

Alcott Louisa May

Lulu's Library. Volume 2 of 3



Луиза Мэй Олкотт

Lulu's Library. Volume 2 of 3

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Содержание

PREFACE	5
I	6
II	11
III	18
IV	23
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	24

Alcott Louisa May Lulu's Library Volume II

PREFACE

Most of these stories were written at sixteen for my younger sisters and their playmates, the little Emersons and Channings, and appeared some years later under the name of "Flower Fables." With some additions they are now republished for the amusement of those children's children by their old friend,

L. M. ALCOTT.

June, 1887.

I

THE FROST KING AND HOW THE FAIRIES CONQUERED HIM

The Queen sat upon her throne, and all the fairies from the four kingdoms were gathered for a grand council. A very important question was to be decided, and the bravest, wisest elves were met to see what could be done. The Frost King made war upon the flowers; and it was a great grief to Queen Blossom and her subjects to see their darlings die year after year, instead of enjoying one long summer, as they might have done but for him. She had sent messengers with splendid gifts, and had begged him to stop this dreadful war, which made autumn so sad and left the fields strewn with dead flowers. But he sent back the gifts, sternly refused her prayers, and went on with his cruel work; because he was a tyrant, and loved to destroy innocent things.

"My subjects, we will try once more," said the Queen, "if any one can propose a plan that will touch his hard heart and make him kind to the dear flowers."

Then there was a great rustling of wings and murmuring of voices; for all the elves were much excited, and each wanted to propose something. The Queen listened, but none of the plans seemed wise, and she was sadly perplexed, when her favorite maid of honor, the lovely Star, came and knelt before her, saying, while her face shone and her voice trembled with the earnestness of her words, "Dear Queen, let me go alone to the Frost King and try what love will do. We have sent presents and prayers by messengers who feared and hated him, and he would not receive them; but we have not tried to make him love us, nor shown him how beautiful his land might be, by patiently changing that dreary place, and teaching his people to plant flowers, not to kill them. I am not afraid; let me go and try my plan, for love is very powerful, and I know he has a heart if we can only find it."

"You may go, dear Star," answered the Queen, "and see if you can conquer him. But if any harm happens to you, we will come with our whole army and fight this cruel King till he is conquered."

At these brave words all the elves cheered, and General Sun, the great warrior, waved his sword as if longing to go to battle at once. They gathered about Star, – some to praise and caress her, some to warn her of the dangers of her task, others to tell her the way, and every one to wish her success; for fairies are gentle little creatures, and believe heartily in the power of love.

Star wished to go at once; so they wrapped her in a warm cloak of down from a swan's breast, gave her a bag of the seeds of all their sweetest flowers, and with kisses and tears went to the gates of Fairyland to say good-by.

Smiling bravely she flew away toward the North, where the frost spirits lived. Soon the wind grew cold, the sunshine faded, and snow began to fall, making Star shiver under her soft cloak. Presently she saw the King's palace. Pillars of ice held up the roof fringed with icicles, which would have sparkled splendidly if there had been any sun. But all was dark and cold, and not a green leaf rustled, or bird sang in the wide plains, white with snow, that stretched as far as the eye could see. Before the doors stood the guard, frozen to their places, who lifted their sharp spears and let Star go in when she said she was a messenger from the Queen.

Walls of ice carved with strange figures were round her, long icicles hung from the roof, and carpets of snow covered the floor. On a throne hung with gray mist sat the King; a crown of crystals was on his white hair, and his mantle was covered with silver frost-work. His eyes were cold, his face stern, and a smile never moved his hard lips. He frowned as he saw the fairy, and drew his cloak closer, as if afraid the light of her bright face might soften his heart.

Then Star told her errand, and in her gentle voice begged him to be kind. She described the sorrow of both elves and children when his frost killed all the flowers; she painted a bright picture

of a world where it was always summer, and asked him to let her show how lovely flowers made any spot, by planting some in his bleak fields.

But he only scowled and ordered her away, saying harshly, "I will do as I please; and if your Queen does not leave me in peace, I will go to war and freeze every fairy to death."

Star tried to say more, but he was so angry that he called his people and bid them shut her up till she would own that he was right and promise to let him kill all the flowers he liked.

"I never will do that," said Star, as the Frost people led her away to a dark little cell, and left her alone.

She was cold and tired and very sad because the King would not listen to her, but her heart was brave, and instead of crying she began to sing. Soon the light of her own eyes, that shone like stars, made a little glimmer in the dark, and she saw that the floor of her cell was of earth; and presently she heard the tinkle of water as it dripped drop by drop down from the snow above. Then she smiled, so that it seemed as if a ray of light had crept in.

"Here is earth and water, I will make the sunshine, and soon by my fairy power I will have a garden even in Frostland." As she spoke she pulled out the seeds and fell to work, still singing, still smiling, still sure that in time she would do the hard task she had set herself. First she gathered the drops in her warm hands and moistened the hard earth; then she loosened it and planted her seeds along the walls; and then, sitting in the middle of the narrow room, she waved her wand and chanted the fairy spell that works the pretty miracle of turning seeds to flowers.

"Sleep, little seed,
Deep in your bed,
While winter snow
Lies overhead.
Wake, little sprout,
And drink the rain,
Till sunshine calls
You to rise again.
Strike deep, young root,
In the earth below;
Unfold, pale leaves,
Begin to grow.
Baby bud, dance
In the warm sun;
Bloom, sweet rose,
Life has begun."

As she sung, the light grew stronger, the air warmer, and the drops fell like dew, till up came rows of little green vines and plants, growing like the magic beanstalk all over the walls and all round the room, making the once dark place look like a bower. Moss spread like a carpet underfoot, and a silvery white mushroom sprung up under Star, as if she were the queen of this pretty place.

Soon the Frost spirits heard the music and went to see who dared sing in that gloomy prison. They were much surprised when they peeped, to see that instead of dying in her cell, the fairy had made it beautiful, and sat there singing while her flowers bloomed in spite of all their power.

They hurried to the King and bade him come and see. He went, and when he saw the lovely place he could not spoil it till he had watched Star at her work, and tried to see what magic did such wonders. For now the dark walls were hung with morning-glories, ringing their many-colored bells, the floor was green with soft moss, the water-drops made music as they fell, and rows of flowers

nodded from their beds as if talking together in a sweet language of their own. Star sat on her throne still singing and smiling, till the once dark place was as bright as if a little sun shone there.

"I am strong, but I cannot do that," said the King. "I love power, and perhaps if I watch I shall learn some of her magic skill to use as I please. I will let her live, but keep her a prisoner, and do as I please about killing other flowers."

So he left her there, and often stole down to peep, and wonder at her cheerfulness and courage; for she never complained or cried, though she longed for home, and found it very hard to be brave and patient.

