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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK MORE TALES IN THE LAND OF NURSERY
RHYME ***

Produced by Al Haines



JACK AND JILL IN THE WITCH'S HOUSE.

Jack and Jill in the Witch's House.

**MORE TALES
IN THE LAND OF
NURSERY RHYME**

BY
ADA M. MARZIALS

AUTHOR OF
"IN THE LAND OF NURSERY RHYME"

WITH FRONTISPIECE

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TO
MY LITTLE COUSINS
KATHLEEN AND DOROTHY

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THE NORTH WIND DOTH BLOW

"Different people have different opinions"

The North Wind doth blow,
And we shall have snow,
And what will the robin do then? Poor thing!
He will sit in a barn,
And to keep himself warm
He will hide his head under his wing. Poor thing!

Oh, how cold it was!

The North Wind howled round the barn, whirling the snowflakes into a little heap inside the half-open door. Even beyond the little heap of snow, right inside the barn among the wisps of hay and straw, and beyond the pile of turnips piled up in one far corner, it was still bitterly cold and draughty.

The few birds left had found their way into the old barn for shelter, and were close together on a low bar of wood at the far end, where they sat ruffling their feathers and shivering.

From time to time one of them would peer out at the leaden grey sky and the falling snowflakes, and then hide its head under its wing again to deaden the sound of the wind whistling through the crannies.

There were five of them.

A Robin, who had been blown in with the last gust of wind; a wretched little Sparrow, who twittered helplessly from time to time, and then hid her head ashamed at having been betrayed into such an exhibition of weakness in public; an Owl, who, living habitually in the barn, regarded the others with suspicion as intruders, and possibly thieves; and, lastly, two queer Japanese birds, who had lived all the summer on the ornamental lake in the garden.

These latter had been brought to the barn during the bad weather, as they were considered too delicate to bear the stress of a really cold English winter, and were looked down on and despised by the other birds as foreigners. They were very shy, and crouched side by side in one corner, never venturing a remark unless first spoken to. The Robin, though he was the latest comer, had, by reason of his cheery good-nature, and a certain perky self-confidence, already gained for himself a position as leader among the other birds. Even the old Owl blinked and winked occasionally at his jokes, and the Sparrow was soon reduced to a helpless state of twittering giggles. But laughing will not keep you warm, and at last even the Robin was forced to confess that he had never been colder in his life; and what was the use of thinking of all the plum-puddings and mince pies and bread crumbs and holly-berries in the world, when you were feeling as though you had not a feather on your body to bless yourself with!

"I wish I could make the snow stop somehow," he said. "It is all very well for Mother Goose to go on plucking out feathers up there, but she does not help to make *us* any warmer."

"Pooh!" said the Owl, who had lately condescended to join in the conversation. "Who told you all that rubbish about Mother Goose? Why, the snow has no more to do with Mother Goose than I have!... Mother Goose, indeed!" and she blinked twice, just to show that she could tell more if she chose.

"Bird of Wisdom," piped the Robin, with a wink at the Sparrow, which set her off giggling worse than ever, "enlighten us, I pray you, as to the true cause of snow?"

"Yes, do," said the Sparrow, when she had recovered her breath. The Japanese birds said nothing, but stirred uneasily.

"Snow," began the Owl, sententiously, "is connected with rain and frost——"

"Pip! Pip!" rudely interrupted the Robin. "If you are going to talk science, madam, I must beg to be excused," and he promptly hid his head under his wing, and the Sparrow followed suit.

The Owl paid no heed to this interruption, but lectured on, and having talked for about ten minutes or so with no applause, withdrew to a further corner of the barn and fell asleep.

When she had gone, the Japanese birds began murmuring softly to each other. The Robin brought his head from under his wing with a start.

"What's that you said?" he inquired.

"In our country," began the elder Japanese bird, with a slightly foreign accent, but in otherwise perfect English, "we look on snowflakes as the whirling mantles of the dancing moon maidens; and when the trees and mountain-peaks are seen covered with snow in the morning, we say the moon maidens have left their mantles hanging up or spread out to dry."

"Charming idea, and most romantic," piped the Robin. "I am not romantic myself, and I must say that the Mother Goose idea strongly appeals to my practical nature. Still, there may be something in what you say."

"An absolutely too sweet notion. Fancy a foreigner thinking of it," chirped the Sparrow.

"Have you ever seen a Moon Maiden?" continued the Robin, without heeding the Sparrow's rude interruption.

"No, they are invisible now," said the Japanese bird; "but my great-grandfather told my father a story about one of them once. We always tell it to each other in snow time. It keeps us warm and makes us think of home."

The other Japanese bird piped a few sad notes, which, as the Robin said, "stirred his nature to the very depths!"

"Would it be asking too much for you to tell us the story too?" he said. "I hope it is something

cheerful, though; the roast beef and plum-pudding type of story is what appeals to me."

"Hoots!" said the Owl, waking from her little nap. "I like melodrama. I hope there is a villain in it, and a churchyard or two."

"And I hope there is a strong domestic interest," said the Sparrow, with a feeble giggle.

"Anyway, please tell us," said the Robin. "I am absolutely freezing and must have something to distract my thoughts—ri tol de rol!"

The elder Japanese bird rustled his feathers softly for a minute or two, and then, with his eyes fixed on the grey sky and driving snow, and interrupted from time to time by the howling of the wind, he began:

You must know that our country, like this, is surrounded by the blue sea; and that the sandy shores are fringed with pine trees, and that behind the pine trees rise the hills and mountains. Yea, and behind all these lies the one most beautiful mountain in the world, our Fuji, to look on whom is the greatest privilege that can be given to bird or man.

You must know, also, that across the blue sea, for those who can find it, is the direct path to the country of the moon. There dwell the moon maidens, creatures so lovely that it is beyond me to describe them. They are dressed in white glistening mantles, and spend their lives dancing and singing to the stars. On great occasions, such as birthdays, they are allowed to visit our country, some even to gaze on the all-glorious Fuji. But though they swim across the sea, and often spread out their mantles to dry when they reach the hills, yet must they always be sure to put their mantles on again before they leave our shores, or they will fade and vanish into nothingness, and never again reach the moon where is their home.

There was once a Moon Maiden who was fairer to look upon than all the others, and danced more divinely than any of them. Her name was Tsuki, the Daughter of the Moon. To her, too, was it granted on her birthday to visit our country, and to gaze on the all-glorious Fuji.

Wrapping her feather mantle round her, she swam down the path which leads from the moon across the blue sea to our shores.

When she arrived on the sands among the pine trees, she searched about for some spot where she might hang her feather mantle to dry, while she climbed a neighbouring hill to gaze on the all-glorious Fuji. She saw one pine tree taller than the others, with a flat surface of branches at the top, and taking her glistening, dripping mantle with her, she flew to the topmost branch. There she spread out her mantle and left it to dry.

She then fled away to the neighbouring peak, which, climbing, she beheld Fuji, bathed in moonlight, and realised that even in her own moon-land she had never seen anything so beautiful.

While she was gazing in wonder at our pearl of mountains, a poor fisherman who lived in a cottage close to the sea came out to tend his nets.

His name was Yama, and he lived alone. My great-grandfather's nest was close to his cottage, and Yama loved my great-grandfather and often spoke to him of his dreams.

On this night when Tsuki came to earth, Yama, tempted by the glory of the sea and stars, did not go into his cottage again, but wandered aimlessly along the shore thinking of his lonely life, and dreaming of the moon.

Unconsciously he raised his eyes to the tops of the pine trees that fringed the sandy shore, and his attention was caught by something white and glistening on the top of one of them.

"Is that some dead white bird lying yonder?" he thought. "'Tis too late, surely, for snow."

He walked to the foot of the tree and climbed it branch by branch. When he reached the top, he saw that what he had taken to be a bird, was indeed a mass of finest feathers, but shaped like a woman's cloak.

He took it in his arms—it was as light as driven snow—and climbed down the tree on to the seashore.

"How beautiful!" he said. "I will hang it up in my cottage; surely it is some fairy thing, and will bring me good luck and a fulfilment of my dreams." He was about to walk away with the mantle in his arms, when he heard a cry behind him.

He turned, and saw a beautiful maiden wringing her hands and crying bitterly. She was pale and slim, and her light golden hair flowed to her feet, but she had no mantle, and she trembled exceedingly.

It was Tsuki, the Moon Maiden.

She, knowing that the night was far spent, had said farewell to Fuji, descended the mountain, and

come back to fetch her mantle that she might return homewards. But when she had reached the pine tree, she had seen that her mantle had disappeared. With tears in her eyes she had run to the shore to gaze sadly on the path which led across the sea to her home—the path that without her mantle she could not tread. Then she had seen Yama, and not knowing who or what he was, had run to him for help. When he turned at her cry, she saw that he had her mantle in his arms. They stood gazing at each other in silence for a few minutes. Then:

"Give me back my mantle," she said in a trembling voice.

