

FITZ-GERALD SHAFTO ADAIR

THE ZANKIWANK AND
THE BLETHERWITCH: AN
ORIGINAL FANTASTIC
FAIRY EXTRAVAGANZA

Shafto Fitz-Gerald

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Bletherwitch: An Original
Fantastic Fairy Extravaganza**

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S. J. Adair Fitz-Gerald

The Zankiwank and The Bletherwitch: An Original Fantastic Fairy Extravaganza

Part I

A Trip to Fable Land

*By the Queen-Moon's mystic light,
By the hush of holy night,
By the woodland deep and green,
By the starlight's silver sheen,
By the zephyr's whispered spell,
Brooding Powers Invisible,
Faerie Court and Elfin Throng,
Unto whom the groves belong,
And by Laws of ancient date,
Found in Scrolls of Faerie Fate,
Stream and fount are dedicate.
Whereso'er your feet to-day
Far from haunts of men may stray,
We adjure you stay no more
Exiles on an alien shore,
But with spells of magic birth
Once again make glad the earth.*

Philip Dayre.

"Well," said the Zankiwank as he swallowed another jam tart, "I think we had better start on our travels at once."

They were all standing under the clock at Charing Cross Station when the station was closed and everybody else had departed, except the train which the Zankiwank had himself chartered. It was all so odd and strange, and the gathering was so very motley, that if it had been to-morrow morning instead of last night, Willie and Maude would certainly have said they had both been dreaming. But, of course, they were not dreaming because they were wide-awake and dressed. Besides, they remembered Charing Cross Station quite well, having started therefrom with their father and mother only last summer when they went to the sea-side for their holidays – and what jolly times they had on the sands! So Maude said promptly, "It is not Night-mare or Dreams or Anything. We don't know what it is, but we must not go to sleep, Willie, in case anything should happen."

Willie replied that he did not want to go to sleep any more. "I believe it's a show," he added, "and somebody's run away with us. How lovely! I'm glad we are lost. Let us go and ask that tall gentleman, who looks like the parlour-tongs in a bathing-suit, to give us some more buns." For, being a boy, he could always eat buns, or an abundance of them, only I hope you won't tell the nursery governess I told you.

It was the Zankiwank, who was doing some conjuring tricks for the benefit of the Jackarandajam and Mr Swinglebinks, to whom Willie referred. The Zankiwank was certainly a very curious person to look at. He had very long legs, very long arms, and a very small body, a long neck and a head like a peacock. He was not wearing a bathing suit as Willie imagined, because there were tails to his jacket, hanging down almost to his heels. He wore a sash round his waist, and his clothes were all speckled as though he had been peppered with the colours out of a very large kaleidoscope. The Jackarandajam was also rather tall and thin, but dressed in the very height of fashion, with a flower in his coat and a cigarette in his mouth, which he never smoked because he never lit it. He was believed by all the others – you shall know who all the others were presently – to know more things than the Man-in-the-Moon, because he nearly always said something that nobody else ever thought of. And the Man-in-the-Moon knows more things than the Old Woman of Mars. You have naturally heard all about Mars – at least, if you have not heard all about her, you all have heard about her, which is just the same thing, only reversed.

There was an Old Woman of Mars
Who'd constantly say "Bless my stars,
There's the Sun and the Moon
And the Earth in a swoon,
All dying for par-tic-u-lars-u-lars!
Of this planet of mine called Mars!"

Mr Swinglebinks, unlike his two companions, was short, stout, and dreadfully important. In Fable Land, where we are going as soon as we start for that happy place, he kept a grocer's shop once upon a time. As nobody cared a fig for his sugar and currants, however, he retired from business and took to dates and the making of new almanacks, and was now travelling about for the benefit of his figures. He was very strong on arithmetic, and could read, write, and arith-metise before he went to school, so he never went at all.

While the Zankiwank was talking to his friends an unseen porter rang an unseen bell, and called out in an unknown tongue: —

"Take your seats for Fableland,
Which stands upon a Tableland,
And don't distress the guard.
And when you pass the Cableland
Say nothing to the Gableland
Because it hurts the guard."

"We must put that porter back in the bottle," said the Jackarandajam, "we shall want some bottled porter to drink on the road."