Meantime the Queen waited and waited for Star to come, and when a long time passed she sent a messenger to learn where she was. He brought back the sad tidings that she was a prisoner, and the King would not let her go. Then there was great weeping and wailing in Fairyland, for every one loved gentle Star. They feared she would be frozen to death if they left her in the cruel King's power, and resolved to go to war as he would not set her free.

General Sun ordered out the army, and there was a great blowing of trumpets, beating of drums, and flying of flags as the little soldiers came marching from the four quarters of the kingdom. The earth elves were on foot, in green suits, with acorn cups for helmets and spear grass for lances. The water sprites were in blue armor made of dragon-fly scales, and they drew shells full of tiny bubbles that were shot like cannon-balls, upsetting their small enemies by the dozen. The fire imps wore red, and carried torches to burn, and little guns to shoot bullets of brimstone from, which killed by their dreadful smell. The air spirits were the finest of all; for they were in golden armor, and carried arrows of light, which they shot from tiny rainbows. These came first, and General Sun was splendid to behold as he led them shining and flashing before the Queen, whose great banner of purple and gold streamed over their heads, while the trumpets blew, the people cheered, and the elfin soldiers marched bravely away to fight the Frost King and bring Star home.

The Queen followed in her chariot drawn by white butterflies, with her maids, and her body guard of the tallest elves in Fairyland. They lived in the pine-trees, and were fine strong fellows, with little cones on their heads, pine needles for swords, and the handsome russet scales for chain armor. Their shields were of sweet-smelling gum, like amber; but no one could approach the Queen when they made a wall about her, for whoever touched these shields stuck fast, and were killed with the sharp swords.

Away streamed the army like a wandering rainbow, and by and by reached the land of frost and snow. The King had been warned that they were coming, and made ready by building a fort of ice, laying in piles of snow-balls, and arming his subjects with sharp icicles. All the cold winds that blow wailed like bagpipes, hailstones drummed on the frozen ground, and banners of mist floated over the towers of the palace. General Fog, in a suit of silver, stood ready to meet the enemy, with an army of snow men behind him, and the Frost King looked down from the walls to direct the fight.

On came the fairy folk, making the icy world sparkle so brilliantly with their light that the King was half-blinded and hid his eyes. The elves shivered as the cold wind touched them, but courage kept them warm, and the Queen, well wrapped in down, stood up in her chariot, boldly demanding Star at the hands of the King.

"I will not give her up," he answered, scowling like a thunder-cloud, though in his heart he wondered more and more how the brave fairy had lived so long away from such lovely friends as these.

"Then I proclaim war upon your country; and if Star is dead we will show no mercy. Sound the trumpets and set on!" cried the Queen, waving her hand to the General, while every sword flashed out, and an elfin cheer rung like music in the air.

Ordering the rest to halt, General Sun led the air spirits to battle first, well knowing that nothing could stand long before a charge of that brilliant troop. General Fog did his best, but was driven back against his will; for his snow men melted away as the arrows of light struck them, and he could not

stand before the other general, whose shield was a golden sun, without feeling himself dissolve like mist at noon.

They were forced to take refuge in the fort, where the King himself was ordering showers of snow-balls to be shot among the fairy troops. Many were wounded, and carried from the field to the tent where the Queen and her maids tended them, and by their soft magic soon made them fit to fight again.

"Now, a grand attack. Bring up the sappers and miners, Captain Rock. Major Flash, surround the walls and melt them as fast as possible, while the archers shall go on shooting," commanded General Sun.

Then a company of moles began to dig under the fort; the fire imps banged away at the walls with their cannon, and held their flaming torches close till the blocks of ice began to melt; the air spirits flew high above and shot their golden arrows down at the Frost people, who fled away to hide in the darkest corners, dazzled and daunted by these brave and brilliant enemies.

It was a hard battle, and the fairies were obliged to rest, after killing General Fog, destroying the fort, and forcing the King to take refuge in the palace. Among the prisoners taken was one who told them where Star was, and all she had done in her little cell. Then they rejoiced, and the Queen said, "Let us follow her example, for these prisoners say the King is changed since she came; that he goes to peep at her lovely bower, and does not spoil it, but talks kindly to her, and seems as if his hard heart might be melting a little. We will not fight any more, but try Star's gentle way, and besiege the King till he surrenders; so we shall win a friend, not kill an enemy."

"We will; we will!" cried all the elves; for they did not love to fight, though brave as little lions to defend their country and their Queen. They all took counsel together, and the Frost people were surprised next day to see the army busily at work making a great garden round the palace instead of trying to destroy it. Creeping to the holes in the walls they watched what went on, and wondered more and more; for the elves worked hard, and their magic helped them to do in a day what it would have taken years for mortals to do.

First the moles dug up the ground, then the Queen's guard sowed pine seeds, and in an hour a green wall fenced in the garden where the earth fairies planted seeds of all the flowers that grow. The fire imps warmed the air, and drove away every chilly wind, every gray cloud or flake of snow that dared come near this enchanted spot. The water sprites gathered drops from the melting ice palace and watered the budding beds, after the imps had taken the chill off, while the air spirits made sunshine overhead by flying to and fro with tireless wings, till a golden curtain was woven that shut out the cold sky and made summer for the flowers.

The Queen and her maids helped, for they fashioned birds, bees, and butterflies with magic skill, and gave them life to sing, buzz, and flutter in the new world, growing so fast where once all was bare and cold and dark.

Slowly the ice palace melted; for warm airs stole through the pines, and soon the walls were thin as glass, the towers vanished like frost-work in the sun, and block after block flowed away in little rills as if glad to escape from prison. The King and his subjects felt that they were conquered; for the ice seemed to melt from them also, and their hearts began to beat, their cold faces to soften as if they wanted to smile if they knew how, and they loved to watch and wonder at the sweet miracles the elves were working all about them.

The King tried not to give up, for he was very proud, and had ruled so long it was hard to submit; but his power was gone, his palace crumbling about him, his people longing to join the enemy, and there was nothing for him to do but lay down his crown or fly away to the far North and live with the bears and icebergs in that frozen world. He would have done this but for Star. All the while the battle and the siege were going on, she lived in her little cell, knowing nothing about it, but hoping and waiting, sure that help would come. Every time the King visited her he seemed kinder, and liked more and more to listen to her songs or the stories she told him of life in Fairyland, and the joy of

being merciful. So she knew that the seeds she sowed in his heart were beginning to grow like those planted in the cell, and she watched over them as carefully.

One day her loveliest roses bloomed, and she was singing for joy as the pink flowers filled the cell with their sweet breath, when the King came hurrying down to her and falling at her feet begged her to save his life. She wondered what he meant, and he told her of the battle, and how the elves were conquering him by love; for the palace was nearly gone, a great garden lay blossoming all about it, and he had nowhere to go unless she would be his friend and ask her people to forgive and pity him.

