THE GALOSHES OF FORTUNE

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1. FOR THE BEGINNING



It was in Copenhagen, in one of the houses on East Street, not far from King's Newmarket, that someone was giving a large party. For one must give a party once in a while, if one expects to be invited in return. Half of the guests were already at the card tables, and the rest were waiting to see what would come of their hostess's query:

"What can we think up now?"

Up to this point, their conversation had gotten along as best it might. Among other things, they had spoken of the Middle Ages. Some held that it was a time far better than our own. Indeed Councilor of Justice Knap defended this opinion with such spirit that his hostess sided with him at once, and both of them loudly took exception to Oersted's article in the Almanac, which contrasted old times and new, and which favored our own period. The Councilor of Justice, however, held that the time of King Hans, about 1500 A.D., was the noblest and happiest age.

While the conversation ran pro and con, interrupted only for a moment by the arrival of a newspaper, in which there was nothing worth reading, let us adjourn to the cloak room, where all the wraps, canes, umbrellas, and galoshes were collected together. Here sat two maids, a young one and an old one. You might have thought they had come in attendance upon some spinster or widow, and were waiting to see their mistress home. However, a closer inspection would reveal that these were no ordinary serving women. Their hands were too well kept for that, their bearing and movements too graceful, and their clothes had a certain daring cut.

They were two fairies. The younger one, though not Dame Fortune herself, was an assistant to one of her ladies in waiting, and was used to deliver the more trifling gifts of Fortune. The older one looked quite grave. She was Dame Care, who always goes in her own sublime person to see to her errands herself, for then she knows that they are well done.

They were telling each other about where they had been that day. The assistant of Fortune had only attended to a few minor affairs, she said, such as saving a new bonnet from the rain, getting a civil greeting for an honest man from an exalted nincompoop, and such like matters. But her remaining errand was an extraordinary one.

"I must also tell you," she said, "that today is my birthday, and in honor of this I have been entrusted to bring a pair of galoshes to mankind. These galoshes have this peculiarity, that whoever puts them on will immediately find himself in whatever time, place, and condition of life that he prefers. His every wish in regard to time and place will instantly be granted, so for once a man can find perfect happiness here below."

"Take my word for it." said Dame Care, "he will be most unhappy, and will bless the moment when he can rid himself of those galoshes."

" How can you say such a thing?" the other woman exclaimed. "I shall leave them here beside the door, where someone will put them on by mistake and immediately be the happy one."

That ended their conversation.