At first Yama could answer nothing; but he held the mantle closer, and then said at last:

"Oh, most beautiful maiden, let me keep your mantle in token that you will stay here always. Willingly would I serve you all the days of my life, and yonder is my little cottage where we could live and be happy for ever."

But she shook her head.

"I am Tsuki, the Moon Maiden," she said. "If I were to enter a human dwelling I should die. By daylight, even, I cannot live in your country. Give me back my mantle that I may return to my home in the moon. The minutes are passing. When the moon wanes, if I have not my mantle, I shall die and disappear utterly. Then shall I never see my home again, nor the moon maidens my sisters, nor shall I ever dance nor sing again to the stars. Oh, for mercy's sake, I pray you give me back my mantle!"

But Yama answered nothing and held the mantle closer. Then Tsuki began to think what she could do or give him in exchange for what she held so dear.

"See!" she cried suddenly. "If it is a mantle you want, if you will give mine back to me now, then when the winter comes I will return with my sisters, and we will leave a bundle of our old cloaks on the hill-tops for you to find and carry home with you. Indeed, I promise truly that you shall have many of our cloaks in the winter time."

But Yama still answered nothing, and held the mantle closer.

Then Tsuki cried again: "The moon is waning fast, oh give me back my mantle, and before I go I will dance for you as I would dance for the Morning Star."

When Yama saw how earnestly she besought him, and that no entreaties of his could persuade her to stay with him, he cast down the cloak before her.

"Take it," he said, "but keep your promise, and dance for me as you would dance for the Morning Star."

So Tsuki flung the soft, white, glistening, mantle round her, and on the sandy shore beneath the pine trees, by the light of the waning moon, she began to dance.

So light was she that she looked like a blown feather of foam as she skimmed and flitted and swayed on the glistening sand, with her pale gold hair glimmering, and her white feet twinkling in the dim light. Once or twice she fell to the ground in a crumpled heap as if exhausted, but each time, as though a puff of wind had caught her up, she rose again fluttering and swiftly turning through the air. The dawn birds twittered and piped soft music for her, and the sea murmured a humming, rushing melody, and still she danced on. As she danced, there arose in the sky above—slow, bright and clear—the Morning Star. Yama saw her twinkling feet pass him as she drew nearer and nearer to the sea; and as the first pink light began to show behind the pine trees she reached the surf. Flinging her arms high above her head, she plunged in, with her snowy mantle billowing round her. Long, long Yama gazed after her, but she had disappeared utterly.

Slowly he turned from the sea. Slowly, very slowly he walked along the shore towards his cottage. Surely he must have been dreaming! But lo! close upon the shore were lying little white flakes that must have been shed from her snowy mantle as she swirled through the air.

Yama stooped to pick them up, but even as he touched them they changed to tear-drops in his hands.

As I have said before, my great-grandfather's nest was close to Yama's cottage, and in the winter evenings Yama would tell my great-grandfather over and over again how Tsuki, the Moon Maiden, had once danced for him.

He never saw her again; but she kept her promise, and every year, on a winter night, she came with her sisters and left a pile of cloaks on the top of Fuji. Every year Yama climbed Fuji to fetch them, but, alas, they always turned to tear-drops at his touch.

Sometimes, too, pieces of her mantle fell to the ground when she was dancing with her sisters to the Morning Star, but they hardly ever fell on the seashore where Yama lived.

Yama never forgot her. Years, long years afterwards, when he was an old, old man he started to climb Fuji as usual. Another bird told my father, however, that that year he never reached the top; but that Tsuki, touched with his devotion to her, had come with her maidens one night as he slept on the mountain side, and, wrapping him in their feathery mantles, had carried him, smiling in his sleep, to

their home in the moon.

"That's the story," concluded the Japanese bird in his sad foreign voice, "and that is why we always think of Tsuki, the Moon Maiden, in snow-time."

"Hoots!" said the Owl grumpily. "It's melancholy enough, but I should have preferred more blood and thunder."

"Anyway, it has passed the time," said the Robin cheerily. "It has left off snowing. I'm off to the house for crumbs. Many thanks for your story. I'll tell *you* one one of these days that will simply make you *die* of laughing."

So the Robin flew off, followed by the twittering Sparrow. The Owl settled herself to sleep again, and the Japanese birds were left shivering in the corner to think of their own country.

MARY, MARY, QUITE CONTRARY

"Such as the gardener is—so is the garden"

Mary, Mary, quite contrary,
How does your garden grow?
With cockle shells,
And silver bells,
And pretty maids all in a row.

There was once upon a time a King who ruled over a vast kingdom. In the kingdom were all sorts of houses, large and small, and the King himself lived in a huge palace the like of which had never been seen for grandeur. Yet, throughout the length and breadth of his kingdom there was not one single garden. Even the palace itself only possessed a back-yard.

This grieved the King very sorely. He sent proclamations over land and sky and sea to men from other countries to come and make him a garden. He offered vast rewards. But, though gardeners had come from far and near, though the King himself had watched them from the palace steps, and had, once even, cut the first sod with a silver spade ... yet, it was all no use. The garden *wouldn't* be made and the flowers *wouldn't* grow. Every kind of patent soil, seeds, hose, watering-cans, weed-killers and mowing machines had been tried in vain. There were stacks of them lying in the palace yard, but never a single flower, never even the beginnings of a garden.

One day the King, quite weary of looking through catalogues and interviewing possible gardeners, had fallen asleep in the little shed in the back-yard which was known as "The Arbour." As he slept he had a dream.

He dreamt that a little wizened old man came to him and said, "Catalogues and gardeners will not help you. You will never have a garden until you get the Princess Mary Radiant to come and shine on your back-yard. Only two men in all your kingdom can help you—Sir Hunny Bee and Sir Richard Byrde—but even these will be no use without the smile of the Princess Mary Radiant, and for her you must search over earth and sky and sea."

The King awoke from his sleep with a start.

"What ho! without there!" he cried. "Fetch me the Princess Mary Radiant!"

The assembled courtiers shook their heads.

"We have never heard of a lady with that name," they said. "Your Majesty must have been dreaming."

"Dream or no dream," said the King testily, "some one must fetch me the Princess Mary Radiant, for if she once smiles on my back-yard it will be turned into a garden with real grass and real flowers—Canterbury bells and sunflowers—that's what I have set my heart on!"

The courtiers answered nothing and shook their heads once more.

"We don't know such a lady," they repeated.

"Fetch Sir Hunny Bee, perhaps he can find the Princess for us," ordered the King.

The courtiers all ran off to find Sir Hunny Bee. In a few minutes that gallant knight appeared, all dusty from the recent ride from his castle, and splendid in his knightly garb of black and orange.

"What is your will, your Majesty?" said he, bowing low before the King.

"Search over all lands and bring me hither the Princess Mary Radiant," said the King, "for if she should smile on my back-yard it will be turned into a garden."

Now no knight ever dreams of disobeying his Majesty's commands, however impossible they may sound, so Sir Hunny Bee merely bowed low before the King and said, "I go,"—and went.

"Real Canterbury bells and sunflowers," murmured the King, listening to the jingle of the silver bells on the knight's bridle as he rode away.

Sir Hunny Bee had not gone many leagues from the palace when he began to realise that he might ride and ride, and never find the Princess Mary Radiant.

"I wish I knew the way!" he cried.

As he said these words, a little wizened old man sprang out on the road in front of him, and so frightened his horse, that the silver bells jingled more than ever.

"Ride over hill and dale for seven times seven leagues," said the old man, "till you come to a gate-post on which is hung a sign-board. Follow the directions on the sign-board and all will be well."

Before the Knight could say "thank you," the little old man had disappeared.

So Sir Hunny Bee rode on over hill and dale for seven times seven leagues, and there, just as the old man had said, was a gate-post, and on the gate-post a sign-board.

Sir Hunny Bee dismounted from his horse and led it by the silver-belled bridle up to the gate-post, that he might read the directions that were written in red letters upon the sign-board.

"THE GARDEN OF THE PRINCESS MARY RADIANT"

No man shall be admitted here,
Till he a fine doth pay.
And he who will not pay the fine
From hence must ride away.

By him that rides here over land,
A silver bell is paid.
He that flies hither through the air,
Must bring a dark-faced maid.
While he that through the sea doth swim,
Must bring a cockle-shell with him.
By order, M. R.

"By him that rides here over land,
A silver bell is paid,"

repeated Sir Hunny Bee. "But the question is, to whom do I pay it?"

Once more, like a jack-in-the-box, the little wizened old man appeared in front of the Knight.

