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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK GRANNY'S WONDERFUL CHAIR ***





**ALL THE COURT CROWDED OUT
TO SEE**

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[1]

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[2]

STORIES OLD AND NEW

A small chosen library is like a walled garden where a child may safely play. In that charmed seclusion the love of books, like the love of flowers, grows of itself. If the reading habit is to be acquired, the child ought from the first to be given real books, which may be handled with pleasure and kept with pride—books containing literature suited to its own age.

This volume belongs to a series of "Stories Old and New" which has been prepared specially for children. The books have been carefully chosen so as to include, along with many charming stories by the best children's authors of to-day, a due proportion of those older tales which never grow old.

To secure simplicity and right gradation, the text has been prepared to suit the different ages of readers. Care has been given to the illustration, print, and binding of the series, for it is believed that this is the best way to secure from the children that careful handling of the volumes which is the mark of the true book-lover.

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GRANNY'S WONDERFUL CHAIR

INTRODUCTORY

In an old time, long ago, when the fairies were in the world, there lived a little girl so very fair and pleasant of look, that they called her Snowflower. This girl was good as well as pretty. No one had ever seen her frown or heard her say a cross word, and young and old were glad when they saw her coming.

Snowflower had no relation in the world but a very old grandmother, called Dame Frostyface. People did not like her quite so well as her granddaughter, for she was cross enough at times, though always kind to Snowflower. They lived together in a little cottage built of peat and thatched with reeds, on the edge of a great forest. Tall trees sheltered its back from the north wind, and the midday sun made its front warm and cheerful. Swallows built in the eaves, and daisies grew thick at the door.

But there were none in all that country poorer than Snowflower and her grandmother. A cat and two hens were all their live stock. Their bed was dry grass, and the only good piece of furniture in the cottage was a great armchair with wheels on its feet, a black velvet cushion, and many strange carvings of flowers and fairies on its dark oaken back.

On that chair Dame Frostyface sat spinning from morning till night, to keep herself and her granddaughter, while Snowflower gathered sticks for the fire, looked after the hens and the cat, and did whatever else her grandmother bade her. There was nobody in that part of the country could spin such fine yarn as Dame Frostyface, but she spun very slowly. Her wheel was as old as herself, and far more worn-out. Indeed, the wonder was that it did not fall to pieces. So what the dame earned was very little, and their living was scanty. Snowflower, however, felt no want of good dinners or fine clothes.

Every evening, when the fire was heaped with the sticks she had gathered till it blazed and crackled up the cottage chimney, Dame Frostyface set aside her wheel and told her a new story. Often did the little girl wonder where her grandmother had gathered so many stories, but she soon learned that.

One sunny morning, at the time of the coming of the swallows, the dame rose up, put on the grey hood and cloak in which she carried her yarn to the fairs, and said: "My child, I am going a long journey to visit an aunt of mine, who lives far in the north country. I cannot take you with me, because my aunt is the crossest woman alive, and never liked young people. But the hens will lay eggs for you, and there is barley meal in the barrel. And, as you have been a good girl, I'll tell you what to do when you feel lonely. Lay your head gently down on the cushion of the armchair and say, 'Chair of my grandmother, tell me a story'."

"The chair was made by a clever fairy, who lived in the forest when I was young, and she gave it to me because she knew nobody could keep what they got hold of better than I could. Remember, you must never ask a story more than once in the day. If there is any need to travel, you have only to seat yourself in it and say, 'Chair of my grandmother, take me such a way'. It will carry you wherever you wish. But mind to oil the wheels before you set out, for I have sat on it these forty years in that same corner."

Having said this, Dame Frostyface set forth to see her aunt in the north country. Snowflower gathered wood for the fire, and looked after the hens and cat, as she had always done. She baked herself a cake or two of the barley meal; but, when the evening came, the cottage looked lonely. Then Snowflower remembered her grandmother's words, and, laying her head gently down, she said: "Chair of my grandmother, tell me a story".

Hardly were the words spoken, when a clear voice from under the velvet cushion began a new and most wonderful tale, which surprised Snowflower so much that she forgot to be afraid. After that the good girl was lonely no more. Every morning she baked a barley cake, and every evening the chair told her a new story. But she could never find out to whom the voice belonged, though Snowflower showed her thanks by keeping bright the oaken back and dusting the velvet cushion, till the chair looked as good as new.

The swallows came and built in the eaves, and the daisies grew thicker than ever at the door, but great troubles fell upon Snowflower. In spite of all her care she forgot to clip the hens' wings, and they flew away one morning to visit their friends the pheasants, who lived far in the forest. The cat went away to see its friends. The barley meal was eaten up, except two handfuls, and Snowflower had often looked out in hope of seeing the grey cloak, but Dame Frostyface did not come back.

"My grandmother stays long," said Snowflower to herself; "and by and by there will be nothing left to eat. If I could get to her, perhaps she would tell me what to do. Surely there is good need for me to travel."

Next day, at sunrise, Snowflower oiled the wheels of the chair, baked a cake out of the last of the meal, took it in her lap by way of food for the journey, seated herself, and said: "Chair of my grandmother, take me the way she went".

At once the chair gave a creak, and began to move out of the cottage, and into the forest, the

very way Dame Frostyface had taken, where it rolled along at the rate of a coach and six. Snowflower was amazed at this way of travelling, but the chair never stopped nor stayed the whole summer day, till as the sun was setting they came upon an open space, where a hundred men were cutting down the tall trees with their axes, a hundred more were splitting them for firewood, and twenty men, with horses and wagons, were carrying the wood away.

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"Oh! chair of my grandmother, stop!" said Snowflower, for she was tired, and also wished to know what this might mean. The chair at once stood still, and Snowflower, seeing an old woodcutter, who looked kind, stepped up to him and said: "Good father, tell me why you cut all this wood?"