Then Star felt that she had done her task, and laying her hands on his white head, she melted the last frost from his old heart by saying in her tender voice, "Do not fear my people; they will welcome you and give you a home if you will promise to hurt no more flowers, but always be as gentle as you are now. Come with me, and let us teach you how beautiful sunshine and love and happy work can make you."

The King promised, and Star led him up to the light again, where his people waited to know what was to become of them.

"Follow me, follow me, and do not be afraid," called Star, dancing before them, – so glad to be free that she longed to fly away. Everything was changed; for as they came up from the cell the ruins of the palace melted into a quiet lake, and under the archway of the pines they passed into a new and lovely world of sunshine, flowers, and happy elves. A great cry went up when Star was seen leading the King, with his few subjects behind him, and every one flew to welcome the dear fairy and the captives she brought.

"I am your prisoner, and I submit, for I have no kingdom now," said the King, as he bowed before the Queen.

"These are the only chains you shall wear, and *this* is your new kingdom," answered the Queen, as her maids hung wreaths of flowers on the King's arms and put a green crown on his head, while all the fairies gathered round to welcome him to the lovely garden where he was to reign beloved and happy, with no frost to spoil the long summer he had learned to love.

There was a great feast that day, and then the elfin army marched home again, well pleased with the battle they had fought, though all said that it was Star who had conquered the Frost-King.

II

LILYBELL AND THISTLEDOWN, OR THE FAIRY SLEEPING BEAUTY

Once upon a time two little fairies went out into the world to seek their fortune. Thistledown wore a green suit, a purple cloak, a gay feather in his cap, and was as handsome an elf as one could wish to see. But he was not loved in Fairyland; for, like the flower whose name and colors he wore, many faults like sharp prickles were hidden under his fine clothes. He was idle, selfish, and cruel, and cared for nothing but his own pleasure and comfort, as we shall see.

His little friend Lilybell was very different, for she was so kind and good every one loved her. She spent her time trying to undo the mischief naughty Thistle did, and that was why she followed him now, because she was afraid he would get into trouble and need some one to help him.

Side by side they flew over hill and dale till they came to a pleasant garden.

"I am tired and hungry," said Thistle; "let us rest here and see what fun is going on."

"Now, dear Thistle, be kind and gentle, and make friends among these flowers. See how they spread their leaves for our beds, and offer us their honey to eat, and their dew to bathe in. It would be very wrong to treat them badly after such a welcome as this," answered Lilybell, as she lay down to sleep in the deep cup of one of her own flowers, as if in a little bed hung with white curtains.

Thistle laughed and flew off to find the tulips, for he liked splendid flowers and lived like a king. First he robbed the violets of their honey, and shook the blue-bells roughly to get all their dew for his bath. Then he ruffled many leaves before his bed suited him, and after a short nap was up and away having what he called fun. He chased the butterflies and hurt them with the sharp thorn he carried for a sword; he broke the cobwebs laid to bleach on the grass for fairy cloth; he pushed the little birds out of the nest and killed them; he stole pollen from the busy bees, and laughed to see them patiently begin to fill their little bags again. At last he came to a lovely rose-tree with one open flower and a little bud.

"Why are you so slow about blooming, baby rose? You are too old to be rocked in your green cradle any longer. Come out and play with me," said Thistle, as he perched on the tree ready for more mischief.

"No, my little bud is not strong enough to meet the sun and air yet," answered the rose-mother, bending over her baby, while all her red leaves trembled with fear, for the wind had told her the harm this cruel fairy had been doing in the garden.

"You silly flower, to wait so long. See how quickly I will make the ugly green bud a pretty pink rose," cried Thistle, as he pulled open the folded bud so rudely that the little leaves fell all broken on the ground.

"It was my first and only one, and I was so fond and proud of it! Now you have killed it, cruel fairy, and I am all alone," sobbed the mother, while her tears fell like rain on the poor bud fading in the hot sun.

Thistle was ashamed of himself, but he would not say he was sorry, and flew away to hunt a white moth, till clouds began to gather and a shower came on. Then he hurried back to the tulips for shelter, sure they would take him in because he had praised their gay colors, and they were vain flowers. But when he came all wet and cold begging to be covered, they laughed and shook their broad leaves till the drops fell on him faster than the rain and beat him down.

"Go away, naughty fairy! we know you now, and won't let you in, for you bring trouble wherever you go. You needn't come to us for a new cloak when the shower has spoilt that one," they cried.

"I don't care, the daisies will be glad to take pity on so splendid an elf as I am," said Thistle, as he flew down to the humble flowers in the grass.

But all the rosy leaves were tightly closed and he knocked in vain, for the daisies had heard of his pranks, and would not risk spoiling their seeds by opening to such a naughty fellow.

He tried the buttercups and dandelions, the violets and mignonette, the lilies and the honeysuckles, but all shut their doors against him and told him to go away.

"Now I have no friends and must die of cold. If I had only minded Lilybell I might be safe and warm as she is somewhere," sighed Thistle, as he stood shivering in the rain.

"I have no little bud to shelter now, and you can come in here," said a soft voice above him; and looking up, Thistle saw that he was under the rose-tree where the dead bud hung broken on its stem.

Grieved and ashamed, the fairy gladly crept in among the warm red leaves, and the rose-mother held him close to her gentle bosom where no rain or chilly wind could reach him. But when she thought he was asleep she sighed so sadly over her lost baby that Thistle found no rest, and dreamed only sad dreams.

Soon the sun shone again and Lilybell came to find her friend; but he was ashamed to meet her and stole away. When the flowers told Lily all the harm Thistle had done she was very sorrowful, and tried to comfort them. She cured the hurt birds and butterflies, helped the bees he had robbed, and watered the poor rose till more buds came to bloom on her stem. Then when all were well and happy again she went to find Thistle, leaving the garden full of grateful friends.

Meantime, Thistle had been playing more pranks, and got into trouble. A kind bee invited him to dinner one day, and the fairy liked the pretty home in the hive; for the floors were of white wax, the walls of golden honey-comb, and the air sweet with the breath of flowers. It was a busy place; some got the food and stored it up in the little cells; some were the house-maids, and kept all exquisitely neat; some took care of the eggs and fed the young bees like good nurses; and others waited on the Queen.

"Will you stay and work with us? No one is idle here, and it is a happier life than playing all day," said Buzz, the friendly bee.

"I hate to work," answered lazy Thistle, and would not do anything at all.

Then they told him he must go; that made him angry, and he went to some of the bees whom he had made discontented by his fine tales of an idle life, and said to them, —

"Let us feast and be jolly; winter is far off and there is no need to work in the summer time. Come and make merry, while those busy fellows are away, and the nurses watching the babies in the cells."