"To me," he said, "and I will take you in. But though you may see all over the garden, I doubt it you will be allowed to see the Princess. She has a very uncertain disposition, and sometimes will not appear for days together."

So Sir Hunny Bee cut off one of the silver bells from his bridle and gave it to the old man, who put it carefully in his hat, and then led the Knight and his horse into the garden.

What a garden it was!

Paths of grass, green as emeralds and sparkling with dew like diamonds, bordered on each side with shells that shone like mother-o'-pearl. Flowers, flowers everywhere, of every hue and shade. Canterbury bells and sunflowers indeed! What should you say to bells of real silver, glowing and shining? To fair maids blossoming and curtsying in the flower-beds, fair maids so beautiful that the Knight would fain have stopped with them all day? To roses flowering everywhere? To lillies trickling oozy scent into gold bowls laid ready to receive it? To whole bowers of honeysuckle, and whole beds of lavender? To hedges of every flowering shrub imaginable? To lofty trees whose leaves whispered soft

invitations to the passers-by to come and sleep beneath their soothing shade? To fountains plashing and showing a thousand different colours? To fruit of gold and silver hanging from the branches of the fruit trees, and to birds of every plumage singing the sweetest songs imaginable?

Truly there never was such a garden!

"There must be a great many gardeners here!" gasped Sir Hunny Bee.

"Oh, no," answered the old man. "The Princess does it all herself, with the help of some Bees (cousins of yours by the way), a few of the Byrdes, and the nymphs Wynde and Wort. Everything looks so beautiful now, because the Princess is in the garden. If we wait in this arbour here, she will pass behind it on her way to the palace. But do not go out until she calls you. For no man is allowed to see her face until she gives him permission. When she speaks to you, tell her your business speedily."

They waited in the arbour; the little old man still held Sir Hunny Bee's silver bell in his hat. Presently soft footsteps were heard approaching, and a gentle voice said:

"Not to-day,"—and the footsteps passed on behind the arbour.

Then the colour faded from the grass and flowers and shells. The fountains ceased to play, and the birds to sing; and Sir Hunny Bee was almost ready to cry with vexation.

"She is gone," he said, "and I have come so far to seek her."

"You must wait till to-morrow now," said the old man.

So Sir Hunny Bee waited till to-morrow, and exactly the same thing happened. The grass shone, and the flowers glowed. The fair maids turned and curtsied on their stems. The fountains splashed, and the birds sang. The Princess passed behind the arbour and once more said in her gentle voice, "Not to-day," and then all grew dull and dim and silent, and Sir Hunny Bee more impatient.

He remained there for seven days—and on the seventh, without waiting for the old man to give him leave, as the Princess approached he called out:

"Seven times seven leagues over hill and dale have I ridden, most gracious Princess—and I have waited here for you for seven days. Oh, grant me permission to tell you of my quest."

Then the gentle voice said:

"Have you paid your fine, oh, bold stranger?"

"Yes," said Sir Hunny Bee.

"Throw it from the arbour that I may see it," said the Princess.

So the old man took the silver bell from his hat and flung it out on to a flower-bed near.

Immediately it began to grow and blossom till it was many feet high.

"The Princess smiles on it," said the old man, "tell her your mission speedily."

"Gracious lady," said Sir Hunny Bee from within the arbour, "the King of a far kingdom has sent me to beg you to come back with me to his kingdom, and smile on his back-yard that it may become a garden,—even as when you smiled on my poor bell it grew and blossomed."

"Oh, stranger," answered the Princess, "go home and tell your master that through the air must he send yet another messenger to fetch me, ere I will come to him. Come forth now and pluck the flower that sprang from your bell, and take it to your master in token that I speak truth."

So Sir Hunny Bee came forth from the arbour to pluck the flower, and his eyes fell on the glory of the Princess Mary Radiant.

She was dressed all in gold, and her hair was gold, and her glowing smile was more beautiful than words can tell. Sir Hunny Bee was dazzled with the sight of her, and, kneeling, kissed her hand.

"Pluck your flower and go," she said, "and if your master will send yet another messenger, I will come."

So Sir Hunny Bee plucked the flower, and, mounting his horse, rode away the way he had come. But when he stopped to look at the flower he had plucked, he found it was only quite an ordinary Canterbury bell!

The King was waiting on the steps of the back-yard when Sir Hunny Bee approached. It looked drearier than ever. Half a dozen gardeners were watering a muddy-looking stone with patent water, while the King looked on. When he saw Sir Hunny Bee he said:

"Have you brought her?"

"No, your Majesty," said the Knight, "but she sent you this flower, in token that if you will send her

another messenger through the air, she will come. Oh, your Majesty, she is more beautiful than day, and her garden is Paradise itself!"

"Don't waste time talking," said the King. "Send Sir Richard Byrde. He learnt to fly long ago. He can fetch her through the air. Have a garden I must and will. This Canterbury bell shall be planted immediately." So the half-dozen gardeners were straightway sent off to plant it.

Meanwhile Sir Richard Byrde had arrived at the palace, having been sent for by an express messenger. He looked splendid in a knightly garb of russet brown.

"What is your will, your Majesty?" said he, bowing low before the King.

"Fly through the air and fetch me the Princess Mary Radiant," said the King. "For if she will smile on my back-yard, it will be turned into a garden."

Sir Richard Byrde bowed low before the King.

"I go," he said ... and went.

He had not flown many leagues from the palace when he began to realise that he might fly and fly, and never find the Princess Mary Radiant.

"I wish I knew the way," he cried.

Then to him as to Sir Hunny Bee appeared the little old man.

"Fly over cloud and through air for seven times seven leagues," said he, "till you come to a large gate-post on which is hung a sign-board. Follow the directions on the sign-board, and all will be well. By the way, you had better take this parcel with you, and open it when you reach the gate-post," and flinging a little parcel on the ground, the little old man disappeared. Sir Richard Byrde picked up the parcel, which was smaller than the smallest seed, and flew on over cloud and through air for seven times seven leagues. There, just as the old man had said, was the gate-post and the sign-board. He, too, read the directions:—

"THE GARDEN OF THE PRINCESS MARY RADIANT"

No man shall be admitted here,
Till he a fine doth pay.
And he who will not pay the fine
From hence must ride away.

By him that rides here over land,
A silver bell is paid.
He that flies hither through the air,
Must bring a dark-faced maid.
While he that through the sea doth swim,
Must bring a cockle-shell with him.
By order, M. R.

"'He that flies hither through the air,
Must bring a dark-faced maid,'

but I have not one!" he cried. Then he remembered the old man's parcel. He opened it and found inside a little egg-shaped doll with a brown face. He paid this dark-faced maid to the little old man, who had suddenly appeared from nowhere, and who, putting the maid into his hat, led the Knight into the garden.

As the garden had appeared to Sir Hunny Bee, so did it now appear to Sir Richard Byrde. The grass like emeralds, the pearl-lined paths, the flashing fountains, the gorgeous fruits, the curtsying maids, the singing birds, and the scented flowers.

As Sir Hunny Bee had been led to the arbour behind which the Princess was to pass, even so was he.

He, too, asked if there were not a great many gardeners, and was told that the Princess did it all herself with a few of the Bees, a few Byrdes (cousins of yours by the way), and the nymphs Wynde and Wort.

He, too, heard the soft footsteps approaching, and heard the gentle voice say, "Not to-day";—and then he, too, saw the colours fade and the fountains cease to play, and the birds to sing as the Princess passed on behind the arbour.

He, too, waited for seven days, and on the seventh, he, too, cried out:

"Most gracious Princess, for seven times seven leagues have I flown over clouds and through air to seek you; and I have waited here for you for seven days; oh, grant me permission to tell my quest," and the gentle voice said:

"Have you paid your fine, most bold stranger?"

"Yes," said Sir Richard Byrde.

"Throw it from the arbour that I may see it," said the Princess.

So the old man took the maid from out of his hat and threw it on to a bed near, and it grew and grew till it was a fair maid, fairer than all the others, and curtsying deeper than any of them.

"The Princess smiles on it," said the old man, "tell her your mission speedily."

"Gracious lady," said Sir Richard Byrde, "the King of a far kingdom has sent me to beg that you will come back with me and smile on his back-yard that it may become a garden—even as when you smiled on my poor maid it grew and blossomed."

"Oh, stranger," answered the Princess, "go home and tell your master that I will never come to him, unless he comes over the sea to fetch me himself. Come forth now and pluck the flower that sprang from your seed, and give it to your master in token that I speak truth."

So Sir Richard Byrde came forth from the arbour to pluck the flower, and he, too, was dazzled by the golden glory of the Princess.

Kneeling, he kissed her hand.

"Pluck your flower and go," she said, "and if your master will fetch me himself, I will come."

So Sir Richard Byrde plucked the flower and flew away the way he had come. But when he stopped to look at the flower he had plucked, he found it was only an ordinary sunflower.