"Well," said Maude, "what a ridiculous thing to say. We don't bottle railway porters, I am sure."

"I wish the Bletherwitch would come," exclaimed the Zankiwank, "we shall miss the next train. She is most provoking. She promised to be here three weeks ago, and we have been waiting ever since."

This astounding statement quite disturbed Willie, who almost swallowed a bun in his excitement. Had he and Maude been waiting there three weeks as well? What would they think at home? You see Maude and Willie, who were brother and sister, had been on a visit to their grandmama; and on their way home they had fallen asleep in the carriage, after having repeated to each other all the wonderful fairy tales their grandmama had related to them. How long they had slept they could not guess, but when they woke up, instead of finding themselves at home in St George's

Square, they discovered that they were at Charing Cross Station. Mary, their nurse, had disappeared, so had John the coachman, and it was the Zankiwank who had opened the door and assisted them to alight, saying at the same time most politely —

"I assist you to alight, because it is so dark."

Then he gave them buns and chocolates, icecreams, apples, pears, shrimps and cranberry tarts. So it stands to reason that after such a mixture they were rather perplexed. However, they did not seem very much distressed, and as they were both fond of adventures, especially in books, they were quite content to accept the Zankiwank's offer to take them for a ride in the midnight-express to Fable Land, over which, as everybody knows, King Æsop reigns. Maudie was nine and a half and Willie was eight and a quarter. Very nice ages indeed, unless you happen to be younger or older, and then your own age is nicer still.

"I think," said the Zankiwank, "that we will start without the Bletherwitch. She knows the way and can take a balloon."

"If she takes a balloon she will lose it. You had better let the balloon take her," exclaimed the Jackarandajam severely.

"Take your places! Take your places!" cried the unseen porter. So everybody made a rush for the train, and they all entered a Pullman Car and sat down on the seats.

"Dear me! How very incorrectly that porter speaks. He means, of course, that the seats should take, or receive us."

The Zankiwank only smiled, while Mr Swinglebinks commenced counting up to a hundred, but as he lost one, he could only count up to ninety-nine – so, to keep his arithmetic going, he subtracted a time-piece from his neighbour's pocket, multiplied his foot-warmers, and divided his attention between the Wimble and the Wamble, who were both of the party, being left-handed and deaf.

Maudie and Willie took their places in the car with all the other passengers amid a perfect babel of chattering and laughing and crying, and then, as the train began to slowly move out of the station, the Zankiwank solemnly sang the following serious song: —

Off to Fable Land

The midnight train departs at three,
To Fable Land we go,
For this express is nothing less
Than a steamer, don't you know!
We're sailing now upon the Thames,
All in a penny boat,
And we soon shall change for a mountain range,
In the atmosphere to float!

So off we go to Fable Land —
(Speak kindly to the guard!)
Which many think a Babel-land,
But this you disregard.
You'll find it is a Stable-land,
With stables in the yard —
A possible, probable, Able-land,
So do not vex the guard!

We've left behind us Charing Cross,
And all the town in bed;
For it is plain, though in this train,
We're standing on our head!
We're riding now in Bedfordshire,
Which is the Land of Nod;
And yet in the sky we are flying high,
Which seems extremely odd!

So off we go to Fable Land —
(Speak kindly to the guard!)
Which many think a Babel-land,
But this you disregard.
You'll find it is a Stable-land,
With stables in the yard —
A possible, probable, Able-land,
So do not vex the guard!

Maudie and Willie found themselves joining lustily in the chorus when the Zankiwank pulled the cord communicating with the guard, and, opening the window, climbed out on to the top of the carriage calling all the time: —

"Guard! Guard! Guard!
Don't go so hard,
Just give the brake a hitch!
To Charing Cross return —
Nay, do not look so stern —

For I would not tell a cram,
I must send a telegram,
To my darling little Bletherwitch."

So the guard turned the train round, and they went back to Charing Cross as quick as lightning. "It's my fault," moaned the Jackarandajam, "I ought to have reminded you. Never mind, we will put on another engine."

So the Zankiwank got out and sent a telegram to the Bletherwitch, and desired her to follow on in a balloon.

Again they started, and everybody settled down until the train reached the British Channel, when it dived through a tunnel into an uninhabited country, where the post-office clerk popped his head into the carriage window and handed in a telegram.