Then he led the drones to the hive, like a band of robbers; first they fastened the Queen into her royal room, so she could do nothing but buzz angrily; next they drove the poor house-keepers away, and frightened the little bees into fits as they went rioting through the waxen halls, pulling down the honey-comb, and stealing the bee-bread carefully put away in the neat cells for winter time. They stayed as long as they dared, and flew off before the workers came home to find their pretty hive in ruins.

"That was fine fun," said Thistle, as he went to hide in a great forest where he thought the angry bees could not find him.

Here he soon made friends with a gay dragon-fly, and they had splendid games skimming over the lake or swinging on the ferns that grew about it. For a while Thistle was good, and might have had a happy time if he had not quarrelled with his friend about a little fish that the cruel elf pricked with his sword till it nearly died. Gauzy-wing thought that very cruel, and said he would tell the Brownies who ruled over everything in the wood.

"I'm not afraid," answered Thistle; "they can't hurt me."

But he *was* afraid, and as soon as the dragon-fly was asleep that night, he got an ugly spider to come and spin webs all round the poor thing till it could stir neither leg nor wing.

Then leaving it to starve, Thistle flew out of the wood, sure that the Brownies would not catch him.

But they did, for they knew all that happened in their kingdom; and when he stopped to rest in a wild morning-glory-bell, they sent word by the wind that he was to be kept a prisoner till they came. So the purple leaves closed round the sleeping fairy, and he woke to find himself held fast. Then he knew how poor Gauzy-wing felt, and wished he had not been so unkind. But it was too late, for soon the Brownies came, and tying his wings with a strong blade of grass said as they led him away, —

"You do so much harm we are going to keep you a prisoner till you repent, for no one can live in this beautiful world unless he is kind and good. Here you will have time to think over your naughtiness, and learn to be a better elf."

So they shut him up in a great rock where there was no light but one little ray through a crack that let air into his narrow cell, and there poor Thistle sat alone longing to be free, and sobbing over all the pleasant things he had lost. By and by he stopped crying, and said to himself, —

"Perhaps if I am patient and cheerful, even in this dark place, the Brownies will let me out." So he began to sing, and the more he sang the better he felt, for the ray of sunshine seemed to grow brighter, the days shorter, and his sorrow easier to bear, because he was trying to take his punishment bravely and be good.

Lilybell was looking for him all this time, tracing him by the harm he did, and stopping to comfort those whom he hurt; so she never found him till she had helped the bees put the hive in order, set free poor Gauzy-wing, and nursed the hurt fish till it was well again. Then she went on looking for him, and wondering where he was. She never would have guessed if he had not sung so much, for the birds loved to hear him, and often perched on the rocks to listen and learn the fairy songs. Columbines sprung up there in the sunshine and danced on their slender stems as they peeped in at him with rosy faces, while green moss went creeping up the sides of the rock as if eager to join in the music.

As Lilybell came to this pleasant place, she wondered if there was a fairy party going on, for the birds were singing, the flowers dancing, and the old rock looked very gay. When they saw her, the birds stopped, and the columbines stood so still that she heard a voice singing sadly, —

"Bright shines the summer sun,
Soft is the summer air,
Gayly the wood-birds sing,
Flowers are blooming fair.
But deep in the dark, cold rock
All alone must I dwell,
Longing for you, dear friend,
Lilybell, Lilybell!"

"Where are you?" cried the other fairy, flying up among the columbines; for she could see no opening in the rock, and wondered where the voice came from. No one replied, for Thistle did not hear her, so she sang her answer to his call, —

"Through sunshine and shower
I have looked for you long,
Guided by bird and flower,
And now by your song,
Thistledown! Thistledown!
O'er wood, hill, and dell
Hither to comfort you
Comes Lilybell."

Then through the narrow opening two arms were stretched out to her, and all the columbines danced for joy that Thistle was found.

Lilybell made her home there, and did all she could to cheer the poor prisoner, glad to see that he was sorry for his naughtiness, and really trying to be good. But he pined so to come out that she could not bear it, and said she would go and ask the Brownies what he could do to be free.

Thistle waited and waited, but she did not come back, and he cried and called so pitifully that the Brownies came at last and took him out, saying, —

"Lilybell is safe, but she is in a magic sleep, and will not wake till you bring us a golden wand from the earth elves, a cloak of sunshine from the air spirits, and a crown of diamonds from the water fairies. It is a hard task, for you have no friends to help you along. But if you love Lilybell enough to be patient, brave, and kind, you may succeed, and she will wake to reward you when you bring the fairy gifts."

As they said this, the Brownies led him to a green tent made of tall ferns, and inside on a bed of moss lay Lilybell fast asleep, like the Beauty in the dear old story.

"I will do it," said Thistle, and spreading the wings that had been idle so long, he was off like a humming-bird.

"Flowers know most about the earth elves, so I will ask them," he thought, and began to ask every clover and buttercup, wood-violet, and wayside dandelion that he met. But no one would answer him; all shrunk away and drew their curtains close, remembering his rough treatment before.

"I will go to the rose; I think she is a friend, for she forgave me, and took me in when the rest left me in the cold," said Thistle, much discouraged, and half afraid to ask anything of the flower he had hurt so much.

But when he came to the garden the rose-mother welcomed him kindly, and proudly showed the family of little buds that now grew on her stem.

"I will trust and help you for Lilybell's sake," she said. "Look up, my darlings, and show the friend how rosy your little faces are growing; you need not be afraid now."

But the buds leaned closer to their mother, and would only peep at Thistle, for they remembered the little sister whom he had killed, and they feared him.

"Ah," he sadly thought, "if I had only been kind like Lily, they would all love and trust me, and be glad to help me. How beautiful goodness is! I must try to prove to them that I *am* sorry; then they will believe me, and show me how to find the crown."

So, at night when the flowers were asleep, he watered them; sung lullabies to the restless young birds, and tucked the butterflies up under the leaves where no dew could spoil their lovely wings. He rocked the baby-buds to sleep when they grew impatient before it was time to blossom; he kept grubs from harming the delicate leaves of the flowers, and brought cool winds to refresh them when the sun was hot.

The rose was always good to him, and when the other plants wondered who did so many kind things, she said to them, —

"It is Thistle, and he is so changed I am sure we may trust him. He hides by day for no one is friendly, but by night he works or sits alone, and sobs and sighs so sadly I cannot sleep for pity."

Then they all answered, "We will love and help him for Lilybell's sake."

So they called him to come and be friends, and he was very happy to be forgiven. But he did not forget his task, and when he told them what it was, they called Downy-back, the mole, and bid him show Thistle where the earth elves lived. Thanking the kind flowers, Thistle followed the mole deep into the ground, along the road he knew so well, till they saw a light before them.