"Where do you live," replied the man, "that you have not heard of the great feast which King Winwealth means to give on the birthday of his only daughter, Princess Greedalind? It will last for seven days. Everybody will be feasted, and this wood is to roast the oxen and the sheep, the geese and the turkeys, amongst whom there is great sorrow throughout the land."

When Snowflower heard that, she could not help wishing to see, and perhaps to share in, such a noble feast, after living so long on barley cakes. So, seating herself, she said: "Chair of my grandmother, take me quickly to the palace of King Winwealth."

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The words were hardly spoken, when off the chair started through the trees and out of the forest, to the great surprise of the woodcutters, who, never having seen such a sight before, threw down their axes, left their wagons, and went after Snowflower to the gates of a great and splendid city, having strong walls and high towers, and standing in the midst of a wide plain covered with cornfields, fruit gardens, and villages.

It was the richest city in all the land. People from every part of the land came there to buy and sell, and there was a saying that they had only to live seven years in it to make their fortunes. Rich as they were, however, Snowflower had never seen so many discontented, greedy faces as looked out from the great shops, grand houses, and fine coaches, when her chair rattled along the streets. Indeed, the people of that city were not much thought of for either good nature or honesty. But it had not been so when King Winwealth was young, and he and his brother, Prince Wisewit, governed the land. Prince Wisewit knew the whole art of governing, the tempers of men, and the powers of the stars. Moreover, he was a very clever man, and it was said of him that he could never die or grow old.

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In his time there was neither discontent nor sickness in the city. Strangers were kindly treated without price or questions. Then no one went to law against his neighbour, and no one locked his door at night. The fairies used to come there at May Day and Michaelmas, for they were Prince Wisewit's friends—all but one, called Fortunetta, a short-sighted but very cunning fairy, who hated everybody wiser than herself, and above all the prince, because she could never cheat him.

There was peace and pleasure for many a year in King Winwealth's city, till one day at midsummer Prince Wisewit went alone to the forest, in search of a strange plant for his garden, but he never came back. Though the King, with all his guards, looked for him far and near, no news was ever heard of him. When his brother was gone, King Winwealth grew lonely in his great palace, so he married a princess called Wantall, and brought her home to be his queen.

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This princess was neither handsome nor pleasant. People thought she must have gained the King's love by the charms she worked, for her whole dowry was a desert island, with a huge pit in it that could never be filled, and she was so greedy that the more she got the greedier she grew. In course of time the King and Queen had an only daughter, who was to be the heiress of all the kingdom. Her name was the Princess Greedalind, and the whole city were at that time preparing to keep her birthday. Not that they cared much for the Princess, who was very like her mother both in looks and temper; but being King Winwealth's only daughter, people came from far and near to the feast, and among them strangers and fairies who had not been there since the day of Prince Wisewit.

There was great stir about the palace, a most noble building, so large that it had a room for every day in the year. All the floors were of beautiful dark wood, and all the roofs of silver; and there was such a large number of golden dishes used by the household, that five hundred men kept guard night and day lest any of them should be stolen.

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When these guards saw Snowflower and her chair, they ran one after the other to tell the King, for the like had never been seen nor heard of in his kingdom, and all the Court crowded out to see the little maiden and her chair that came of itself.

When Snowflower saw the lords and ladies in their fine robes and splendid jewels, she began to feel ashamed of her own bare feet and linen gown. But at length taking courage, she answered all their questions, and told them everything about her wonderful chair. The Queen and the Princess cared for nothing that was not gilt. The people of the Court had learned to do the same, and all turned away in great scorn except the old King, who, thinking the chair might amuse him sometimes when he got into low spirits, allowed Snowflower to stay and feast in his worst kitchen.

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The poor girl was glad of any place, though nobody made her welcome—even the servants looked down upon her bare feet and linen gown. They would give her chair no room but in a dusty corner behind the back door, where Snowflower was told that she might sleep at night, and eat up the scraps the cook threw away.

That very day the feast began. It was fine to see the great crowds of coaches and people on foot and on horseback who came to the palace, and filled every room according to their rank. Never had Snowflower seen such roasting and boiling. There was wine for the lords and ale for the common people, music and dancing of all kinds, and the best of gay dresses. But with all the good cheer there seemed little joy, and a great deal of ill humour in the palace.

Some of the guests thought they should have been feasted in grander rooms. Others were vexed to see many finer than themselves. All the servants were very displeased because they did not get presents. There was somebody caught every hour stealing the cups, and a great number of people were always at the gates shouting for goods and lands, which Queen Wantall had taken from them. The guards were always driving them away, but they came back again, and could be heard plainly in the highest hall. So it was not wonderful that the old King's spirits were very low that evening after supper. His page, who always stood behind him, seeing this, reminded His Majesty of the little girl and her chair.

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"It is a good thought," said King Winwealth. "I have not heard a story this many a year. Bring the child and the chair at once!"

The page sent someone to the first kitchen, who told the master-cook; the master-cook told the kitchen-maid; the kitchen-maid told the dust-boy, and he told Snowflower to wash her face, rub up her chair, and go to the highest hall, for the great King Winwealth wished to hear a story.

Nobody offered to help her; but when Snowflower had made herself as smart as she could with soap and water, and rubbed the chair till it looked as if dust had never fallen on it, she seated herself and said: "Chair of my grandmother, take me to the highest hall."

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At once the chair marched in a grave and courtly manner out of the kitchen, up the grand staircase, and into the highest hall. The chief lords and ladies of the land were feasting there, besides many fairies and noble people from far-off countries. There had never been such company in the palace since the time of Prince Wisewit. Nobody wore less than the finest satin.