*"From the Bletherwitch,
To the Zankiwank.
Don't wait tea. Gone to the Dentists."*

"Extremely thoughtful," exclaimed everybody. But the Zankiwank wept, and explained to the sympathetic Maude that he was engaged to be married to the Bletherwitch, and he had been waiting for her for fourteen years. "Such a charming creature. I will introduce you when she comes. Fancy, she is only two feet one inch and one third high. Such a suitable height for a bride."

"What," expostulated Willie and Maude together, "she's no bigger than our baby! And you are quite – "

"Eight feet and one half of an inch."

"How disproportionate! It seems to me to be a most unequal match," answered Maude. "What does her mother say?"

"Oh, she hasn't got any mother, you know. That would not do. She has been asleep for two thousand years, and has only just woke up to the fact that I am her destiny."

"She is only joking," declared Maude. "Two thousand years! She *must* be joking!"

"No," replied the Zankiwank somewhat sadly, "she is not joking. She never jokes. She is of Scottish descent," he added reflectively. "I hope she will keep her appointment. I am afraid she is rather giddy! – "

"Giddy! Well, if she has waited two thousand years before making up her mind to go to the dentists she must be giddy. I am afraid you are not speaking the truth."

Before any reply could be given the Guard came to the window and said they would have to go back to Charing Cross again as he forgot to pay his rent, and he always paid his rent on Monday.

"But this is *not* Monday," said Willie. "Yesterday was Monday. To-day is to-morrow you know, therefore it is Tuesday. Pay your landlady double next Monday and that will do just as well."

The Guard hesitated.

"Don't vex the Guard," they all said in chorus.

"I am not vexed," said the Guard, touching his hat. "Do you think it would be right to pay double? You see my landlady is single. She might not like it."

"Write 'I. O. U.' on a post-card and send it to her. It will do just as well, if not better," suggested Mr Swinglebinks.

So the Guard sent the post-card; but in his agitation he told the engineer driver to go straight ahead instead of round the corner. The consequence was that they were run into by a Demon on a bicycle, and thrown out of the train down a coal mine. Luckily there were no coals in the mine so it did not matter, and they went boldly forward – that is to say, Willie and Maude did, and knocked at the front door of a handsome house that suddenly appeared before them.

Nobody opened the door, so they walked in. They looked behind them, but could not see the Zankiwank or any of the passengers in the train; therefore, not knowing what else to do, they went upstairs. They appeared to be walking up stairs for hours without coming to a landing or meeting with anyone, and the interminable steps began to grow monotonous. Presently they heard a scuffling and a stamping and a roaring behind them and something or somebody began to push them most rudely until at last the wall gave way, the stairs gave way, they gave way, and tumbled right on to the tips of their noses.

"Out of the way! Out of the way!" screamed a chorus of curious voices, and Maude and Willie found themselves taken by the hand by a weird-looking dwarf with a swivel eye and an elevated proboscis, and led out of danger.

The children could not help gazing upon their preserver, who was so grotesquely formed, with a humped back, twisted legs, very long arms, and such a funny little body without any neck. But his eyes atoned for everything – they sparkled and glinted in their sockets like bright brown diamonds – only there are no brown diamonds, you know, only white and pink ones.

The Dwarf did not appear to mind the wondering looks of the children at all, but patted them on the cheeks and told them not to be frightened. But whether he meant frightened of himself, or of the Birds, Beasts, and Fishes that were hurrying by in such confusing masses, they could not tell. One thing, however, that astonished them very much was the deference with which they greeted their quaint rescuer, as they passed by. For every creature from the Lion to the Mouse bowed most politely as they approached him, and then went on their way gaily frisking, for this was their weekly half-holiday.

"How do you like my Menagerie," enquired the Dwarf. "Rough and ready, perhaps, but as docile as a flat-iron if you treat them properly."

"It is just like the Zoo," declared Willie. "Or the animals in Æsop's Fables," suggested Maude.

This delighted the Dwarf very much, for though he looked so serious, he was full of good humour and skipped about with much agility.

"Good! Good!" he cried. "Æsop and the Zoo! Ha! Ha! He! He! Anybody can be a Zoo but only one can be Æsop, and I am he!"