"There they are; now you can go on alone, and good luck to you," said Downy-back, as he scampered away, — for he liked the dark best.

Thistle came to a great hall made of jewels that shone like the sun, and here many spirits were dancing like fireflies to the music of silver bells.

One of these came and asked why he was there, and when he told her, Sparkle said, "You must work for us if you want to earn the golden wand."

"What must I do?" asked Thistle.

"Many things," answered Sparkle; "some of us watch over the roots of the flowers and keep them warm and safe; others gather drops and make springs that gush up among the rocks, where people drink the fresh water and are glad; others dig for jewels, make good-luck pennies, and help miners find gold and silver hidden in dark places. Can you be happy here, and do all these things faithfully?"

"Yes, for love of Lily I can do anything," said Thistle bravely, and fell to work at once with all his heart.

It was hard and dull for the gay fairy, who loved light and air, to live in the earth like a mole; and often he was very sad and tired, and longed to fly away to rest. But he never did, and at last Sparkle said, "You have done enough. Here is the golden wand, and as many jewels as you like."

But Thistle cared only for the wand, and hurried up to the sunshine as fast as he could climb, eager to show the Brownies how well he had kept his word.

They were very glad to see him back and told him to rest a little. But he could not wait, and with a look at Lily, still fast asleep, he flew away to find the air spirits.

No one seemed to know where they lived, and Thistle was in despair till he remembered hearing Buzz speak of them when he first met him.

"I dare not go to the hive, for the bees might kill me, I did so much harm. Perhaps if I first show them I am sorry, they will forgive me as the flowers did," he said.

So he went into a field of clover and worked busily till he had filled two blue-bells full of the sweetest honey. These he left at the door of the hive when no one saw him, and then hid in the apple-tree close by.

The bees were much pleased and surprised; for every day two little blue jars stood at the door, full of honey so fresh and sweet that it was kept for the Queen and the royal babies.

"It is some good elf, who knows how much trouble we have had this summer, and wants to help us fill our cells before the frost comes. If we catch the kind fellow we will thank him well," said the bees gratefully.

"Ah, ha! we shall be friends again, I think, if I keep on," laughed Thistle, much cheered as he sat among the leaves.

After this he not only left the pretty honey-pots, but flew far and wide for all the flowering herbs bees love to suck, and nearly broke his back lugging berries from the wood, or great bags of pollen for their bread, till he was as dusty as a little miller. He helped the ants with their heavy loads, the field-mice with their small harvesting, and chased flies from the patient cows feeding in the fields. No one saw him, but all loved "Nimble Nobody" as they called the invisible friend who did so many kindly things.

At last they caught him, as he was wrapping a lizard who had chills in a warm mullein-leaf blanket.

"Why, it is naughty Thistle!" cried the bees, ready to sting him to death.

"No, no," chirped an old cricket, who had kept the secret. "It is the good fellow who has done so much to make us all happy and comfortable. Put up your stings and shake hands, before he flies away to hide from you again."

The bees could hardly believe this at first, but finding it true were glad to make up the quarrel and be friends. When they heard what Thistle wanted, they consented at once, and sent Buzz to show him the way to Cloudland, where the air spirits lived.

It seemed a lovely place, for the sky was gold and purple overhead, silver mist hung like curtains from the rainbow arches, and white clouds were piled up like downy cushions for the spirits to sleep on. But they were very busy flying to and fro like motes in a sunbeam, some polishing the stars that they might shine well at night, some drawing up water from rivers and lakes, to shower it down again in rain or dew; others sent messages by the winds that kept coming and going like telegraph-boys, with news from all parts of the world; and others were weaving light into a shining stuff to hang on dark walls, wrap about budding plants, and clothe all spirits of the airy world.

"These are the ones I want," said Thistle, and asked for the mantle of sunshine.

"You must earn it first, and help us work," answered the weavers.

Thistle willingly went with them and shared their lovely tasks; but most of all he liked to shake sweet dreams from the dreamland tree down upon little people in their beds, to send strong, bright rays suddenly into dark rooms, dancing on the walls and cheering sick or sad eyes. Sometimes he went riding to the earth on a raindrop, like a little water-cart man, and sprinkled the dusty road or gave some thirsty plant a good drink. He helped the winds carry messages, and blow flower-seeds into lonely places to spring and blossom there, a pleasant surprise for all who might find them.

It was a busy and a happy life, and he liked it; for fairies love light, air, and motion, and he was learning to live for good and helpful things. Sooner than he expected the golden cloak was won, and he shot like a falling star to the forest with his prize.

"One more trial and she will wake," said the Brownies, well pleased.

"This I shall not like, for I am not a water elf, but I'll do my best," answered Thistle, and roamed away into the wood, following a brook till he came to the lake where he used to play with Gauzy-wing. As he stood wondering how to find the nixies, he heard a faint cry for help, and presently found a little frog with a broken leg, lying on the moss.

"I tried to jump too far, when a cruel child was going to tread on me, and fell among the stones; I long for the water, but can drag myself no farther," sighed the frog, his bright eyes dim with pain.

Thistle did not like to touch the cold thing, but remembering his own unkindness to the dragon-fly, he helped the poor froggie to a fallen oak-leaf, and then tugged it by its stout stem to the waterside where he could bathe the hurt leg and bring cool draughts in an acorn cup.

"Alas! I cannot swim, and I am very tired of this bed," cried poor Hop after a day or two, during which Thistle fed and nursed him tenderly.

"I'll pull a lily-pad to the shore, and when you are on it we can sail about wherever we please, without tiring you," and away went the elf to find the green boat.

After that they floated all day, and anchored at night, and Hop got well so fast that soon he could dive off and paddle a bit with his hands, or float, using his well leg to steer with. Thistle had talked about the water sprites, but Hop was rather a dull fellow, and lived in the mud, so he could tell him nothing. One day, however, a little fish popped up his head and said, —

"I know, and for kind Lilybell's sake I'll show you where they live."

Then Thistle left grateful Hop to his family, and folding his wings plunged into the lake after the silvery fish, who darted deeper and deeper till they stood in a curious palace made of rosy coral at the bottom of the sea. Gay shells made the floors and ornamented the walls. Lovely sea-weeds grew from the white sand, and heaps of pearls lay everywhere. The water sprites in their blue robes floated here and there, or slept in beds of foam, rocked by the motion of the waves.

They gathered round the stranger, bringing all sorts of treasures for him. But he did not care for these, and told them what he wanted. Then little Pearl, the gentlest of the sprites, said:

"You must help the coral-workers till the branches of their tree reach the air; because we want a new island, and that is the way we begin them. It is very dull work, but we cannot give you the crown till that is done."