King Winwealth sat on his ivory throne in a robe of purple velvet, stiff with flowers of gold. The Queen sat by his side in a robe of silver cloth clasped with pearls. But the Princess Greedalind was finer still, the feast being in her honour. She wore a robe of cloth of gold clasped with diamonds. Two waiting-ladies in white satin stood, one on either side, to hold her fan and handkerchief, and two pages, in gold-lace livery, stood behind her chair. With all that, Princess Greedalind looked ugly and spiteful. She and her mother were angry to see a barefooted girl and an old chair allowed to enter the highest hall.

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The supper table was still covered with golden dishes, and the best of good things, but no one offered Snowflower a morsel. So, having made a humble bow to the King, the Queen, the Princess, and the good company, most of whom hardly noticed her, the poor little girl sat down upon the carpet, laid her head on the velvet cushion, as she used to do in the old cottage, and said: "Chair of my grandmother, tell me a story."

Everybody was greatly surprised, even the angry Queen and the spiteful Princess, when a clear voice from under the cushion said: "Listen to the story of the Christmas Cuckoo."

ALL CAME TO TALK WITH SPARE
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CHAPTER II

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THE CHRISTMAS CUCKOO

Once upon a time there stood in the midst of a bleak moor, in the north country, a certain village. All its people were poor, for their fields were barren, and they had little trade; but the poorest of them all were two brothers called Scrub and Spare. They were cobblers, and had but one stall between them. It was a hut built of clay and wattles. The door was low and always open, for there was no window. The roof did not entirely keep out the rain, and the only thing with any look of comfort about it was a wide hearth, for which the brothers could never find wood enough to make a good fire. There they worked in most brotherly friendship, though the people did not give them very many shoes to make or mend.

The people of that village did not need many shoes, and better cobblers than Scrub and Spare might be found. Spiteful people said there were no shoes so bad that they would not be worse for their mending. Nevertheless Scrub and Spare managed to live by means of their own trade, a small barley field, and a cottage garden, till a new cobbler arrived in the village. He had lived in the chief city of the kingdom, and, by his own account, cobbled for the Queen and the princesses. His awls were sharp and his lasts were new. He set up his stall in a neat cottage with two windows.

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The villagers soon found out that one patch of his would outwear two of the brothers'. In short, all the mending left Scrub and Spare, and went to the new cobbler. The season had been wet and cold, their barley did not ripen well, and the cabbages never half closed in the garden. So the brothers were poor that winter; and when Christmas came, they had nothing to feast on but a barley loaf, a piece of musty bacon, and some small beer of their own brewing.

Worse than that, the snow was very deep, and they could get no firewood. Their hut stood at the end of the village; beyond it spread the bleak moor, now all white and silent. But that moor had once been a forest. Great roots of old trees were still to be found in it, loosened from the soil and laid bare by the winds and rains. One of these, a rough, heavy log, lay close to their door, the half of it above the snow.

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Spare said to his brother: "Shall we sit here cold on Christmas Day while the great root lies yonder? Let us chop it up for firewood, the work will make us warm."

"No," said Scrub; "it's not right to chop wood on Christmas. Besides, that root is too hard to be cut with any axe."

"Hard or not, we must have a fire," replied Spare. "Come, brother, help me in with it. Poor as we are, there is nobody in the village will have such a Yule log as ours."

Scrub liked to be a little grand sometimes, and in hopes of having a fine Yule log, both brothers strove with all their might till, between pulling and pushing, the great old root was safe on the hearth, and soon began to crackle and blaze with the red embers. In high glee, the cobblers sat down to their beer and bacon. The door was shut, for there was nothing but cold moonlight and snow outside. But the hut, strewn with fir branches, and decked with holly, looked cheerful as the ruddy blaze flared up and made their hearts glad.

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"Long life and good fortune to ourselves, brother!" said Spare. "I hope you will drink that toast, and may we never have a worse fire on Christmas—but what is that?"

Spare set down the drinking-horn, and the brothers listened in great surprise, for out of the blazing root they heard "Cuckoo! cuckoo!" as plain as ever the spring bird's voice came over the moor on a May morn.

"It is something bad," said Scrub, very much frightened.

"Maybe not," said Spare.

And out of the deep hole at the side which the fire had not reached flew a large grey cuckoo, and alighted on the table before them. Much as the cobblers had been surprised at first, they were still more so when the bird began to speak.

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"Good gentlemen," said the cuckoo, "what season is this?"

"It's Christmas," replied Spare.

"Then a merry Christmas to you!" said the cuckoo. "I went to sleep in the hollow of that old root last summer, and never woke till the heat of your fire made me think it was summer again. But now, since you have burned my lodging, let me stay in your hut till the spring comes round—I only want a hole to sleep in, and when I go on my travels next summer you may be sure I will bring you some gift for your trouble."

"Stay, and welcome," said Spare, while Scrub sat wondering if it were something bad or not. "I'll make you a good warm hole in the thatch. But you must be hungry after that long sleep. There is a slice of barley bread. Come, help us to keep Christmas!"

The cuckoo ate up the slice, drank some water from the brown jug—for it would take no beer—and flew into a snug hole which Spare scooped for it in the thatch of the hut.

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Scrub said he was afraid the bird wouldn't be lucky. But as it slept on, and the days passed, he forgot his fears. So the snow melted, the heavy rains came, the cold grew less, and the days became longer; and one sunny morning the brothers were awakened by the cuckoo shouting its own cry to let them know the spring had come.

"Now," said the bird, "I am going on my travels over the world to tell men of the spring. There is no country where trees bud, or flowers bloom, that I will not cry in before the year goes round. Give me another slice of bread to keep me on my journey, and tell me what gift I shall bring you at the end of the twelve months."

Scrub would have been angry with his brother for cutting so large a slice, their store of barley meal being low; but his mind was so taken up with what present it would be best for him to ask. At length a lucky thought struck him.

"Good Master Cuckoo," said he, "if a great traveller who sees all the world like you, could know of any place where diamonds or pearls were to be found, one of a fairly large size brought in your beak would help such poor men as my brother and me to get something better than barley bread to give you the next time you come."