"Æsop! Are you really Mr Æsop, the Phrygian Philosopher?" cried Maude.

"*King* Æsop, I should say," corrected Willie. "I am glad we have met you, because now, perhaps, you will kindly tell us what a Fable really is."

"A Fable," said the merry Æsop, with a twinkle in his witty eyes, "is a fictitious story about nothing that ever happened, related by nobody that ever lived. And the moral is, that every one is quite innocent, only they must not do it again!"

"Ah! that is only your fun," said Willie sagely, "because of the moral. Why do they give you so many morals?"

"I don't know," answered Æsop gravely. "But the Commentators and Editors do give a lot of applications and morals to the tales of my animals, don't they?"

"I like a tale with a moral," averred Maude, "it finishes everything up so satisfactorily, I think. Now, Mr Æsop, as you know so much, please tell us what a proverb is?"

"Ah!" replied Mr Æsop, "I don't make proverbs. There are too many already, but a proverb usually seems to me to be something you always theoretically remember to practically forget."

Neither of the children quite understood this, though Maude thought it was what her papa would call satire, and satire was such a strange word that she could never fully comprehend the meaning.

Willie was silent too, like his sister, and seeing them deep in thought, King Æsop waved a little wand he had in his hand, and all the Birds and Beasts and Fishes joined hands and paws, and fins and wings, and danced in a circle singing to the music of a quantity of piping birds in the trees: —

If you want to be merry and wise,

You must all be as bright as you can,
You never must quarrel,
Or spoil a right moral,
But live on a regular plan.
You must read, write and arith-metise,
Or you'll never grow up to be good;
And you mustn't say "Won't,"
Or "I shan't" and "I don't,"
Or disturb the Indicative Mood.

So round about the Knowledge Tree,
Each boy and girl must go,
To learn in school the golden rule,
And Duty's line to toe!

If you want to be clever and smart,
You must also be ready for play,
And don't be too subtle
When batting your shuttle,
But sport in a frolicsome way.
With bat and with ball take your part,
Or with little doll perched on your knee,
You sing all the time,
To a nursery rhyme,
Before you go in to your tea!

So round about the Sunset Tree
Each boy and girl should go
To play a game of – What's its name?
That is each game – you know!

After merrily joining in this very original song, with dancing accompaniment, Maude and Willie thanked King Æsop for permitting his animals to entertain them.

"Always glad to please good little boys and girls, you know," he replied pleasantly, "even in their play they furnish us with a new fable and a moral."

"And that is?"

"All play and no work makes the world stand still."

Before they could ask for an explanation, their attention was once more drawn to the animals, who had commenced playing all kinds of games just the same as they themselves played in the playground at school. The Toads were playing Leap-frog; the Elephants and the Bears, Fly the Garter; the Dromedaries, Hi! Spie! Hi! while the snakes were trundling their hoops. The Lions and the Lambs were playing at cricket with the Donkeys as fielders and the Wombat as umpire.

The Frogs were in a corner by themselves playing "Kiss in the Ring," and crying out: —

"It isn't you! It isn't you!
We none of us know what to do,"

in a very serio-comic manner. Then the Storks and the Cranes and the Geese and the Ganders were standing in a circle singing: —

Sally, Sally Waters,
Sitting in the Moon,
With the camel's daughters,
All through the afternoon!
Oh Sally! Bo Sally!
Where's your dusting pan;
My Sally! Fie Sally!
Here is your young man!

In another part the Crabs, the Sheep, and the Fox, were vowing that London Bridge was Broken Down, because they had not half-a-crown, which seemed a curious reason. Then all the rest of the wild creatures, Birds, Beasts, and Fishes, commenced an extraordinary dance, singing, croaking, flapping their fins and spreading their wings, to these words: —

We are a crowd of jolly boys,
All romping on the lea;
We always make this merry noise,
When we return from sea.

So we go round and round and round,
Because we've come ashore;
For Topsy Turvey we are bound,
So round again once more.

Go in and out of the coppice,
Go in and out at the door;
And do not wake the poppies,
Who want to have a snore.

It was too ridiculous; they could recognise every animal they had read about in Æsop, and they were all behaving in a manner they little dreamed could be possible, out of a Night-mare. But it certainly was not a Night-mare, though they could distinguish several horses and ponies.