Thistle was ready to begin at once, and hastened away to the coral-tree, where hundreds of little creatures were building cell upon cell, till the white tree rose tall and wide, spreading through the blue

water. It *was* very dull, and the poor fairy never could lose his fear of the strange monsters that swam to and fro, staring at him with big eyes, or opening their great mouths as if to swallow him. There was no sun, – only a dim light, and the sky seemed full of storm, when the waves rolled overhead, and wrecks came floating down. The sea-flowers had no sweetness; the only birds were flying-fish and Mother Carey's chickens, as the stormy petrels are called. Thistle pined for light and air, but kept patiently at work, and his only pleasure was now and then to float with Pearl on the waves that rippled to the shore, and get a breath of warm air from the lovely earth he longed to see again.

At last the great tree rose above the sea, and the long task was done; for now the waves would wash weeds over the branches, gulls would bring earth and sticks to make their nests, and by and by an island would be formed where men might land or wild birds live in peace.

"Now you can go. Here is the crown of water-drops, changed to diamonds, that will always lie cool and bright on your Lily's head. Good-by, good-by," said Pearl, as she gave the reward and waved her hand to Thistle, who shook the foam off his wings and flew away in the sunshine, like a happy butterfly just out of its cell.

When he came to the wood the Brownies hastened to meet him, and he saw that they had made the place beautiful with wreaths from tree to tree; birds were singing their sweetest on every bough; the brook was laughing as it hurried by to tell the good news wherever it went; and the flowers, all in their best, were dancing with impatience to welcome him home.

Lilybell lay with the cloak of sunshine folded round her, and the golden wand in her hand, waiting for the crown and the kiss that should wake her from this long sleep. Thistle gave them both; and when her eyes opened and she stretched out her arms to him, he was the happiest fairy in the world. The Brownies told all he had done, and how at last he had learned to be gentle, true, and brave, after many trials and troubles.

"You shall have the crown, for you have worked so hard you deserve it, and I will have a wreath of flowers," said Lily, so glad and proud she cared for nothing else.

"Keep your crown, for here are friends coming to bring Thistle his rewards," said the Brownies, as they pointed to a troop of earth spirits rising from among the mossy roots of an old tree. Sparkle brought a golden wand like the one he had earned for Lily, and while she was giving it, down through the air came the sky spirits, with the mantle of sunshine as their gift. Hardly had they folded it round happy Thistle, when the sound of music, like drops falling in time and tune, was heard, and along the brook in their boats of rosy shells came the water sprites with the crown.

As they put it on his head all took hands and danced about the two elves, shouting in their soft voices, "Thistledown and Lilybell! Long live our King and Queen!"

III

RIPPLE, THE WATER SPRITE

Down in the deep sea lived Ripple, a happy little water sprite. She lived in a palace of red coral, with gardens of sea-flowers all round it, the waves like a blue sky above it, and white sand full of jewels for its floor. Ripple and her mates had gay times playing with the sea-urchins, chasing flying-fish, rocking in the shells, and weaving many-colored sea-weed into delicate clothes to wear.

But the pastime Ripple loved best was to rise to the light and air, and float on the waves that rocked her softly in the sunshine, while the gulls stooped to tell her news of the great world they saw in their long flights. She liked to watch little children playing on the shore, and when they ran into the sea she caught them in her arms and held them up and kissed them, though they saw and felt only the cool water and the white foam.

Ripple had one sorrow; for when tempests came and the waves rolled overhead like black clouds, ships were often wrecked, and those whom the angry sea drowned came floating down, pale and cold, to the home of the water sprites, who mourned over them, and laid them in graves of white sea-sand, where jewels shone like flowers.

One day a little child sank down from the storm above to the quiet that was never broken, far below. Its pretty eyes were closed as if asleep, its long hair hung about the pale face like wet weeds, and the little hands still held the shells they had been gathering when the cruel waves swept it away. The tender-hearted sprites cried salt tears over it, and wrapped it in their softest sheets, finding it so lovely and so sad they could not bury it out of sight. While they sung their lullabies Ripple heard through the roar of wind and water a bitter cry that seemed to call her. Floating up through foam and spray she saw a woman standing on the beach with her arms outstretched, imploring the cruel sea to give her back her little child.

Ripple longed so much to comfort the poor mother that power was given her to show herself, and to make her soft language understood. A slender creature, in a robe as white as foam, with eyes as blue as the sea, and a murmuring voice that made music like falling drops of water, bent over the weeping woman and told her that the child was cared for far below all storms, and promised to keep the little grave beautiful with sea-flowers, and safe from any harm. But the mother could not be comforted, and still cried bitterly, —

"Give him back to me alive and laughing, or I cannot live. Dear sprite, have you no charm to make the little darling breathe again? Oh, find one, find one, or let me lie beside him in the hungry sea."

"I will look far and wide and see if I can help you. Watch by the shore, and I will come again with the little child if there is any power in land or sea to make him live," cried Ripple, so eager to do this happy thing that she sprang into the ocean and vanished like a bubble.

She hurried to the Queen in her palace of pearls and told her all the sad story.

"Dear Ripple, you cannot keep your promise, for there is no power in my kingdom to work this spell. The only thing that could do it would be a flame from the sun to warm the little body into life, and you could never reach the fire spirits' home far, far away."

"But I *will*!" cried Ripple, bravely. "If you had seen the poor mother's tears and heard her cries you would feel as I do, and never let her watch in vain. Tell me where I must go; and I will not be afraid of anything if I can only make the little child live again."

"Far away beside the sun live the fire spirits; but I cannot tell the road, for it is through the air and no water sprite could live to reach it. Dear Ripple, do not go, for if any harm comes to you I shall lose my sweetest subject," said the Queen, – and all the others begged her to stay safely at home.

But Ripple would not break her promise, and they had to let her go. So the sprites built a tomb of delicate, bright shells, where the child might lie till she came to make him live again; and with a brave good-by Ripple floated away on her long journey to the sky.

"I will go round the world till I find a road to the sun. Some kind friend will help me, for I have no wings and cannot float through the blue air as through the sea," she said, as she came to the other side of the ocean and saw a lovely land before her. Grass was green on all the hills, flowers were budding, young leaves danced upon the trees, and birds were singing everywhere.

"Why are you all so gay?" asked Ripple, wondering.

"Spring is coming! Spring is coming! and all the earth is glad," sang the lark, as the music poured from its little throat.

"Shall I see her?" asked Ripple, eagerly.

"You will meet her soon. The sunshine told us she was near, and we are hurrying to be up and dressed to welcome her back," answered a blue-eyed violet, dancing on her stem for joy.

"I will ask her how to reach the fire spirits. She travels over the earth every year, and perhaps can show me the way," said Ripple, as she went on.