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"I know nothing of diamonds or pearls," said the cuckoo. "They are in the hearts of rocks and the sands of rivers. I know only of that which grows on the earth. But there are two trees close by the well that lies at the end of the world. One of them is called the golden tree, for its leaves are all of beaten gold. Every winter they fall into the well with a sound like that of scattered gold, and I know not what becomes of them. As for the other, it is always green, like a laurel. Some call it the wise, and some the merry tree. Its leaves never fall but they that get one of them keep a cheerful heart in spite of all troubles, and can make themselves as merry in a hut as in a palace."

"Good Master Cuckoo, bring me a leaf off that tree!" cried Spare.

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"Now, brother, don't be a fool!" said Scrub. "Think of the leaves of gold. Dear Master Cuckoo, bring me one of them!"

Before another word could be said, the cuckoo had flown out of the open door, and was shouting its spring cry over moor and meadow.

The brothers were poorer than ever that year. Nobody sent them a single shoe to mend. The new cobbler said, in scorn, they should come over and work for him. Scrub and Spare would have left the village but for their barley field, their cabbage garden, and a maid called Fairfeather, whom both the cobblers had courted for seven years without even knowing whom she meant to favour.

Sometimes Fairfeather seemed to favour Scrub, sometimes she smiled on Spare; but the brothers were always friends and did not quarrel. They sowed their barley, planted their cabbage, and, now that their trade was gone, worked in the fields of some of the rich villagers to make out a scanty living.

So the seasons came and passed. Spring, summer, harvest, and winter followed each other as they have always done. At the end of the winter Scrub and Spare had grown so poor and ragged that Fairfeather thought them beneath her notice. Old neighbours forgot to invite them to wedding feasts or merrymaking. They thought the cuckoo had forgotten them too, when at daybreak, on the first of April, they heard a hard beak knocking at their door and a voice crying:

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"Cuckoo! cuckoo! let me in with my gifts."

Spare ran to open the door, and in came the cuckoo, carrying on one side of his bill a golden leaf larger than that of any tree in the north country; and in the other, one like that of the common laurel, only it had a fresher green.

"Here," it said, giving the gold to Scrub and the green to Spare; "it is a long way to carry them from the end of the world. Give me a slice of bread, for I must tell the north country that the spring has come."

Scrub did not grudge the thickness of that slice, though it was cut from their last loaf. So much gold had never been in the cobbler's hands before, and he could not help exulting over his brother.

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"See the wisdom of my choice!" he said, holding up the large leaf of gold. "As for yours, as good might be plucked from any hedge. I wonder such a wise bird would carry the like so far."

"Good Master Cobbler," cried the cuckoo, finishing the slice, "your words are more hasty than kind. If your brother is disappointed this time, I go on the same journey every year, and for your kind treatment will think it no trouble to bring each of you whichever leaf you wish."

"Darling cuckoo!" cried Scrub, "bring me a golden one."

And Spare, looking up from the green leaf on which he gazed as though it were a crown-jewel, said:

"Be sure to bring me one from the merry tree."

And away flew the cuckoo once again.

"This is the Feast of All Fools, and it ought to be your birthday," said Scrub. "Did ever man fling away such a chance of becoming rich! Much good your merry leaves will do when you are so poor!"

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So he went on; but Spare laughed at him, and answered with many old proverbs about the cares that come with gold, till Scrub, at length growing angry, vowed his brother was not fit to live with a gentleman like himself. And taking his lasts, his awls, and his golden leaf, he left the wattle hut and went to tell the villagers.

They were surprised at the folly of Spare, and charmed with Scrub's good sense, more so when he showed them the golden leaf, and told that the cuckoo would bring him one every spring. The new cobbler at once made him a partner. The greatest people sent him their shoes to mend. Fairfeather smiled kindly on him, and in the course of the summer they were married, with a grand wedding feast, at which the whole village danced, except Spare, who was not invited,

because the bride said he was low-minded, and his brother thought he was a disgrace to the family.

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Indeed, all who heard the story thought that Spare must be mad, and nobody would take up with him but a lame tinker, a beggar boy, and a poor woman, who was looked upon as a witch because she was old and ugly. As for Scrub, he went with Fairfeather to a cottage close by that of the new cobbler, and quite as fine. There he mended shoes so as to please everyone, had a scarlet coat for holidays, and a fat goose for dinner every wedding-day. Fairfeather, too, had a crimson gown and fine blue ribbons. But neither she nor Scrub were content, for to buy all these grand things the golden leaf had to be broken and parted with piece by piece, so the last morsel was gone before the cuckoo came with another.

Spare lived on in the old hut, and worked in the cabbage garden. (Scrub had got the barley field, because he was the elder.) Every day his coat grew more ragged, and the hut more weather-beaten, but the people remarked that he never looked sad nor sour. The wonder was, that from the time they began to keep his company, the tinker grew kinder to the ass with which he travelled the country, the beggar boy kept out of mischief, and the old woman was never cross to her cat or angry with the children.

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Every first of April the cuckoo came tapping at their doors with the golden leaf to Scrub and the green to Spare. Fairfeather would have treated him nobly with wheaten bread and honey, for she had some notion of trying to make him bring two gold leaves instead of one. But the cuckoo flew away to eat barley bread with Spare, saying he was not fit company for fine people, and liked the old hut where he slept so snugly from Christmas to Spring.

Scrub spent the golden leaves, and Spare kept the merry ones; and I know not how many years passed in this manner, when a great lord, who owned that village, came to dwell near. His castle stood on the moor. It was old and strong, with high towers and a deep moat. All the country as far as one could see from the highest turret belonged to this lord; but he had not been there for twenty years, and would not have come then, only he was very sad.