They never seemed to stop in their games, and even the Ants and the Gnats were playing – and above all a game of football, – though as some played according to Association and some to Rugby rules, of course it was rather perplexing to the on-lookers. When they grew tired of watching the Animal World enjoying their holiday, they turned to consult King Æsop, but to their astonishment, he was not near them – he had vanished! And when they turned round the other way the Animals had vanished too, and they were quite alone. Indeed everything seemed to disappear, even the light that had been their guide so long, and they began to tremble with fear and apprehension.

Not a sound was to be heard, and darkness gradually fell around them. They held each other by the hand, and determined to go forward, but to their dismay they could not move! They were glued to the earth. They tried to speak, but their tongues stuck to the roofs of their mouths, and they were in great distress. "Where, Oh where was the Zankiwank?" they wondered in their thoughts. And a buzzing in their ears took up the refrain: —

The Zankiwank, the Zankiwank,
Oh where, Oh where is the Zankiwank?
He brought us here, and much we fear

His conduct's far from Franky-wank!
The Zankiwank, the Zankiwank,
He has gone to seek the Bletherwitch,
Oh the Zankiwank, 'tis a panky prank
To leave us here to die in a ditch.

"A telegram, did you say? For me, of course, what an age you have been. How is my blushing bride? Let me see —

'From the Bletherwitch, Nonsuch Street,
To the Zankiwank, Nodland.

Forgot my new shoes, and the housemaid's killed the parrot. Put the kettle on."

Then the children heard some sobbing sound soughing through the silence and they knew that they were saved. Also that the Zankiwank was weeping. So with a strong effort Maude managed to call out consolingly, "Zankiwanky, dear! don't cry, come and let me comfort you."

But the Zankiwank refused to be comforted. However, he came forward muttering an incantation of some sort, and Maude and Willie finding themselves free, rushed forward and greeted him.

"Hush, my dears, the Nargalnannacus is afloat on the wild, wild main. We must be careful and depart, or he will turn us into something unpleasant – the last century or may be the next, as it is close at hand, and inexpensive. Follow me to the ship that is waiting in the Bay Window, and we will go and get some Floranges."

Carefully Maudie and Willie followed the Zankiwank, each holding on by the tails of his coat, glad enough to go anywhere out of the Blackness of the Dark.

Soon they found themselves in Window Bay, and climbing up the sides of a mighty ship with five funnels and a red-haired captain.

"Quick," called the Captain, "the Nargalnannacus is on the lee scuppers just off the jibboom brace. Make all sail for the Straights of Ballambangjan, and mind the garden gate."

Then the Zankiwank became the man at the wheel, and the vessel scudded before the wind as the two children went off into a trance.

Part II

The Fairies' Feather and

Flower Land

*Faëry elves,
Whose midnight revels, by a forest side
Or fountain, some belated peasant sees,
Or dreams he sees, while overhead the moon
Sits arbitress.*

Milton.

*O then I see Queen Mab hath been with you:
She is the fairies' midwife; and she comes
In shape no bigger than an agate-stone
On the fore-finger of an alderman,
Drawn with a train of little atomies,
Athwart men's noses as they lie asleep.*

Shakespeare.

The Fairies' Feather and Flower Land

How long Maude and Willie had been rocking in the cradle of the deep they could not tell, nor how long it took them to steam through the Straits of Ballambangjan, for everything was exceptionally bleak and blank to them. By the way, if you cannot find the Straits of Ballambangjan in your Geography or on the Map, you should consult the first sailor you meet, and he will give you as much information on the subject as any boy or girl need require.

Both children experienced that curious sensation of feeling asleep while they were wide awake, and feeling wide awake when they imagined themselves to be asleep, just as one does feel sometimes in the early morning, when the sun is beginning to peep through the blinds, and the starlings are chattering, and the sparrows are tweeting under the eaves, outside the window.

They were no longer on the vessel that had borne them away from Fableland, and the approach of the Nargalnannacus, a fearsome creature whom nobody has yet seen, although most of us may not have heard about him.

The obliging Zankiwank was with them, and when they looked round they found themselves in a square field festooned with the misty curtains of the Elfin Dawn.