Soon a beautiful child came dancing over the hills, rosy as dawn, with hair like sunshine, a voice like the balmy wind, and her robe full of seeds, little leaves, dewdrops, and budding flowers, which she scattered far and wide, till the earth smiled back at the smiling sky.

"Dear Spring, will you help a poor little sprite, who is looking for the fire spirits' home?" cried Ripple, – and told her tale so eagerly that the child stopped to hear.

"Alas, I cannot tell you," answered Spring, "but my elder sister Summer is coming behind me, and she may know. I long to help, so I will give you this breeze, that will carry you over land and sea and never tire. I wish I could do more, but the world is calling me, and I must go."

"Many thanks, kind Spring," cried Ripple, as she floated away on the breeze. "Say a kind word to the poor mother waiting on the shore, and tell her I do not forget."

Then the lovely season flew on with her sunshine and song, and Ripple went swiftly over hill and dale till she came to the place where Summer lived. Here the sun shone warmly on early fruit and ripening grain; the wind blew freshly over sweet hay-fields and rustled the thick branches of the trees. Heavy dews and soft showers refreshed the growing things, and long bright days brought beauty to the world.

"Now I must look for Summer," said Ripple, as she sailed along.

"I am here," said a voice, and she saw a beautiful woman floating by, in green robes, with a golden crown on her hair, and her arms full of splendid flowers.

Ripple told her story again, but Summer said with a sigh of pity, —

"I cannot show you the way, but my brother Autumn may know. I, too, will give you a gift to help you along, good little creature. This sunbeam will be a lamp to light your way, for you may have a gloomy journey yet."

Then Summer went on, leaving all green and golden behind her, and Ripple flew away to look for Autumn. Soon the fields were yellow with corn and grain; purple grapes hung on the vines; nuts rattled down among the dead leaves, and frost made the trees gay with lovely colors. A handsome hunter, in a russet suit, came striding over the hills, with his hounds about him, while he made music on his silver horn, and all the echoes answered him.

This was Autumn, but he was no wiser than his sisters, and seeing the little sprite's disappointment he kindly said, —

"Ask Winter; he knows the fire spirits well, for when he comes they fly down to kindle fires on the hearths where people gather to keep warm. Take this red leaf, and when you meet his chilly

winds wrap it round you, else you will be frozen to death. A safe journey and a happy end;" and with a shrill blast on his horn Autumn hurried away, with his hounds leaping after him.

"Shall I ever get there?" sighed poor Ripple, as the never-tiring breeze flew on, till the sky grew dark and cold winds began to blow. Then she folded the warm red leaf about her like a cloak, and looked sadly down at the dead flowers and frozen fields, not knowing that Winter spread a soft blanket of snow over them, so they could lie safely asleep till Spring woke them again.

Presently, riding on the north wind, Winter came rushing by, with a sparkling crown of ice on his white hair, and a cloak of frost-work, from which he scattered snow-flakes far and wide.

"What do you want with me, pretty thing? Do not be afraid; I am warm at heart, though rude and cold outside," said Winter, with a smile that made his pleasant face glow in the frosty air.

When Ripple told what she was looking for, he nodded and pointed to the gloomy sky.

"Far away up there is the palace, and the only road is through cloud and mist and strange places full of danger. It is too hard a task for you, and the fire spirits are wild, hot-tempered things who may kill you. Come back with me, and do not try."

"I cannot go back, now that I have found the way. Surely the spirits will not hurt me when I tell why I have come; and if they do give me the spark I shall be the happiest sprite in all the big sea. Tell the poor mother I will keep my word; and be kind to her, she is so sad."

"You brave little creature! I think you will succeed. Take this snowflake, that will never melt, and good luck to you," cried Winter, as the north wind carried him away, leaving the air full of snow.

"Now, dear Breeze, fly straight up till we reach our journey's end. Sunbeam shall light the way; Redleaf shall keep me warm, and Snowflake lie here beside me till I need it. Good-bye to land and sea; now away, up to the sun!"

When Ripple first began her airy journey, heavy clouds lay piled like hills about her, and a cold mist filled the air. Higher and higher they went, and darker grew the air, while a stormy wind tossed the little traveller to and fro as if on the angry sea.

"Shall I ever see the beautiful world again?" sighed Ripple. "It is indeed a dreadful road, and but for the seasons' gifts I should have died. Fly fast, dear wind, and bring me to the sunshine again."

Soon the clouds were left behind, the mist rolled away, and she came up among the stars. With wondering eyes she looked at the bright worlds that once seemed dim and distant when she saw them from the sea. Now they moved around her, some shining with a soft light, some with many-colored rings, some pale and cold, while others burned with a red glare.

Ripple would gladly have stayed to watch them, for she fancied voices called; faces smiled at her, and each star made music as it shone in the wide sky. But higher up, still nearer to the sun, she saw a far-off light that glittered like a crimson flame, and made a fiery glow. "The spirits must be there," she said, and hurried on, eager to reach her journey's end.

Up she flew till straight before her lay a broad path that led to a golden arch, behind which she could see lovely creatures moving to and fro. As she drew nearer, the air grew so hot that the red leaf shrivelled up, and Ripple would have died if she had not quickly unfolded the snowflake and wrapped herself in that cool cloak. Then she could safely pass under the tall arch into a strange place, where the walls were of orange, blue, and purple flames, that made beautiful figures as they flickered to and fro. Here the fire spirits lived, and Ripple saw with wonder their crowns of flame, their flashing eyes, the sparks that popped from their lips as they spoke, and how in each one's bosom burned a little flame that never wavered or went out.

She had time to see no more, for the wild things came dancing round her; and their hot breath would have burned her if she had not pulled the snow-cloak over her head and begged them not to touch her, but to take her to the Queen.

Through halls of many-colored fire they led her to a spirit more brilliant than the rest; for a crown of yellow flames waved on her head, and under the transparent violet of her robe the light in her breast shone like a star.

Then Ripple told how she had been round the world to find them, and, thanks to the seasons, had come at last to ask the magic spark that would make the little child live again.

"We cannot give it," said the Queen; "for each of us must take something from our bosom-fires to make up this flame, and this we do not like to do; because the brighter these souls of ours burn, the lovelier we are."

"Dear, warm-hearted spirits, do not send me away without it after this long, hard journey," cried Ripple, clasping her hands. "I am sure if you do this kind thing your souls will shine the brighter; for every good act makes us beautiful. Give me the spark and I will do anything I can for you."

As she spoke, the cloak fell back a little, and the Queen saw the chain of jewels Ripple wore.

"If you will give me those lovely blue stones that shine like water I will give a little of my bosom-fire for the child; because you are a brave sprite, and it is hard to be cruel to you."