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The cause of his grief was that he had been Prime Minister at Court, and in high favour, till somebody told the Crown Prince that he had spoken with great disrespect about the turning out of His Royal Highness's toes, and the King that he did not lay on taxes enough; whereon the north-country lord was turned out of office and sent to his own estate. There he lived for some weeks in very bad temper. The servants said nothing would please him, and the people of the village put on their worst clothes lest he should raise their rents. But one day, in the harvest time, his lordship chanced to meet Spare gathering watercresses at a meadow stream, and fell into talk with the cobbler.

How it was nobody could tell, but from that hour the great lord cast away his sadness. He forgot his lost office and his Court enemies, the King's taxes and the Crown Prince's toes, and went about with a noble train, hunting, fishing, and making merry in his hall, where all travellers were well treated and all the poor were welcome.

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This strange story soon spread through the north country, and a great company came to the cobbler's hut—rich men who had lost their money, poor men who had lost their friends, beauties who had grown old, wits who had gone out of fashion—all came to talk with Spare, and whatever their troubles had been, all went home merry. The rich gave him presents, the poor gave him thanks. Spare's coat was no longer ragged, he had bacon with his cabbage, and the people of the village began to think there was some sense in him after all.

By this time his fame had reached the chief city of the kingdom, and even the Court. There were a great many discontented people there besides the King, who had lately fallen into ill humour because a princess, who lived in a kingdom near his own, and who had seven islands for her dowry, would not marry his eldest son. So a royal page was sent to Spare, with a velvet cloak, a diamond ring, and a command that he should come to Court at once.

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"To-morrow is the first of April," said Spare, "and I will go with you two hours after sunrise."

The page lodged all night at the castle, and the cuckoo came at sunrise with the merry leaf.

"The Court is a fine place," he said, when the cobbler told him he was going. "But I cannot come there, they would lay snares and catch me. So be careful of the leaves I have brought you, and give me a farewell slice of barley bread."

Spare was sorry to part with the cuckoo, little as he had of his company. But he gave him a slice which would have broken Scrub's heart in the former times, it was so large. And having sewed up the leaves in the lining of his leather doublet, he set out with the page on his way to the Court.

His coming caused great surprise there. Everybody wondered what the King could see in such a common-looking man. But hardly had His Majesty talked with him half an hour, when the Princess and her seven islands were forgotten, and orders given that a feast for all-comers should be spread in the large dining-hall. The princes of the blood, the great lords and ladies, the Ministers of State, and the judges of the land had a talk with Spare; the more they talked the lighter grew their hearts, so that such changes had never been seen at Court. The lords forgot their spites and the ladies their envies, the princes and Ministers made friends among themselves, and the judges showed no favour.

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As for Spare, he had a room set apart for him in the palace, and a seat at the King's table. One sent him rich robes and another costly jewels. But in the midst of all his greatness he still wore the leathern doublet, which the palace servants thought very mean. One day the King's attention being drawn to it by the chief page, he asked why Spare didn't give it to a beggar.

But the cobbler answered: "High and mighty King, this doublet was with me before silk and velvet came. I find it easier to wear than the Court cut. Moreover, it serves to keep me humble, by recalling the days when it was my holiday dress."

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The King thought this was a wise speech, and gave orders that no one should find fault with the leathern doublet. So things went on, till news of his brother's good fortune reached Scrub in the moorland cottage on another first of April, when the cuckoo came with two golden leaves because he had none to carry for Spare.

"Think of that!" said Fairfeather. "Here we are spending our lives in this humdrum place, and Spare making his fortune at the Court with two or three paltry green leaves! What would they say to our golden ones? Let us pack up and make our way to the King's palace. I am sure he will make you a lord and me a lady of honour, not to speak of all the fine clothes and presents we shall have."

Scrub thought there was a great deal in what his wife said, and they began to pack up. But it was soon found that there were very few things in the cottage fit for carrying to the Court. Fairfeather could not think of her wooden bowls, spoons, and plates being seen there. Scrub thought his lasts and awls had better be left behind, as without them no one would suspect him of being a cobbler. So, putting on their holiday clothes, Fairfeather took her looking-glass, and Scrub his drinking-horn, and each carrying a golden leaf wrapped up with great care that none might see it till they reached the palace, the pair set out with high hopes.

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How far Scrub and Fairfeather journeyed I cannot say; but when the sun was high and warm at noon, they came into a wood both tired and hungry.

"Husband," said Fairfeather, "you should not have such mean thoughts. How could one eat barley bread on the way to a palace? Let us rest ourselves under this tree, and look at our leaves to see if they are safe."

In looking at the leaves, and talking of what they were going to do when they came to the Court, Scrub and Fairfeather did not see that a very thin old woman had slipped from behind a tree, with a long staff in her hand and a great bag by her side.

"Noble lord and lady," she said,— "for I know you are such by your voices, though my eyes are dim and my hearing none of the sharpest,—will you tell me where I may find some water to mix a bottle of mead which I carry in my bag, because it is too strong for me?"

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As the old woman spoke, she pulled out of her bag a large wooden bottle such as shepherds used in the olden times, corked with leaves rolled together, and having a small wooden cup hanging from its handle.

"Perhaps you will do me the favour to taste it," she said. "It is only made of the best of honey. I have also cream cheese, and a wheaten loaf here, if such noble persons as you eat the like."

Scrub and Fairfeather were now sure, after this speech, that there must be about them something of the look that noble persons have. Besides, they were very hungry; and having with great haste wrapped up the golden leaves, they told the old woman that they were not at all proud, notwithstanding the lands and castles they had left behind them in the north country, and would willingly help to lighten the bag. The old woman would hardly sit down beside them, she was so humble and modest, but at length she did; and before the bag was half empty, Scrub and Fairfeather firmly believed that there must be something very noble-looking about them.