"Of course," said the Zankiwank, "this is Midsummer Day, and very soon it will be Midsummer Night, and you will see some wonders that will outwonder all the wonders that wonderful people have ever wondered both before and afterwards. Listen to the Flower-Fairies – not the garden flowers, but the wild-flowers; they will sing you a song, while I beat time – not that there is any real need to beat Time, because he is a most respectable person, though he always contrives to beat us."

Both children would have liked to argue out this speech of the Zankiwank because it puzzled them, and they felt it would not parse properly. However, as just at that moment the Elfin Orchestra appeared, they sat on the grass and listened: —

This is the Elfin Dawn,
When ev'ry Fay and Faun,
Trips o'er the earth with joy and mirth,
And Pleasure takes the maun.
Night's noon stars coyly peep,
O'er dale and dene and deep,
And Fairies fair float through the air,
Love's festival to keep.

We dance and sing in the Welkin Ring,
While Heather Bells go Ding-dong-ding!
To greet the Elfin Dawn.
The Flower-fairies spread each wing,

And trip about with mincing ging,
Upon the magic lawn.
And so we frisk and play,
Like mortals, in the day;
From acorn cup we all wake up
Titania to obey.
We never, never die,
And this the reason why,

Of Fancy's art we are the part
That lives eternalie.

We dance and sing in the Welkin Ring,
While Heather Bells go Ding-dong-ding!
To greet the Elfin Dawn.
The Flower-fairies spread each wing,
And trip about with mincing ging,
Upon the magic lawn.

"They keep very good time, don't they?" said the Zankiwank to the children, who were completely entranced with pleasure and surprise.

"Lovely, lovely," was all they could say.

Every wild flower they could think of, and every bird of the air, was to be seen in this beautiful place with the purling stream running down the centre, crossed by innumerable rustic bridges, while far away they could see a fountain ever sending upward its cooling sprays of crystal water.

"I think I shall spend my honeymoon here," said the Zankiwank. "I have already bought a honeycomb for my bride. I am so impatient to have her by my side that I have dispatched the Jackarandajam and Mr Swinglebinks in a four-wheeled cab to fetch her. When the Bletherwitch arrives I will introduce you, and you shall both be bridesmaids!"

"But I can't be a bridesmaid, you know," corrected Willie.

"Oh yes, you can. You can be anything here you like. You only have to eat some Fern seeds and you become invisible, and nobody would know you. It is so simple, and saves a lot of argument. And you should never argue about anything unless you know nothing about it, then you are sure to win."

"But," interrupted Maude, "how can you know nothing about anything?"

"'Tis the easiest thing out of the world," said the Zankiwank. "What is nothing?"

"Nothing."

"Precisely. Nothing is nothing; but what is better than nothing?"

"Something."

"Wrong! Wrong! Wrong! Where is your logic? Nothing is better than something! I'll prove it: —

"Nothing is sweeter than honey,
Nothing's more bitter than gall,
Nothing that's comic is funny,
Nothing is shorter than tall."

"That is nonsense and nothing to do with the case," exclaimed Maude.

"Nonsense? Nonsense? Did you say nonsense?"

"Of course she did," said Willie, "and so do I."

"Nonsense! To me? Do you forget what my name is?"

"Oh, no, nothing easier than to remember it. You are the Great Zankiwank."

"Thank you, I am satisfied. I thought you had forgotten. I am not cross with you."

Maude and Willie vowed they would not cross him for anything, let alone nothing, and so the Zankiwank was appeased and offered to give them the correct answer to his own unanswerable conundrum. Do you know what a conundrum is though? I will tell you while the Zankiwank is curling his whiskers: —

A conundrum is an impossible question with an improbable answer. Think it over the next time you read "Robinson Crusoe."

"Nothing is better than a good little girl;
But a jam tart is better than nothing,
Therefore a jam tart is better than the best little girl alive."

"What do you think of that?" said the Zankiwank.

"I have heard something like it before. But that is nothing. Anyhow I would much rather be a little girl than a jam tart – because a jam tart must be sour because it's tart, and a little girl is always sweet," promptly replied Willie, kissing his sister Maude on the nose – but that was an accident, because she moved at the wrong moment.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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