The King was waiting on the steps of the back-yard, watching a dozen gardeners trying to rear the Canterbury bell with patent foods. When he saw Sir Richard Byrde approaching he called out:

"Have you brought her?"

"No, your Majesty," said the Knight, "but she sent you this flower in token that if you, yourself, will go across the sea to fetch her, she will come—and, oh, your Majesty, she is more beautiful than day, and her garden is Paradise itself!"

"Don't waste time talking," said the King. "You know quite well I have never fetched anything myself in my life. In fact, I have never done any thing myself. That is one of the privileges of being a King."

"Well, but your Majesty will never have a garden without her," murmured Sir Richard Byrde humbly, looking round the back-yard, and thinking of the Princess's lovely garden.

The back-yard certainly did look very dismal. A dozen more gardeners were already at work trying to plant the sunflower, but they had put it in upside down. Scraps of old iron, once patent rakes, hoes, or watering-cans, were scattered about. The smell of the patent soils and weed-killers was positively horrible. The Canterbury bell drooped helplessly in one corner.

The King sighed.

"Well, I must have a garden," he said. "So I will put an end to all this, and go and fetch the Princess myself. After all, I shall only have to bring her here—and then what a difference there will be!"

So without wasting another minute the King himself climbed the castle wall, and plunged headlong into the sea.

He had swum a dozen yards or so when it suddenly occurred to him that he might swim and swim, and never find the Princess Mary Radiant.

"I wish I knew the way," he cried, catching hold of a cockle-shell that was lying on one of the upstanding rocks.

Then to him, as to the two Knights, appeared the old man. "Swim over rocks and through water for seven times seven leagues," said he, "till you come to a large gate-post on which is hung a sign-board. Follow the directions on the sign-board and all will be well." Then the King swam on over rocks and through water, for seven times seven leagues; and there, just as the old man had said, was the sign-board. He, too, read the directions:—

"THE GARDEN OF THE PRINCESS MARY RADIANT"

No man shall be admitted here,
Till he a fine doth pay.
And he who will not pay the fine
From hence must ride away.

By him that rides here over land,
A silver bell is paid.
He that flies hither through the air,
Must bring a dark-faced maid.
While he that through the sea doth swim,
Must bring a cockle-shell with him.
By order, M. R.

"He that through the sea doth swim,
Must bring a cockle-shell with him.'

Well, here it is," said the King. "So I will just walk in."

This time the old man did not appear, and the King walked straight into the garden, holding the shell in his hand.

"Ah-h-h, this is the garden I should like to have, perhaps the Princess could have it transplanted to my palace," said the King. "What a number of gardeners they must employ here!"

"No, only myself," said a soft voice behind him, "a few Bees, a few Byrdes and the nymphs Wynde and Wortá."

The King turned, but could see no one, though he thought he caught a glimpse of a gold skirt among the bushes.

He threw down the shell by the path, and running forward, cried—"Oh Princess, come with me to my back-yard, and make it into a lovely garden such as this."

Then, for one moment through the arching branches of the trees, there appeared before him a maiden so beautiful that he was almost blinded with the sight of her. She was all gold and shining, like the pictures of Queen Elizabeth. She was smiling, too, but oh, so sadly!

"I will come," she said, "but you, yourself, must prepare the place for the garden. When it is ready I will smile on it and you. Till then, though I will come back with you and tell you what to do, you will never see my face."

As she spoke, a veil of mist shrouded her face and her shining golden dress. The flowers grew dim, the fruits ceased to shine, the fair maids to curtsey, the fountains to play, and the birds to sing. The King shivered. "I thought that when you came I would have my garden at once," he muttered.

"Come," said the Princess gently.

Together they swam back to the Palace. The King was angry and disappointed, but the beautiful picture of the golden Princess smiling at him through the trees was fixed for ever in his mind. He began to think that he would not mind doing a little digging, if only he might see her face again. The first thing to be done the next day was to dismiss all the gardeners; and of all the court only Sir Richard Byrde and Sir Hunny Bee were allowed to stay in the back-yard, where the King was going to work with his own hands.

Sometimes in the long days that followed, the Princess sent out her two nymphs, Wynde and Wortá to help him—but all the really hard work he had to do quite alone. Long days they were, for first there was so much, much, digging to be done. All the patent soils had got mixed up, and twisted and turned the King's spade as he tried to dig. He was not accustomed to digging either, and disliked getting hot, and also getting blisters on his kingly hands—but as he toiled on he thought of the Princess and her lovely garden.

Day after day he worked and worked. He felt as if each little tiny task took him years and years; and then he had to wait what seemed to him an eternity before anything happened at all; and then another eternity before the Princess would come and smile upon his garden.

"Will it *never* be a garden?" he said at last. "Will you *never* come and smile on it, and shall I *never* see your face again."

"Not to-day," she said.

At last, one day, after a long time, when his back was bowed with digging and his hands horny with working, he suddenly stopped, for a strange light seemed to be shining from the Palace steps behind

him.

"Do not look round yet," said the Princess' soft voice. "Look straight in front of you first."

He stood quite still, staring at what had been, until now, the backyard.

As he gazed there appeared before him paths of grass, green as emeralds and sparkling with dew, and bordered on each side with shells that glowed like mother-o'-pearl. Flowers, flowers everywhere, Canterbury bells, and sunflowers, roses, lilies and lavender. Fruit trees of gold and silver glittering in the sunshine, and behind, great dark leafy trees inviting to shade and coolth. Fountains splashing, and birds singing. He rubbed his eyes, thinking he must be dreaming.

Then he turned—and there, standing on the Palace steps, was the Princess. No veil covered her face now. There she stood in all her glorious golden beauty—smiling, radiant, as her name.

"You have your garden at last," she said.

Now this story might have been written about any garden, yours or mine. For the honey bee still helps to grow the Canterbury bells, and the birds still help to scatter seeds, and people still line their paths with cockle shells, and sunflowers are still called "fair maids" in the country. As for the Princess Mary Radiant—why, it's only in the sunshine that the bells look like silver, and the cockle-shells like mother-o'-pearl, and it's only to the sun that the sunflowers turn their heads every day ... and we all know the sun can be "contrary" enough!

JACK AND JILL

"When the well is dry, they know the worth of water"

Jack and Jill
Went up the hill,
To fetch a pail of water;
Jack fell down
And broke his crown,
And Jill came tumbling after.

"Oh dear, how I hate the rain," said Jack to Jill, as they stood at the window watching the drops trickling down the window-pane. "We can't do anything really nice when it is raining. I wish someone would take all the rain away so that we could have nothing but fine days."

I *have* heard Jacks and Jills say much the same things nowadays! But this particular Jack and Jill do not live nowadays at all. They lived a very long time ago, in a far-off country. So long ago, and so far off, that witches were still alive, and one of them actually lived in their own village!

The village straggled up the side of a hill, and the Witch's cottage was at the top of it.

It was a queer-looking, tumble-down place, but people said that from it there were trap doors and passages leading to all sorts of caves and cellars dug out of the ground underneath. It was surrounded by very high branching palings with skull-shaped knobs on the top of them.

The people in the village hardly ever saw the old Witch, except during thunderstorms and after late winter parties; but everyone who had seen her, declared that she was very ugly, and beyond a doubt very wicked. She had an uncomfortable way, too, of sometimes appearing suddenly when she was not wanted, and granting people's wishes. This sounds very nice, but it may be horribly inconvenient. The villagers realised this, and it had become the fashion never to wish for anything; and so, despite the presence of the Witch, the village was a happy and contented place enough.

Jack was certainly not thinking about the old Witch when he said, "Oh dear, how I hate the rain," on that particular afternoon.

And Jill was certainly not thinking about the old Witch, when, a few minutes later, she heard a "tap-tap" on the door, louder and more insistent than the pattering of the raindrops on the window-pane.

So they were both of them distinctly frightened when they went to the door and saw—who but the old Witch herself, on the doorstep!

"Oh dear," said Jack.

"Won't you come in?" said Jill.

And in she came.

She was certainly very ugly. She had a hooked nose and pointed chin. Grey wisps of hair straggled out from beneath her poke bonnet. Her eyes were like two snakes, and when she opened her mouth to speak she showed her long pointed iron teeth. She was dressed in a black cloak, from which protruded her long skinny arms and claw-like hands. She carried a broom-stick, and behind her slunk her cat, all draggled with the wet, and mewling frightfully. She sat down on the chair Jill offered her.

"Thank you, my dear," she said, in a voice so harsh and grating that it sounded like a saw scraping over a stone.

"Surely you wouldn't grudge a poor old woman a rest on the way up to her cottage." This with a leering grin at Jack, who was obviously disconcerted at her presence.

Jack tried to make some polite reply, and then there was a long silence, only broken by the pat, pat patter of the raindrops against the window-pane.