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The old woman was a wood-witch. Her name was Buttertongue, and all her time was spent in making mead, which being boiled with strange herbs and spells, had the power of making all who drank it fall asleep and dream with their eyes open. She had two dwarfs of sons; one was named Spy and the other Pounce. Wherever their mother went, they were not far behind; and whoever tasted her mead was sure to be robbed by the dwarfs.

Scrub and Fairfeather sat leaning against the old tree. The cobbler had a lump of cheese in his hand; his wife held fast a hunch of bread. Their eyes and mouths were both open, but they were dreaming of the fine things at the Court, when the old woman raised her shrill voice:

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"What ho, my sons! come here, and carry home the harvest."

No sooner had she spoken than the two little dwarfs darted out of the nearest thicket.

"Idle boys!" cried the mother, "what have you done to-day to help our living?"

"I have been to the city," said Spy, "and could see nothing. These are hard times for us—everybody minds his work so contentedly since that cobbler came. But here is a leathern doublet which his page threw out of the window. It's of no use, but I brought it to let you see I was not idle." And he tossed down Spare's doublet, with the merry leaves in it, which he had carried like a bundle on his little back.

To let you know how Spy got hold of it, I must tell you that the forest was not far from the

great city where Spare lived in such high esteem. All things had gone well with the cobbler till the King thought that it was quite unbecoming to see such a worthy man without a servant. His Majesty, therefore, to let all men understand his royal favour towards Spare, appointed one of his own pages to wait upon him.

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The name of this youth was Tinseltoes, and, though he was the seventh of the King's pages in rank, nobody in all the Court had grander notions. Nothing could please him that had not gold or silver about it, and his grandmother feared he would hang himself for being made page to a cobbler. As for Spare, if anything could have troubled him, this mark of His Majesty's kindness would have done it.

The honest man had been so used to serve himself that the page was always in the way; but his merry leaves came to his aid; and, to the great surprise of his grandmother, Tinseltoes took to the new service in a wonderful way. Some said it was because Spare gave him nothing to do but play at bowls all day on the palace green. Yet one thing vexed the heart of Tinseltoes, and that was his master's leathern doublet. But for it, he was sure people would never remember that Spare had been a cobbler; and the page took a deal of pains to let him see how much out of the fashion it was at the Court. But Spare answered Tinseltoes as he had done the King; and at last, finding nothing better would do, the page got up one fine morning earlier than his master, and tossed the leathern doublet out of the back window into a lane, where Spy found it and brought it to his mother.

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"That nasty thing!" said the old woman. "Where is the good in it?"

By this time, Pounce had taken everything of value from Scrub and Fairfeather—the looking-glass, the silver-rimmed horn, the husband's scarlet coat, the wife's gay cloak, and, above all, the golden leaves, which so gladdened the hearts of old Buttertongue and her sons, that they threw the leathern doublet over the sleeping cobbler for a joke, and went off to their hut in the middle of the forest.

The sun was going down when Scrub and Fairfeather awoke from dreaming that they had been made a lord and a lady, and sat clothed in silk and velvet, feasting with the King in his palace hall. They were greatly disappointed to find their golden leaves and all their best things gone. Scrub tore his hair, and vowed to take the old woman's life, while Fairfeather uttered loud cries of sorrow. But Scrub, feeling cold for want of his coat, put on the leathern doublet without asking or caring whence it came.

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Hardly was it buttoned on when a change came over him. He began to talk so merrily, that, instead of crying, Fairfeather made the wood ring with laughter. Both busied themselves in getting up a hut of branches, in which Scrub kindled a fire with a flint and steel, which, together with his pipe, he had brought unknown to Fairfeather, who had told him the like was never heard of at the Court. Then they found a pheasant's nest at the root of an old oak, made a meal of roasted eggs, and went to sleep on a heap of long green grass which they had gathered, with nightingales singing all night long in the old trees about them.

So it happened that Scrub and Fairfeather stayed day after day in the forest, making their hut larger and more cosy against the winter, living on wild birds' eggs, and berries, and never thinking of their lost golden leaves, or their journey to the Court.

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In the meantime Spare had got up and missed his doublet. Tinseltoes, of course, said he knew nothing about it. The whole palace was searched, and every servant questioned, till all the Court wondered why such a fuss was made about an old leathern doublet. That very day, things came back to their old fashion. Quarrels began among the lords, and envies among the ladies. The King said his people did not pay him half enough taxes, the Queen wanted more jewels, the servants took to their old quarrels and got up some new ones.

Spare found himself getting strangely dull, and very much out of place. Nobles began to ask what business a cobbler had at the King's table, and His Majesty ordered the palace records to be searched to find out if such a thing had ever taken place before. The cobbler was too wise to tell all he had lost with that doublet; but as by this time he knew the Court customs, he offered a reward of fifty gold pieces to anyone who would bring him news about it.

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Scarcely was this made known in the city, when the gates and outer courts of the palace were filled by men, women, and children—some bringing leathern doublets of every cut and colour, some with tales of what they had heard and seen in their walks round about the palace. So much news about all sorts of great people came out of these stories, that lords and ladies ran to complain of Spare as one who spoke against people. His Majesty, being now sure that there was no example in all the palace records of such a retainer, sent forth a decree sending the cobbler away for ever from the Court, and giving all his goods to the page Tinseltoes.

That royal decree was hardly issued before the page had taken for himself Spare's rich room, his costly garments, and all the presents the people at Court had given him. While Spare, having no longer the fifty pieces of gold to give, was glad to make his escape out of a back window, for fear of the nobles, who vowed to have revenge on him, and the crowd, who were ready to stone him for cheating them about his doublet.

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The window from which Spare let himself down with a strong rope, was that from which Tinseltoes had tossed the doublet; and as the cobbler came down late in the twilight, a poor woodman, with a heavy load of fagots, stopped and stared at him in great surprise.