Gladly Ripple gave her the necklace; but, alas! as soon as the Queen's hand touched it the jewels melted like snow, and fell in bright drops to the ground. Then the Queen's eyes flashed, and the spirits gathered angrily about Ripple, while sparks showered from their lips as they spoke angrily to her.

"I have many finer ones at home, and if you will give me the flame I will bring all I can gather in the sea, and each shall have a necklace to remember the kind deed you have done," she said gently, as they hovered about her, looking ready to burn her up in their wrath.

"We will do it," said the Queen; "but if the jewels you bring melt like these, we shall keep you a prisoner here. Promise to come back, or we shall send lightning to find and kill you, even at the bottom of the sea."

Ripple promised, and each spirit gave a spark, till the golden flame was made, and put into a crystal vase, where it shone like a splendid star.

"Remember! remember!" cried the fierce imps as they led her to the arch and left her to travel back through mist and cloud till far below she saw the beautiful blue sea.

Gladly she plunged into the cool waves and sunk to her home, where her friends hastened joyfully to welcome her.

"Now come," they said, "dear, brave Ripple, and finish the good work you have begun." They gathered round the tomb, where like a marble image lay the little child. Ripple placed the flame on his breast and watched it sparkle there while the color came slowly back to the pale face, light to the dim eyes, and breath through the cold lips, till the child woke from his long sleep and looked up smiling as he called his mother.

Then the spirits sang for joy, and dressed him in pretty clothes of woven sea-weed, put chains of shells on his neck and a wreath of water-flowers on his head.

"Now you shall see your mother who has waited so long, dear child," said Ripple, taking him in her arms and feeling that all her weariness was not in vain.

On the shore the poor woman still sat, watching and waiting patiently, as she had done all that weary year. Suddenly a great wave came rolling in, and on it, lifted high by arms as white as foam, sat the child waving his hands as he cried to her, "I am coming, mother, and I have such lovely things to show you from the bottom of the sea!"

Then the wave broke gently on the shore and left the child safe in his happy mother's arms.

"O faithful Ripple, what can I do to thank you? I wish I had some splendid thing, but I have only this little chain of pearls. They are the tears I shed, and the sea changed them so that I might offer them to you," said the woman, when she could speak for joy.

Ripple took the pretty chain and floated away, ready for her new task, while the child danced gayly on the sand, and the mother smiled like sunshine on the happy sprite who had done so much for her.

Far and wide in all the caves of the sea did Ripple look for jewels, and when she had long necklaces of all the brightest, she flew away again on the tireless breeze to the fire palace in the sky.

The spirits welcomed her warmly as she poured out her treasures at the feet of the Queen. But when the hot hands touched the jewels, they melted and fell like drops of colored dew. Ripple was filled with fear, for she could not live in that fiery place, and begged for some other task to save her life.

"No, no," cried the spirits fiercely. "You have not kept your promise and you must stay. Fling off this cold cloak and swim in the fire-fountains till you get a soul like ours, and can help us brighten our bosom sparks again."

Ripple sank down in despair and felt that she must die; but even then was glad to give her life for the little child's. The spirits gathered about her, but as they began to pull the cloak away, underneath they saw the chain of pearls shining with a soft light, that only brightened as they put their hands upon it.

"Oh, give us this!" they cried; "it is finer than the others, and does not melt. Give us this and you may go free."

Ripple gladly gave it, and, safe under the cloak, told them how the pearls they so proudly divided to wear were tears which, but for them, would still be flowing. This pleased the spirits, for they had warm hearts as well as hot tempers, and they said, smiling, – "Since we may not kiss you, and you cannot live with us, we will show our love for you by giving you a pleasant journey home. Come out and see the bright path we have made."

They led her to the gate and there she saw a splendid rainbow arching from the sky to the sea, its lovely colors shining in the sun.

Then with thanks and good-by, happy little Ripple flew back along that lovely road, and every wave in the great ocean danced for joy to welcome her home.

IV

EVA'S VISIT TO FAIRYLAND

A little girl lay on the grass down by the brook wondering what the brown water said as it went babbling over the stones. As she listened she heard another kind of music that seemed to come nearer and nearer, till round the corner floated a beautiful boat filled with elves, who danced on the broad green leaves of the lily of the valley, while the white bells of the tall stem that was the mast rung loud and sweet.

A flat rock, covered with moss, stood in the middle of the brook, and here the boat was anchored for the elves to rest a little. Eva watched them at their pretty play, as they flew about or lay fanning themselves and drinking from the red-brimmed cups on the rocks. Wild strawberries grew in the grass close by, and Eva threw some of the ripest to the fairy folk; for honey and dew seemed a poor sort of lunch to the child. Then the elves saw her, and nodded and smiled and called, but their soft voices could not reach her. So, after whispering among themselves, two of them flew to the brookside, and perching on a buttercup said close to Eva's ear, —

"We have come to thank you for your berries, and to ask if we can do anything for you, because this is our holiday and we can become visible to you."

"Oh, let me go to fairyland! I have longed so to see and know all about you dear little people; and never would believe it is true that there are no fairies left," cried Eva, so glad to find that she was right.

"We should not dare to take some children, they would do so much harm; but you believe in us, you love all the sweet things in the world, and never hurt innocent creatures, or tread on flowers, or let ugly passions come into your happy little heart. You shall go with us and see how we live."

But as the elves spoke, Eva looked very sad and said, —

"How can I go? I am so big I should sink that pretty ship with one finger, and I have no wings."

The elves laughed and touched her with their soft hands, saying, —

"You cannot hurt us now. Look in the water and see what we have done."

Eva looked and saw a tiny child standing under a tall blue violet. It was herself, but so small she seemed an elf in a white pinafore and little pink sun-bonnet. She clapped her hands and skipped for joy, and laughed at the cunning picture; but suddenly she grew sober again, as she looked from the shore to the rock.

"But now I am so wee I cannot step over, and you cannot lift me, I am sure."

"Give us each a hand and do not be afraid," said the elves, and whisked her across like dandelion down.

The elves were very glad to see her, and touched and peeped and asked questions as if they had never had a mortal child to play with before. Eva was so small she could dance with them now, and eat what they ate, and sing their pretty songs. She found that flower-honey and dewdrops were very nice, and that it was fine fun to tilt on a blade of grass, to slide down a smooth bulrush-stem, or rock in the cup of a flower. She learned new and merry games, found out what the brook said, saw a cowslip blossom, and had a lovely time till the captain of the ship blew a long sweet blast on a honeysuckle horn, and all the elves went aboard and set sail for home.

"Now I shall find the way to Fairyland and can go again whenever I like," thought Eva, as she floated away.

But the sly little people did not mean that she should know, for only now and then can a child go to that lovely place. So they set the bells to chiming softly, and all sung lullabies till Eva fell fast asleep, and knew nothing of the journey till she woke in Fairyland.

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