"Now I wonder what you two were talking about so nicely when I came in?" said the old Witch at last.

"We were talking about the rain," said Jill.

"Yes," blurted out Jack, "we were saying, at least I was, that I hated the rain. You see, we can't go out when it is raining, and to-morrow everything will be wet, and we shan't be allowed to walk on the grass, and there won't be any cricket for days. Oh, I wish——"

"Ye-es," drawled out the old Witch. "I thought so. You wish that there was not any rain at all."

"Why, yes," said Jack.

"Would you like that too, my pretty dear?" said the old Witch, turning to Jill.

"Yes," said Jill.

"Very well," said the old Witch. "Ve-ry well! Let us make a bargain together. If you, my little dear, (turning to Jill) will come and serve me for a year and a day, I'll manage this rain business for you," and she scraped her iron teeth together and smiled more horribly than ever.

"May I not come and serve you, too?" said Jack.

"Dear me, no!" said the old Witch, bringing her lips together with a smack. "I don't want any boys about the place. Besides, you'll be able to enjoy some of the fine weather first, and can tell your sister how delightful it is when she comes back," and she winked at the cat, who winked one of his green eyes back at her.

"Is it a bar-gain?" drawled the old Witch.

"Yes," said Jack and Jill together.

Then the old Witch drew from her under cloak, a long thin bag made of elastic. This she opened, and hung out of the window.

The rain poured in. When the bag was quite full she whipped a piece of string out of her pocket and tied up the top end. "That will do for the present," she said. "You can carry the bag, my little dear, and we will go straight home and begin work immediately. Say good-bye to your brother and come along."

So Jill kissed Jack, took up the sack, (it was wonderful how very heavy it was,) and opened the door to go out. It had stopped raining, but was still grey and cloudy. As it was already dusk there was no one in the village street as they climbed the hill to the old Witch's cottage followed by the cat. They went slowly. Jill had plenty of time to look about her. The familiar cottage gardens were bright with flowers. Behind them spread the fields thick and lush with growing grass. Over the road arched the trees in all the freshness of their first spring beauty. At the foot of the hill babbled and gurgled the village stream, by the side of which clacked and chattered a few ducks revelling in the glories of the recent shower. Everything smelt fresh and pure and spring-like. Only she, Jill, was tired, for the old Witch's elastic bag seemed to grow heavier and heavier, and the cat would keep on rubbing up against her legs and disconcerting her by winking and blinking up at her with his green eyes.

It was quite dark when they reached the old Witch's cottage. Jill felt she must be getting sleepy, but it certainly appeared to her as if the branching palings round the cottage were really long lean arms joining their skinny hands, and as if the skull-shaped knobs on the top of them were real skulls.

As they approached, all the eyes of all the skulls suddenly lit up like lanterns. Jill began to wish that she had never come.

They went in. The room was very small and dark, and the ceiling was covered with cobwebs. There was a horrible smell coming from a huge cauldron on the fire.

"Hurry up there," called out the old Witch sharply. "Put the bag down on the floor and lay the table

for supper."

Jill let down the bag on to the floor with a thud that disturbed several spiders and snakes which were crawling about.

"Hurry up there!" called out the old Witch again.

Jill laid the supper. The old Witch ate hastily, clawing huge pieces of meat out of the smoking cauldron, and throwing titbits to the cat, who lay, winking and blinking as usual, in front of the fire.

After supper the old Witch called out, "Pick up the bag and follow me."

So Jill picked up the bag and followed the Witch into a corner of the kitchen.

"Lift up the floor
And open door,"

bawled out the old Witch, tapping the floor with her broomstick.

Immediately a square piece of the floor slid away, revealing a long flight of black steps.

"Follow me," said the old Witch again.

She went on down the steps and Jill followed, dragging the bag after her.

The steps were very dark and winding, but at last they reached the bottom. Jill found herself in a huge vault.

She first of all thought the vault was empty, but when her eyes grew accustomed to the darkness, she saw that it was filled with rows and rows of empty casks. Though the casks were empty, yet each one had a label. Jill strained her eyes to read some of the labels in the dim light. "Showers," "Dew," "Drinking-water!"

"What extraordinary labels!" she said to herself, and went on to the next row. "Taps," "Washing-water," "Streams," "Rivers," "Mists," "Frosts." One very large one was labelled "Thunder-storms." The next one to it, "Raindrops, Special, extra loud patterers." The next one, "Steam reserved for Boats, second best quality only." Rows upon rows of them, all empty, and all labelled with these curious labels!

"Bring the bag here," said the old Witch, pointing to a cask labelled "Spring Showers. Pure Refreshers."

Jill lifted up the bag and untied the string. The water went pattering into the cask. When the bag was empty, and the cask was full, a lid slid on to the cask by itself. Then the old Witch touched one of the walls, and another door flew open, leading to a second and much smaller vault. This vault was full of elastic bags like the one Jill had carried up the hill.

"Take as many of these as you can carry," said the old Witch.

So Jill picked up as many as she could carry, and they went back the way they had come.

When they reached the kitchen again the old Witch called out:

"Shut down the floor
And close the door,"

and the floor closed up again.

"I am going out now," said the old Witch. "I shall not be back till to-morrow at dusk. I shall lock the door so that you cannot get out. Clean the place and have supper ready for me when I come back."

She took her broomstick. Then, slinging all the empty bags across it, and balancing the cat on the other end, she mounted it astride.

"Abracadabra!" shouted she.

The broomstick rose up in the air and swirled through the window, which shut down after her with a bang.

So Jill was left alone to work as best she might. The next night when dusk approached she laid the supper and set the cauldron boiling.

"Abracadabra," and in swirled the Witch again, and the window shut after her with a bang!

The elastic bags were full and distended as the old Witch flopped them on to the floor.

"They are all full of water," said she.

"Where did you get it from?" ventured Jill.

"Aha, I stole it!" said the old Witch, with a wicked grin. "When the people weren't looking, I stole it! A bag here, and a bag there. Some nice little thunderstorms I got too. They won't like it when they wake up to-morrow and find their wells dried up, and their grass withering. Ha! ha! ha!" and the old Witch ground her teeth together more maliciously than ever.

"Now, come along, pick up those bags and follow me," she cried, when she had finished eating her supper. So Jill picked up the bags.

"Lift up the floor
And open door,"

shouted the old Witch, tapping the floor with her broomstick. Once more they went down the dark steps into the vault. Jill untied the sacks and emptied them into the different casks according to the Witch's directions, and as each cask was filled a lid slid on of itself. There was a terrible noise while the thunder-storm cask was being filled, and the old Witch had to mutter spells all the time to prevent it from running over.

When the bags were empty and the casks full, the old Witch went into the next vault and made Jill pick up and add some more bags to the number that she already had.

Then they went back to the kitchen again. At the top of the steps the Witch called out:

"Shut down the floor
And close the door,"

and the floor closed up again.

"I am going out now," said the old Witch as before. "I shall not be back till to-morrow at dusk. I shall lock the door so you cannot get out. Clean the place and have supper ready for me when I come back." She took her broomstick and bound on it the double number of elastic bags, perched her cat at the other end, mounted it astride, and with an "Abracadabra," she was gone.

The next night at dusk she returned again with the bags full of water.

"Ha! ha! I stole it," said she to Jill. "A bag here, and a bag there. They won't like it when they wake up to-morrow and find they have no water to wash in and precious little water to drink." She ground her iron teeth together and laughed again.

As before, Jill had to take the bags down to the vault, empty them in the casks, and get a further supply of bags for the next day. And so it went on for a year and a day.

At the end of that time the numberless casks in the vault were all full; the last to be filled being those labelled "Drinking-water Possible," and "Reservoirs Old Fruity."

On the last evening the old Witch was in high spirits. "You have worked well, my pretty dear," she said to Jill. "Go home now and enjoy yourself," and she approached Jill as if to kiss her. But Jill fled out of the door and through the gate-posts on to the hill outside.

She had never been outside the Witch's cottage since the day she came, but she had often thought of the village street as she had seen it last—cool and green and shady, with the babbling stream and chattering ducks at the foot of the hill.

When she got outside the fence she stopped suddenly.

What had happened to the village?

It looked brown and baked and dusty. The sun was intolerably hot. There was not a field to be seen, nothing but a wide dreary desert of sand stretching on either side of the sun-baked houses. A few rotting stumps by the roadside told where once the shady trees had been. As Jill went slowly down the hill she looked into the little dried-up yards that had once been gardens. Oh, how dusty it was! The stream had disappeared, some bleaching bones told of the poor ducks' fate.

"Oh, I am thirsty!" said Jill as she went on down the hill to her own cottage.

A dirty, thin, brown-skinned, weak-looking boy was lying in the porch.