"What is the matter, friend?" asked Spare. "Did you never see a man coming down from a back window before?"

"Why," said the woodman, "the last morning I passed here, a leathern doublet came out of that very window, and I feel sure you are the owner of it."

"That I am, friend," said the cobbler eagerly. "Can you tell me which way that doublet went?"

"As I walked on," said the woodman, "a dwarf, called Spy, bundled it up and ran off to his mother in the forest."

"Honest friend," said Spare, taking off the last of his fine clothes (a grass-green cloak edged with gold), "I will give you this if you will follow the dwarf and bring me back my doublet." [46]

"It would not be good to carry fagots in," said the woodman. "But if you want back your doublet, the road to the forest lies at the end of this lane;" and he trudged away.

Having made up his mind to find his doublet, and sure that neither crowd nor nobles could catch him in the forest, Spare went on his way, and was soon among the tall trees; but neither hut nor dwarf could he see. Moreover, the night came on; the wood was dark and thick, but here and there the moon shone through its lanes, the great owls flitted about, and the nightingales sang. So he went on, hoping to find some place of shelter.

At last the red light of a fire, shining through a thicket, led him to the door of a low hut. It stood half open, as if there was nothing to fear, and within he saw his brother Scrub snoring loudly on a bed of grass, at the foot of which lay his own leathern doublet; while Fairfeather, in a dress made of plaited rushes, sat roasting pheasants' eggs by the fire. [47]

"Good evening, mistress!" said Spare, stepping in.

The blaze shone on him, but so changed was her brother-in-law with his Court life, that Fairfeather did not know him, and she answered far more kindly than was her wont.

"Good evening, master! Whence come you so late? but speak low, for my good man has tired himself cutting wood, and is taking a sleep, as you see, before supper."

"A good rest to him!" said Spare, seeing he was not known. "I come from the Court for a day's hunting, and have lost my way in the forest."

"Sit down and have a share of our supper," said Fairfeather, "I will put some more eggs in the ashes; and tell me the news of Court—I used to think of it long ago when I was young and foolish."

"Did you never go there?" said the cobbler. "So fair a dame as you would make the ladies wonder."

"You are pleased to flatter," said Fairfeather; "but my husband has a brother there, and we left our moorland village to try our fortune also. An old woman at the entrance to this forest, by means of fair words, got us to take some strong drink, which caused us to fall asleep and dream of great things. But when we woke, everything had been robbed from us—my looking-glass, my scarlet cloak, my husband's Sunday coat; and, in place of all, the robbers left him that old doublet, which he has worn ever since, and he never was so merry in all his life, though we live in this poor hut." [48]

"It is a shabby doublet, that," said Spare, taking up the garment, and seeing that it was his own, for the merry leaves were still sewed in its lining. "It would be good for hunting in, however—your husband would be glad to part with it, I dare say, in exchange for this handsome cloak;" and he pulled off the green mantle and buttoned on the doublet, much to Fairfeather's delight, who ran and shook Scrub, crying: "Husband, husband, rise and see what a good bargain I have made!" [49]

Scrub gave one last snore, and muttered something about the root being hard. But he rubbed his eyes, gazed up at his brother and said:

"Spare, is that really you? How did you like the Court, and have you made your fortune?"

"That I have, brother," said Spare, "in getting back my own good leathern doublet. Come, let us eat eggs, and rest ourselves here this night. In the morning we will return to our own old hut, at the end of the moorland village, where the Christmas Cuckoo will come and bring us leaves."

Scrub and Fairfeather agreed. So in the morning they all returned, and found the old hut little the worse for wear and weather. The people of the village came about them to ask the news of Court, and see if they had made their fortune. Everybody was surprised to find the three poorer than ever, but somehow they liked to go to the hut. Spare brought out the lasts and awls he had hidden in the corner. Scrub and he began their old trade again, and the whole north country found out that there never were such cobblers. [50]

They mended the shoes of lords and ladies as well as the common people; everybody was well pleased with the work. Their trade grew greater from day to day, and all that were discontented or unlucky came to the hut as in old times, before Spare went to the Court.

The rich brought them presents, the poor did them service. The hut itself changed, no one

knew how. Flowering honeysuckle grew over its roof; red and white roses grew thick about its door. Moreover, the Christmas Cuckoo always came on the first of April, bringing three leaves of the merry tree—for Scrub and Fairfeather would have no more golden ones. So it was with them when I last heard the news of the north country.

CHAPTER III

[51]

LADY GREENSLEEVES

On the evening of the next day King Winwealth again fell into low spirits, and gave orders that Snowflower and her wonderful chair should be brought to the highest hall. When Snowflower came, she at once laid down her head on the chair, saying: "Chair of my grandmother, tell me a story."

"Listen," said the clear voice from under the cushion, "to the story of Lady Greensleeves."

Once upon a time there lived two noble lords in the east country. Their lands lay between a broad river and an old oak forest. In the midst of his land each lord had a stately castle; one was built of white freestone, the other of grey granite. So the one was called Lord of the White Castle, and the other Lord of the Grey.

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No lords in all the east country were so noble and kind as they. Their people lived in peace and plenty; all strangers were well treated at their castles. Every autumn they sent men with axes into the forest to hew down the great trees, and chop them into firewood for the poor. Neither hedge nor ditch divided their lands, but these lords never had a quarrel. They had been friends from their youth. Their ladies had died long ago, but the Lord of the Grey Castle had a little son, and the Lord of the White a little daughter; and when they feasted in each other's halls it was their custom to say, "When our children grow up they will marry, and have our castles and our lands, and keep our friendship in memory."

So the lords and their little children, and their people, lived happily till one Michaelmas night, as they were all feasting in the hall of the White Castle, there came a traveller to the gate, who was welcomed and feasted as usual. He had seen many strange sights and countries, and he liked to tell of his travels. The lords were delighted with his tales as they sat round the fire after supper, and at length the Lord of the White Castle, who was always very eager to know all he could about new countries, said:

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"Good stranger, what was the greatest wonder you ever saw in all your travels?"

