinner for a gentleman in his position. At twilight he went for his customary walk to expand the lungs. It was on one such walk that the most unusual incident occurred.

The gentleman had just rounded a bend in the green leafy lane. He expected to see the gate of the neighboring widow's manor, and perhaps a farmer on his way home from the market. Instead, he saw a glittering royal carriage, an elegantly dressed woman with wings sprouting from her shoulders, and a beautiful girl. Wings! What possible explanation was there for this strange creature? Panic stricken, the gentleman recited to himself the different species of winged creatures he knew. Meanwhile, the fairy was saying to the girl, "You must be back before the clock strikes midnight! For then my enchantments will cease and all will go back to what it was before." The horses started and the carriage rumbled off down the lane. And now the gentleman was more terrified than ever. He was alone with the creature, but stood rooted to the ground, his face a delicate shade of white. It was at this very moment that the fairy first noticed his presence. Being in the good humor that comes with doing some generous deed, she looked magnanimously towards the humble human. "Is there any wish I can grant you?" she said with a kind smile. "Surley there is something you desire? Wisdom? Youth? Wealth? Ask and your wish will be granted."

"But—but it is a scientific fact! In fact there is no proof whatsoever—what I mean to say is—this is all nonsense!" he blustered.

The fairy laughed. “Surely you believe your own eyes. Did you not see the poor stepdaughter of the widow dressed in fine clothes and riding in a carriage?” To her surprise the gentleman now seemed relieved.

“Why yes, I did! That’s it! I must be seeing things. In fact, I’m sure there have been many such cases. A wilted lettuce, some spoiled milk, leading to confusion of the mind. Or perhaps,” he said, growing increasingly excited, “it is a hallucination brought on by some trick of my mind. In fact, I’m sure I read something Lord Marlborough wrote on the subject. He said, ‘people of great intelligence can be subject to episodes of hallucination.’ Why, I’m surprised it hasn’t happened to me before!”

The fairy had listened to this monologue with a mixture of consternation and amusement. “Well!” she began.

“No, no!” the gentleman interrupted, his hand raised to silence her. “I will not stand here listening to a bit of wilted lettuce or a figment of my imagination. What I really need is a long night of rest.”

And he turned without acknowledging the fairy and marched back down the lane in the direction of his house. “Merely a spot of indigestion!” he assured himself. “To think some people actually believe such things! Fairies and trolls and such,” he thought pityingly as he walked.

By the next week the gentleman had convinced himself to stop thinking of the incident. If he did, it was with a certain satisfaction in his logical conclusion and distinguished conduct under the circumstances. On a summer morning that same week, he sat in his breakfast room with the newspaper before him. He glanced over it. At the top of the page was written, “From Housemaid to Princess: How the Prince Chose a Commoner for a Bride." He turned the page and sighed, “Some people are just born lucky.”