"Jill," he said feebly.

"Is that you, Jack?"

"Yes, have you brought us any water?"

"Me, no; I was just going to ask you for a drink. I am so thirsty."

Jack smiled feebly. "There isn't any," he said.

Jill went indoors. A dirty table-cloth was spread on the dusty table.

"Ugh!" she said, coming out again, "isn't there any milk?"

"No," said Jack. "You see there is no grass for the cows. Where's the water gone?" he cried, raising himself from his chair, "that's what I want to know. I wish it would rain. My word, wouldn't I hang my tongue out to catch the raindrops," and he sank back again exhausted.

"The water?" said Jill, suddenly realising what that year with the old Witch had meant. "Why the old Witch has got it all! Her casks are full of it! But she will never let us have it back again."

"Then we must go and fetch it," said Jack with a sudden burst of energy. "You must come and show me where it is."

"Let us go at once," said Jill, "while the Witch is out. I know the spell to open the doors. We must take a pail to put the water in."

So she went into the dusty, dirty kitchen and found a pail, and then she and Jack set off to climb the glaring village street.

They passed some of the villagers. They all looked as brown and dirty and thin as Jack.

"Where are you going?" they called after the children.

"To fetch a pail of water," answered Jack.

Poor Jack was so thin and tired, and Jill so hot and thirsty that they were forced to stop many times on their way up the hill.

At last they reached the Witch's cottage.

"Abracadabra," called out Jill, and they both entered the house through the window with the pail between them.

"Come along," said Jill, "she may come in at any minute." So they ran to the corner of the kitchen.

"Lift up the floor
And open door,"

cried Jill, and they went down the steps.

Jack was so tired that he could hardly stand, but when he saw the casks he clapped his hands.

"Quick," he cried, "Abracadabra!"

"What have you done?" called out Jill the next minute. "You said Abracadabra to the thunder-storm cask. They will all be surging out in a minute! Oh, dear! oh, dear! See, *this* is the drinking-water cask.

"Abracadabra!"

The lid slid open.

She dipped the pail in. "You must not stop to drink now," she said. "Come quickly before the thunder-storms pour out." And without thinking what she was doing, she ran back, past all the casks, saying, "Abracadabra," as quickly as ever she could. Then, with the full pail in her hand, she stumbled up the steps, and Jack after her. She did not wait to shut the trap-door, but ran out of the house half-way down the hill.

Jack tottered after her.

"I must have a drink," he said.

He caught hold of the handle of the pail, and was about to dip in his head when—

Flash! flash! across the sky came the lightning, and then a deafening roar of thunder.

"It's the old Witch!" he cried, dropping the handle of the pail again.

"It's the thunder-storms tumbling out of the cask," said Jill, letting go of her side of the pail too.

They started to run on home, but Jack caught his foot in the handle of the pail as it rolled down the hill. He fell headlong, cutting his head on a stone in the pathway. Jill tried to stop, but somehow got entangled with Jack's feet, and fell headlong too.

All the while the lightning was flashing and the thunder roaring overhead, and then, splash! splash! great drops of rain came pouring down upon them.

How it rained! It splashed down in torrents! Streams and streams of it! Drop after drop, shower

after shower, storm after storm.

"I must have opened all the casks at once," said Jill.

Jack lay still where he was, he did not heed his broken head or his drenched clothes.

"Oh, how good the rain is," was all *he* said.

When, at last, the rain did leave off, those who went to see, found that the old Witch's cottage had been quite washed away. Nothing remained to show where once it had been but one or two rotting casks, and a worn-out elastic bag. The old Witch herself was never seen or heard of in the village again, but she is probably still wandering about somewhere. So don't be too anxious for the rain to leave off, in case she should hear you, and come and steal all *your* water!

LITTLE MISS MUFFET

*"Cowards are cruel
But the brave
Have mercy, and delight to save"*

Little Miss Muffet,
Sat on a tuffet,
Eating her curds and whey.
There came a big spider,
And sat down beside her,
Which frightened Miss Muffet away.

Of course if Miss Muffet had been just an ordinary little girl, she would not have been afraid of spiders! But she wasn't an ordinary little girl at all, she was a little fairy girl, which just makes all the difference. That is why she is always known as "little" Miss Muffet, because she was so very small, and spiders did seem to her so very large; and that is why she is always called "Miss" Muffet, because fairy girls only have sur-names, just as if they were grown-ups!

It was really extremely awkward that Miss Muffet was so afraid of spiders, and of *the* Spider in particular, because, you see, the one thing a fairy cannot be is a coward. If a fairy once does a cowardly act, unless he or she immediately makes it right by doing a brave one, he or she will become a mortal at once. And think how dull it would be to become a mere mortal, when you have been used to flying, or dancing, or appearing in dreams, or granting wishes, or doing one of the hundred and one exciting things that fairies do!

Miss Muffet lived under a gooseberry bush just outside the farm-house door, and the Spider lived in the barn opposite, and there was a fine tuft of grass in between, where they sometimes met. The farm people knew all about fairies, and on Midsummer Eve always put out a bowl of curds and whey for Miss Muffet in the true old-fashioned style. Miss Muffet always hoped that the Spider would not see it and get there first. Oh, Miss Muffet was certainly very much afraid of the Spider!

She was quite sure he had a hundred legs, whereas he had only eight; quite sure that he was as big as a house, whereas he wasn't as big as your little finger; and quite sure that he spent his life lying in wait to eat her up, whereas he was far too busy about his own affairs ever to think about her at all!

It was on one particular Midsummer Eve that Miss Muffet had her great adventure with the Spider.

It was a beautiful moonlight night. Miss Muffet crept out from under the gooseberry bush, and flew across to the tuft of grass. Yes, there was the bowl of curds and whey as usual. It had never been forgotten ever since Miss Muffet had come to live under the gooseberry bush.

Miss Muffet tripped up to the bowl, and began to sip the contents, thinking all the while how glad she was that she was not a mortal, when——

Plop!

Out of the barn dropped the Spider, close down beside her.

"Can you tell me where the best dewdrops——" he began. But Miss Muffet only looked once in his direction, and then fled as fast as her wings could carry her.

Trembling, she reached the gooseberry bush, and then, all of a sudden, her wings failed her.

"Oh dear," she cried. "I have run away, and been a coward. If I don't do something very brave at once I shall start turning into a mortal. Oh, I don't want to be an ordinary little girl and be called Molly or Dolly, and have to walk everywhere, and go to school, and put my hair in pig-tails. I must do something brave this minute."

Then her eye fell on the gooseberry bush.

"I know," she said, "I will screw up my courage and kill that spider dead. I will take a thorn from the gooseberry bush to spear him with."

So, with her tiny hands, she broke off a long thorn from the gooseberry bush. Then, feeling very brave indeed, she shouldered the thorn and flew back very slowly to the tuft.

At first she thought the spider had disappeared, as she could not see him anywhere. But, happening to fly over the bowl of curds and whey, she saw that he was lying struggling, in the very middle of it!

At first sight of him Miss Muffet felt all her old terror returning, and had half a mind to fly away again. But then she remembered that she had come to do a brave deed, and she held her big thorn tighter, and forced herself to look at the Spider as he struggled in the curds and whey.

"That will make it easier," she said, as she balanced herself on the rim of the bowl. "He will not be able to fly away when I start to stab him," and she poised the thorn all ready for a vigorous thrust.

The Spider looked up at her.

"Gracious lady," he began humbly. "Can you direct me as to the best way out of this pond?"

Miss Muffet was so astonished at being addressed so humbly and so politely by such a formidable person as the Spider, that she lowered her spear-point in order to look at him more closely.

"Gracious lady," began the Spider again. "I beg you will show me the way to get out of this pond soon. I have eight hours more work to do to-night before my task is done."

"Work!" said Miss Muffet, almost to herself. "Do *you* do any work?"

"Toil and spin, toil and spin, year in, year out," said the Spider sadly. "It is my masterpiece that I am finishing to-night,—a woven counterpane, light as air, threaded with sparkling dewdrops. I was just going out to fetch a few more, and thought there might be some in this pond; but it is a sticky pond, and I fell in, and now I cannot get out again."

"Well, of all the idiots!" began Miss Muffet. "Of course you won't find dewdrops in there," she continued hastily. "But tell me some more about your work?"

So the Spider, still struggling in the curds and whey, told on. How he helped the gardener by eating up the flies; how day and night he toiled and spun, making and weaving carpets and counterpanes from silken threads that he himself spun out of nothing. "It was my masterpiece I was to finish to-night," he said again at the end.

All the while he was talking a great struggle was going on in Miss Muffet's mind.

She raised the thorn again.

"I came here to kill him. I shall be a coward and turn into a mortal if I don't kill him," she said to herself. "But if I kill him he will never finish his masterpiece. Supposing I don't kill him after all, but help him out, then he can finish his work and be happy." She looked at him again and shuddered.

