

# The Dice-Box. A Fairy Tale.

By Horace Walpole

*Translated from the French Translation of the  
Countess DAUNOIS, for the Entertainment of  
Miss CAROLINE CAMPBELL.<sup>1</sup>*

There was a merchant of Damascus named Aboulcasem, who had an only daughter called Piffimiffi, which signifies *the waters of Jordan*; because a fairy foretold at her birth that she would be one of Solomon's concubines. Azazel, the angel of death, having transported Aboulcasem to the regions of bliss, he had no fortune to bequeath to his beloved child but the shell of a pistachia-nut drawn by an elephant and a ladybird. Piffimiffi, who was but nine years old, and who had been kept in great confinement, was impatient to see the world; and no sooner was the breath out of her father's body, than she got into the car, and whipping her elephant and ladybird, drove out of the yard as fast as possible, without knowing whither she was going. Her coursers never stopped till they came to the foot of a brazen tower, that had neither doors nor windows, in which lived an old enchantress, who had locked herself up there with seventeen thousand husbands. It had but one single vent for air, which was a small chimney grated over, through which it was scarce possible to put one's hand. Piffimiffi, who was very impatient, ordered her couriers to fly with her up to the top of the chimney, which, as they were the most docile creatures in the world, they immediately did; but unluckily the fore paw of the elephant lighting on the top of the chimney, broke down the grate by its weight, but at the same time stopped up the passage so entirely, that all the enchantress's husbands were stifled for want of air. As it was a collection she had made with great care and cost, it is easy to imagine her vexation and rage. She raised a storm of thunder and lightning that lasted eight hundred and four years; and having conjured up an army of two thousand devils, she ordered them to flay the elephant alive, and dress it for her supper with anchovy sauce. Nothing could have saved the poor beast, if, slugging to get loose from the chimney, he had not happily broken wind, which it seems is a great preservative against devils. They all flew a thousand ways, and in their hurry carried away half the brazen tower, by which means the elephant, the car, the ladybird, and Piffimiffi got loose; but in their fall tumbled through the roof of an apothecary's shop, and broke all his bottles of physic. The elephant, who was very dry with his fatigue, and who had not much taste, immediately sucked up all the medicines with his proboscis, which occasioned such a variety of effects in his bowels, that it was well he had such a strong constitution, or he must have died of it. His evacuations were so plentiful, that he not only drowned the tower of Babel, near which the apothecary's shop stood, but the current ran fourscore leagues till it came to the sea, and there poisoned so many whales and leviathans, that a pestilence ensued, and lasted three years, nine months and sixteen days. As the elephant was extremely weakened by what had happened, it was impossible for him to draw the car for eighteen months, which was a cruel delay to Piffimiffi's impatience, who during all that time could not travel above a hundred miles a day, for as she carried the sick animal in her lap, the poor ladybird could not make longer slages with no assistance. Besides, Piffimiffi bought every thing she saw wherever she came; and

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<sup>1</sup> *Eldest daughter of lord William Campbell; she lived with her aunt the countess of Ailesbury.*

all was crowded into the car and stuffed into the seat. She had purchased ninety-two dolls, seventeen baby-houses, six cart-loads of sugar-plumbs, a thousand ells of gingerbread, eight dancing dogs, a bear and a monkey, four toy-shops with all their contents, and seven dozen of bibs and aprons of the newest fashion. They were jogging on with all this cargo over mount Caucasus, when an immense humming-bird, who had been struck with the beauty of the ladybird's wings, that I had forgot to say were of ruby spotted with black pearls, sousing down at once upon her prey, swallowcd ladybird, Piffimiffi, the elephant, and all their commodities. It happened that the humming-bird belonged to Solomon; he let it out of its cage every morning after break-fast, and it constantly came home by the time the council broke up. Nothing could equal the surprise of his majesty and the courtiers, when the dear little creature arrived with the elephant's proboscis hanging out of its divine little bill. However, after the first astonishment was over, his majesty, who to be sure was wisdom itself, and who understood natural philosophy that it was a charm to hear him discourse of those matters, and who was actually making a collection of dried beasts and birds in twelve thousand volumes of the best fool's-cap paper, immediately perceived what had happened, and taking out of the fide pocket of his breeches a diamond toothpick-case of his own turning, with the toothpick made of the only, unicorn's horn he ever saw, he stuck it into the elephant's snout, and began to draw it out: but all his philosophy was confounded, when jammed between the elephant's legs he perceived the head of a beautiful girl, and between her legs a baby-house, which with the wings extended thirty feet, out of the windows of which rained a torrent of sugarplumbs, that had been placed there to make room. Then followed the bear, who had been pressed to the bales of gingerbread and was covered all over with it, and looked but uncouthly; and the monkey with a doll in every paw, and his pouches so crammed with sugar-plumbs that they hung on each side of him, and trailed on the ground behind like the duchess of —'s beautiful breasts. Solomon, however, gave small attention to this procession, being caught with the charms of the lovely Piffimiffi: he immediately began the song of songs extempore; and what he had seen—I mean, all that came out of the humming-bird's throat had made such a jumble in his ideas, that there was nothing so unlike to which he did not compare all Piffimiffi's beauties. As he sung his canticles too to no tune, and god knows had but a bad voice, they were far from comforting Piffimiffi: the elephant had torn her best bib and apron, and she cried and roared, and kept such a squalling, that though Solomon carried her in his arms, and showed her all the fine things in the temple, there was no pacifying her. The queen of Sheba, who was playing at backgammon with the high-priest, and who came every October to convene with Solomon, though she did not underftand a word of Hebrew, hearing the noise, came running out of her dressing-room; and seeing the king with a squalling child in his arms, asked him peevishly, if it became his reputed wisdom to expose himself with his bastards to all the court? Solomon, instead of replying, kept singing, "We have a little sister, and she has no breasts;" which so provoked the Sheban princess, that happening to have one of the dice-boxes in her hand, she without any ceremony threw it at his head. The enchantress, whom I mentioned before, and who, though invisible, had followed Piffimiffi, and drawn her into her train of misfortunes, turned the dice-box aside, and directed it to Piffimiffi's nofe, which being something flat, like madame de —'s, it stuck there, and being of ivory, Solomon ever after compared his beloved's nose to the tower that leads to Damascus. The queen, though ashamed of her behaviour, was not in her heart sorry for the accident; but when she found that it only increased the monarch's passion, her contempt redoubled; and calling him a thousand old fools to herself, she ordered her postchaise and drove away in a fury, without leaving sixpence for the

servants; and nobody knows what became of her or her kingdom, which has never been heard of since.