

**MELUSINE**

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Melusine by George Ernle

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**GEORGE ERNLE**

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## MELUSINE

### PART I

Once on a time and in the years of yore  
A maiden lived whom earthly mother bore  
And fairies stole. Her name was Melusine,  
And whom she served was of the fairies Queen.  
This Queen so loved her for her lovely face  
And for her courtesy and for her grace,  
She bade her on a day a boon to choose—  
Ask what she would, she could her naught refuse.  
'I choose,' quoth she, 'to be an earthly maid':  
And though they chided and for all they prayed,  
She would but this. Then though the Queen were loth,  
Yet she must yield, for saving of her oath,  
Far as she might (since out of fairy thrall,  
Queen though she were, she might not free her all);  
So spake and answered—'Thou shalt serve,' quoth she,  
'One night in seven. For the rest, go free.  
But, Melusine, betray not us and ours,  
Nor bring with thee no mortals to our bowers.  
This, Melusine, thou diest, if thou dost.'  
Bowed Melusine as meekly as she must.  
No better ways her freedom was to win,  
So forth she went. Here doth her tale begin.  
Nigh to a forest rose a slippery steep  
Of burnt brown turf, a pasturage of sheep,



Browèd with rocks, which overhung and gave  
A little shallow shelter like a cave.  
A clear-cut shadow slept on summer-noons  
There, to the bumble-bee's moss-tangled tunes.  
Dwarf bracken filled the hollow of the ground  
Before it, and the foxglove clustered round  
Of bells nigh beggared ; there were harebells sown  
Over the thin scalp of each baking stone.  
Here day by day under blue lonely skies  
The maiden sits with longing in her eyes,  
No further daring toward the world she needs,  
Than from a wood a rabbit runs and feeds.  
But on a morning, as it chanced so,  
She heard one hunting in the woods below,  
And on the stag he followed such a spell  
She cast as drew the creature to her cell,  
And after him both hounds and hunter sped.  
It was a boy, but newly ripe to wed,  
In looks a maid, but manly to the ear—  
Who kissed his roses had no thorns to fear.  
Wide-eyed with wonder he drew rein to see  
Clad in her hair, which hid her to the knee,  
A girl—her arm a snowy halter placed  
About the trembling quarry that he chased—  
And smiling on his hounds which leapt and bayed.  
Swift was his thought—' It is an holy maid.

Look to the hounds! By God, they will her slay!  
So down he leapt and whipped his hounds away;  
And thus the maid yet smiling him addressed—

‘Beautiful boy, this creature is my guest.  
Spare him—to murder is not in thy mien.  
I am a maiden, I am Melusine,  
And here I dwell all out of sight and mind,  
Because I will not commerce with my kind  
Whiles they are cruel. But if thou wilt mend—  
Wilt thou?—I welcome thee and call thee friend.’

And with the word all suddenly she gave  
Her hands in his and drew him to the cave;  
There in the shadow seated him apace  
And stood before him smiling in his face.  
The boy was dumber than the beast whose dread  
Snorted beside him. His wits wanderèd.  
But when he saw her smiling he awoke  
Hotly to speech and stammered as he spoke.  
His name was Melisèrt and he the son  
Of Sagramore and brethren had he none,  
Nor parents—all were buried long ago.  
These hills he hunted and had thought to know  
Until that morn: but never had he known,  
God was adorèd in their hollow stone  
By maiden's knee. ‘For lady, as I guess,’  
Quoth he, ‘thou art an holy hermitess,

Casting thy beauty like a beggar's shoe  
In an old pit, to home in yonder blue.'

'Friend, all I am,' she smiled, 'thou seest well,  
And there remains no more of me to tell.  
I tumbled as I played when I was young,  
As children will, and bit into my tongue,  
As children do; and rising, well-a-day,  
What told the past was bitten clean away;  
The bit which tells the present only left.  
Prithee, remember I am so bereft.  
Though thou should'st question until I should weep,  
What is, I only tell—what was, I keep.  
Now rendering thee such answer as I can—  
I am a maiden as thou art a man.  
Art thou content with this? As I hear say,  
This hath contented many in their day.  
Be thou contented, and unless thou art,  
As of thy will thou camest, so depart.'

Content was Melisert. His eyes were deep  
In beauty, as a hundred head of sheep  
All feeding fast should wander in a mead,  
Where yet the grass springs faster than they feed.  
He was content with anything to be  
Still where he was, still what he saw to see,  
And fain to catch and kiss, to touch and toy;  
But clear she eyed him as boy eyes boy  
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