"Oh, if I help him out he will eat me!" she cried. "I *will* be brave and kill him."

So she shouldered the thorn, and poised herself once more upon the edge of the bowl.

The Spider was still struggling, but more feebly, and Miss Muffet could hear him muttering to himself, "Grey, threaded with silver and sparkling dewdrops, oh, my masterpiece!"

"No!" she said, flinging the spear down on the tuft behind her. "I *can't* kill him. What does it matter if I turn into a mortal. I have never done any work or made a masterpiece. Let him eat me if he likes. I will *save* him!"

"Here!" she said in a louder voice. "Give me one of your feet, and I will pull you out."

"Ugh! how ugly he is," she continued to herself, as the Spider drew nearer and lifted up one of his feet. She knelt down on the brim, and stretching out her tiny hands seized the foot, and pulled him slowly up the side of the bowl.

"Now he'll eat me!" she thought, as he stood for a moment shaking himself on the edge.

But no, without a word he was gone, scuttling straight off to the barn as fast as he could run. Was it

possible that *he* was afraid of *her*!

Miss Muffet looked round. Behind her on the ground lay the big thorn with which she had set out to kill the Spider.

"I wonder if I have been a coward to spare him after all," she said as she flew home. "Anyway, I shall know to-morrow morning. Perhaps this is the last fly I shall ever have, and when I wake up to-morrow I shall be just an ordinary little girl with no wings, and a serge frock and pigtails." And murmuring "Coward, coward, I shall be an ordinary little girl to-morrow!" she fell asleep.

But when she woke up to-morrow morning she found she was a fairy still—wings and all; and moreover she found spread over her the daintiest and most beautiful counterpane in the world, made of grey threads woven with silver and diamented with dewdrops all glistening and quivering in the morning sunlight. It was indeed a masterpiece!

"Look what a lovely spider's web there is under the gooseberry bush!" said the farmer's little girl, when she came to fetch the empty bowl of curds and whey that morning.

PUSSY CAT, PUSSY CAT

"The man who loses his opportunity loses himself"

Pussy Cat, Pussy Cat, where have you been?"
I've been to London to visit the Queen."
Pussy Cat, Pussy Cat, what did you there?"
I frightened a little mouse under her chair."

You would never think to look at Thomas now, as he lies blinking in front of the fire, that he once had the chance of being King of England!

To us, Thomas only looks like an ordinary, sleek, well-fed, tabby cat. But then, you see, you don't know Thomas' Private History. Thomas himself is usually too sleepy to think about his early adventures now, but time was, when the mere mention of the Queen's name, would start him off purring at the thought of what might have been!

It was a long time ago, when Thomas was just emerging from the kitten stage, that his Private History really began. It started one evening when mother was reading the children the story of the White Cat in front of the nursery fire before they went to bed. Thomas, who had been more than usually frisky all day, was taking a little repose on the hearthrug, and as the story was about a cat, had condescended to listen.

You all know the story—how the White Cat, though in the form of a cat, was really a princess, and how she married the prince, and changed back into a princess at last.

Thomas listened enthralled, and from the moment the story ended, his Private History began.

For, at the close of the story, Thomas had quite come to the conclusion that he, too, was no ordinary cat. No! As the White Cat in the story was really a princess, Thomas was now convinced that he was really a prince, and only waiting to marry a princess, or better still, a Queen, to show himself in his true guise.

It was soon after this idea entered his head that Thomas became almost intolerable.

The airs he assumed! The graces he put on! The arts he practised! The condescension of his smile! The upward tilt of his nose! The twirl of his moustachios! The defiant angle of his tail!

He began, also, to exercise his voice at night. "Practising serenades," was how he described it to the stable cat, for whom he had the utmost contempt, though he was not above showing off his fine person in front of her now and then.

It was about this time, too, that Thomas started on a long series of nightly prowls. "Quests of adventure," was how he described them. He also developed a habit of strolling in about breakfast time, and listening to Papa reading aloud the morning paper; but it was only in the Court news that he really took any interest. From this he gathered that it was in London that the Queen lived, and he became filled with a burning desire to go to London. Accordingly he made himself more than usually agreeable

to the family, in the hopes that they would take him with them when they paid their yearly visit to town.

All this, of course, was Thomas' Private History at this time. To the family he was only known as "an excellent mouser," and "so good with the children."

This troubled Thomas not a little.

It also troubled him that he was so exceedingly fond of mice.

He far preferred them to milk, which was a much more princely diet. Once, even, the idea just crossed his mind, that, as he was so fond of mice, perhaps he wasn't a prince after all, but only an ordinary tabby cat. This thought he thrust from him with a flick of his tail.

"Just wait till I get to London," he said to himself. "When the Queen sees me she will at once recognise me for what I am," and he twitched his nose contemptuously at the stable cat who was just crossing the yard.

The next day the family went up to London. Thomas, to his great delight, was taken too. "He is such an excellent mouser," Papa had said, and the children, "Oh we can't leave Thomas, he is such a darling."

This had annoyed Thomas, and hurt his dignity. So, just before starting, he went out to say good-bye to the stable cat.

"Good-bye," he said. "I don't suppose you will see me again, or if you do, I don't suppose you will recognise me. I am going up to London to marry the Queen."

The stable cat expressed no surprise at this remarkable statement. She merely winked her yellow eyes and answered nothing.

"I suppose she thinks I am too fine to be spoken to by such as she!" said Thomas to himself as he stalked away.

The journey up to London was certainly not a success as far as Thomas was concerned.

He was put in a basket. This he considered undignified, as well as uncomfortable, and he took no pains to conceal his feelings. He scratched and spluttered at the side of the basket, and uttered his opinion of the family with no uncertain voice. But nobody paid any attention to him.

"Very well," he cried at last. "When I am King of England you won't put me in a basket any more. The next time I go on a journey, it will be in a coach and four."

Then he started thinking of how many mice he had caught last week, and this thought comforted him so much that he curled round and went to sleep for the rest of the journey.

The evening after they arrived, one of the young ladies of the family was to go and see the Queen. Thomas privately decided to go with her.

He did not tell her he was coming too.

"Though, of course, if she knew I was her future King, she would be only too delighted to be going with me," he thought. "All the same, I think I will go quite quietly without any fuss, there will be plenty of time for that afterwards."

He assisted while the young lady was being dressed. She looked very beautiful, with a long train, and feathers in her hair, and a sheaf of lilies in her arms.

"Just like a fairy princess," thought Thomas.

She went downstairs. Thomas followed her. She got into her carriage. Thomas, concealed by her train, crept in too.

"I thought Thomas got in with me," she said anxiously.

But Thomas hid himself under the seat. When they arrived at the door of the palace, she alighted, and Thomas got out after her.

The crowd was so occupied in gazing at the young lady's beauty that they never looked at Thomas at all.

This annoyed him. He was almost inclined to mew with vexation.

"Never mind," he consoled himself, "she, poor girl, has only this one chance of being looked at, but everyone will always be looking at me when I am King of England," so he refrained from mewling.

The young lady walked in through the folding doors. Thomas followed, still concealed by the folds of her train.

They went along what seemed to Thomas miles and miles of red carpet, and were finally ushered,

through a great door, into a great room. Thomas disengaged himself from the young lady's train and sniffed, just to show that he was quite at home.

That sniff was fatal, for he scented a mouse somewhere!

The room was hung with red and gold, and surrounded with glittering mirrors. There was a rustle of silks and satins. On every side were court lords and ladies dressed in all their gorgeous splendour. Fans fluttered, feathers nodded, diamonds sparkled in all directions. Over all floated a strain of delicious dreamy music. At the end of the long room, up six red-carpeted steps was the Queen's golden chair of state. On it sat the Queen herself, smiling graciously. She was dressed in white and blazing with jewels, and she had a crown of gold upon her head.

It was Thomas' great opportunity! Who knows but that if he had walked sedately up to the Queen and asked her hand in marriage that she might not have consented, and then he might have turned into a Prince, and been King of England! Yes, it was certainly Thomas' opportunity.

That fatal sniff!

He never saw the splendid room. He never saw the beautiful ladies and the gorgeous dresses. Worse than all, he never saw the Queen herself at all. All thoughts of being a Prince had flown out of his head. As though he had been bewitched, he had only one idea.

There was a mouse somewhere!

He was no longer Thomas the Prince in Disguise, he was only Thomas "the good mouser."

He crept forward cautiously, sniffing as he went, and slid noiselessly up to the Queen's great chair. Yes, there was the mouse peeping out from behind one of the golden legs. Thomas sprang forward.

"What is that cat doing here?" called out the Queen. "Send him out of the room immediately."

A dozen hands were stretched forward to seize the unfortunate Thomas. He saw the mouse run like a dart towards a hole in the wall. He dashed after it.

Then ensued such a hue and cry as never was seen. People rushed here, and rushed there, and stepped on each other's toes, and tore each other's gowns. Several ladies fainted, and everyone hurried in pursuit of Thomas.

He ran this way and that, and turned and twisted himself in every direction. At last he found himself near the door, and slipped out with the whole crowd after him. He ran and ran till he had outdistanced them all, and even then he still ran on from mere fright.

It was a very draggled and dishevelled Thomas that appeared next morning at the stable door of his old home in the country.

"Hm, I thought so," said the old stable cat when she at last recognised him. "Cat you were born, and cat you will remain all the rest of your days. King of England indeed!"

Thomas has no Private History now.

HEY, DIDDLE, DIDDLE!

"Live merrily"

Hey, diddle, diddle!
The Cat and the Fiddle,
The Cow jumped over the moon.
The little Dog laughed to see such sport,
And the Dish ran away with the Spoon.

Once upon a time in a large white farm-house upon an open moor there lived a Wizard.

As you know, wizards work very hard; and about once a year, usually towards the middle of March, they take a holiday—and then very extraordinary things happen.

One March night this particular Wizard set off upon his holiday as usual.

Before he went he looked round to see that everything was tidy and in its place. Yes, there was the Cat dozing in front of the fire. The Fiddle was standing upright in a corner of the room. The Dish was on the dresser and the Spoon in the basket. The little Dog was guarding the door outside. The Cow was lying by the cow-tub in the yard. All looked peaceful and in order.

So the Wizard put all his magic into his tall black hat, shut the door, and went out.

When he had passed through the farmyard gate he locked and bolted it behind him. But the lock was very stiff, and in turning and pulling out the key, his black hat got pushed on one side, so that a little of the magic escaped, and filtered back through the keyhole.

The Wizard, without stopping to think what might happen, pulled his hat straight, and went off into the wide world to enjoy his holiday.

The little bit of magic floated slowly in through the farm-yard gate; over the Cow by the cow-tub; over the little Dog guarding the door; through the keyhole of the door; over the Cat dozing in front of the fire; into the corner where stood the Fiddle; into the basket where lay the Spoon; and finally rested on the Dish on the dresser shelf. The Dish yawned, steadied himself, slowly dismounted from the dresser, and balanced himself on the kitchen table.

"Spoon, my love," he said wearily.

"Yes, my sweet," answered the Spoon, tripping out of the basket on to the table beside him.

"I can make love as well as that, and better," said the Cow, poking her head through the kitchen window.

"Here we are again!" said the little Dog, bursting in through the door.

The Cat and Fiddle bowed and scraped to each other in the corner.

"Hey, diddle, diddle! The Dog has no manners," squeaked the Fiddle.

"No, indeed," said the Cat, politely.

"Spoon, my love," began the Dish again, "what a miserable life we lead. Laid down to do the same old things over and over again. Though twice a day your elegant figure approaches mine, and I see myself reflected in your shining countenance, yet have I never a chance of telling you how much I admire you. We have never any opportunity for amusement, or private conversation. Though you do occasionally scrape me, just to show me how much you love me. Yet, oh my Spoon, that is not enough. I am weary, oh my Spoon, of being laid on a dresser or a table. I loathe that my beautiful form should be covered with gravy or soapy water. Oh, my Spoon, in these few hours that are before us, let us forget our miserable and monotonous existence. Let us show the world that we can twirl and spin with the best of them. Let us dance, my love, let us dance, and," he continued, pursing his lips, and lowering his voice to a whisper, "when the fun is at its highest, let us run away from here altogether, and get married and live happily ever after," and he twirled round on his edge, just to show what he could do.

"Yours is a delightful plan, my sweet!" said the Spoon. "You are indeed a lordly Dish," and she simpered charmingly.

"I could think of as good a plan as that and a better," bellowed the Cow through the window. "I could think of a plan as big as the sky."

"What's the odds, so long as we're happy!" chortled the little Dog.

"Hey, diddle, diddle! how vulgar he is!" squeaked the Fiddle.

"I quite agree with you," said the Cat, politely.

"Spoon, my love," began the Dish once more, "shall we ask the Cat and Fiddle to sing and play for us, while we dance?"

"Certainly, my sweet," said the Spoon, and added coyly, "I am sure if *you* asked them, they could refuse you nothing."

"I can sing and play as well as they can and better," bawled the Cow again through the window. "My top notes reach the stars."

"You may all sing and play till you're hoarse for all I care!" said the little Dog.

"Hey, diddle, diddle! don't let's pay any attention to him," squeaked the Fiddle.

"But we may as well oblige the others," said the Cat.

So the Cat and the Fiddle struck up a lively tune in which they each strove as to who would squeak the highest. The Dish and the Spoon danced and kinked blissfully together on the centre of the kitchen table.

As the music got louder and louder, and wilder and wilder, the little Dog joined in the dance, and at last even the Cow tossed up her four legs and started dancing too.

"Spoon, my love, see how high I can spring," said the Dish, coming down on the table with such a thud that he nearly cracked from top to bottom. "When I do that again," he added in a lower voice, "it will be the signal for you to run away with me. What a night we are having!" and he twirled round

faster than ever.

"Yes, my sweet," answered the Spoon, "everything that you do is right. Wherever you run I will run too. I would that I could spring as high as you do," and she turned gracefully on her handle.

"I can jump as high as that and higher," roared the Cow through the window. "I can jump over the moon."

"All right, old girl, do it then," said the little Dog, skipping out into the yard, when the moon was shining in all her splendour, and reflected round and bright in the cow-tub.

"Hey, diddle, diddle!" squeaked the Fiddle, louder and more contemptuously than ever.

"Me-ow!" shrieked the Cat on an even higher note. They played and sang more vigorously than before.

"Over the moon you go!" shouted the little Dog to the Cow.

She tossed up her heels, and springing high into the air jumped over the cow-tub, wherein shone the moon's reflection as round and bright as the moon itself. The little Dog nearly split his sides with laughing. "Ha! ha! ha! that's a good joke," he said. "You had me there nicely," and he and the Cow started jumping about together all over the yard.

The Cat and the Fiddle squeaked louder.

The Cow and the little Dog jiggled higher and higher. Never was heard such a noise!

The Dish jumped off the table with a thud.

"Spoon, my love," he whispered, "the moment has arrived. The little Dog has left the door open. Fly with me."

There was such a hullabaloo going on that nobody except the Spoon heard what he said. He seized her round her elegant waist and danced away with her, through the open door, and across the farm-yard.

They were just wondering how they should get out of the gate, when——

Snip! Snap! Snorum!

There stood the Wizard just outside!

The Dish and the Spoon looked guiltily at each other, but they could not stop dancing.

"What is all this noise!" cried out the Wizard angrily.

The little Dog and the Cow heard his voice in the yard. They, too, looked guiltily at each other, but they could not stop dancing.

"What are you all about!" cried the Wizard again, still more angrily.

The Cat and the Fiddle heard his angry voice through the open door. They, too, looked guiltily at each other, but they could not stop playing or singing.

Then the Wizard lost his temper altogether. "Pouf!" he said, flinging back his head, so that his hat fell off, and the magic went rolling about all over the place.

"Pouf! Is *this* the way you behave when I am not here. Can't you stop that disgraceful noise! Pouf!! I will get rid of the whole lot of you!"

He raised his foot and gave the farm-yard gate one tremendous kick.

It was a magic kick.

Before you would have had time to say "Snip! Snap! Snorum!" the whole farm, Cat, Fiddle, Dog, Cow, Dish, Spoon and all, went flying sky high into the air.

Even then they could not leave off dancing and singing.

"Spoon, my love!" sobbed the Dish, "I wish I was sitting down on the dresser again.

"Yes, my sweet," panted the Spoon.

"I can breathe as well as you and better!" puffed the Cow.

"Whew-w-w," whistled the little Dog.

"Hey, diddle, diddle," sniffed the Fiddle.

"Yes, we are all quite breathless," gasped the Cat.

But still they went swirling on.

Up, up, they flew, dancing and singing all the time. The music sounded fainter and fainter as they mounted higher and higher into the sky, but their forms were still quite plainly visible.

What a pity it was that the Wizard had forgotten all about that little bit of magic that had filtered in through the keyhole, for now they were doomed to go on singing and dancing for ever.

A long time has gone by from that day to this, but they have never ceased to swirl along up there in the sky. They have been in the glare of the sun now for so many years that they are bleached quite white, and their outlines are blurred and indistinct. Yet, if you look carefully enough, you will see them all—Cat, Fiddle, Cow, little Dog, Dish and Spoon, and even bits of the farm-house too—for they are always sailing along somewhere, high up above our heads.

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