"The most wonderful sight that ever I saw," replied the traveller, "was at the end of yonder forest, where in an old wooden house there sits an old woman weaving her own hair into grey cloth on an old worn-out loom. When she wants more yarn she cuts off her own grey hair, and it grows so quickly that though I saw it cut in the morning, it was out of the door before noon. She told me she wished to sell the cloth, but none of all who came that way had yet bought any, she asked so great a price. And, if the way were not so long and dangerous through that wide forest, which is full of bears and wolves, some rich lord like you might buy it for a cloak."

All who heard this story were greatly surprised; but when the traveller had gone on his way, the Lord of the White Castle could neither eat nor sleep for wishing to see the old woman that wove her own hair. At length he made up his mind to go through the forest in search of her old house, and told the Lord of the Grey Castle what he had made up his mind to do. Being a wise man, this lord replied that travellers' tales were not always to be trusted, and tried hard to advise him against undertaking such a long and dangerous journey, for few that went far into that forest ever returned.

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However, when the curious lord would go in spite of all he said, he vowed to go with him for friendship's sake, and they agreed to set out without letting anyone know, lest the other lords of the land might laugh at them. The Lord of the White Castle had a steward who had served him many years, and his name was Reckoning Robin. To him he said:

"I am going on a journey with my friend. Be careful of my goods, deal justly with my people, and above all things be kind to my little daughter Loveleaves till my return."

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The steward answered: "Be sure, my lord, I will."

The Lord of the Grey Castle also had a steward who had served him many years, and his name was Wary Will. To him he said:

"I am going on a journey with my friend. Be careful of my goods, deal justly with my people, and above all be kind to my little son Woodwender till my return."

His steward answered him: "Be sure, my lord, I will."

So these lords kissed their children while they slept, and set out each with his staff and cloak before sunrise through the old oak forest.

The children missed their fathers, and the people missed their lords. None but the stewards

could tell what had become of them; but seven months wore away, and they did not come back. The lords had thought their stewards faithful, because they served so well under their eyes; but instead of that, both were proud and cunning, and thinking that some evil had happened to their masters, they set themselves to be lords in their places.

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Reckoning Robin had a son called Hardhold, and Wary Will a daughter named Drypenny. There was not a sulkier girl or boy in the country, but their fathers made up their minds to make a young lord and a young lady of them; so they took the silk clothes which Woodwender and Loveleaves used to wear, to dress them, putting on the lords' children their coarse clothes. Their toys were given to Hardhold and Drypenny; and at last the stewards' children sat at the chief tables, and slept in the best rooms, while Woodwender and Loveleaves were sent to herd the swine, and sleep on straw in the granary.

The poor children had no one to take their part. Every morning at sunrise they were sent out—each with a barley loaf and a bottle of sour milk, which was to serve them for breakfast, dinner, and supper—to watch a great herd of swine on a wide field near the forest. The grass was scanty, and the swine were always straying into the wood in search of acorns. The children knew that if they were lost the wicked stewards would punish them; and between gathering and keeping their herds in order, they were readier to sleep on the granary straw at night than ever they had been within their own silken curtains.

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Still, Woodwender and Loveleaves were a great help and comfort to each other, saying their fathers would come back or God would send them some friends. So, in spite of swine-herding and hard living, they looked as cheerful and handsome as ever; while Hardhold and Drypenny grew crosser and uglier every day, notwithstanding their fine clothes.

The false stewards did not like this. They thought their children ought to look genteel, and Woodwender and Loveleaves like young swineherds. So they sent them to a wilder field, still nearer the forest, and gave them two great black hogs, more unruly than all the rest, to keep. One of these hogs belonged to Hardhold, and the other to Drypenny. Every evening when they came home the stewards' children used to come down and feed them, and it was their delight to reckon up what price they would bring when properly fattened.

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One very hot day, about midsummer, Woodwender and Loveleaves sat down in the shadow of a mossy rock. The swine grazed about them more quietly than usual; and the children plaited rushes and talked to each other, till, as the sun was sloping down the sky, Woodwender saw that the two great hogs were missing.

Thinking they must have gone to the forest, the children ran to search for them. They heard the thrush singing and the wood-doves calling; they saw the squirrels leaping from branch to branch, and the deer bounding by. But though they searched for hours, no trace of the hogs could be seen.

Loveleaves and Woodwender dared not go home without them. Deeper and deeper they ran into the forest, searching and calling, but all in vain. And when the woods began to darken with the fall of evening, the children feared they had lost their way.

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It was known that they never feared the forest, nor all the boars and wolves that were in it. But being weary, they wished for some place of shelter, and took a green path through the trees, thinking it might lead to the dwelling of some hermit or forester.

A fairer way Woodwender and Loveleaves had never walked. The grass was soft and mossy, a hedge of wild roses and honeysuckle grew on either side, and the red light of the sunset streamed through the tall trees above. On they went, and it led them straight to a great open dell, covered with the most lovely flowers, bordered with banks of wild strawberries, and all overshadowed by a huge oak, the like of which had never been seen in grove or forest. Its branches were as large as full-grown trees. Its trunk was wider than a country church, and its height like that of a castle.

There were mossy seats at its great root, and when the tired children had gathered as many strawberries as they cared for, they sat down on one, close by a small spring that bubbled up as clear as crystal. The mighty oak was covered with thick ivy, in which thousands of birds had their nests. Woodwender and Loveleaves watched them flying home from all parts of the forest, and at last they saw a lady coming by the same path which led them to the dell. She wore a gown of a red colour; her yellow hair was braided and bound with a red band. In her right hand she carried a holly branch; but the strangest part of her dress was a pair of long sleeves, as green as the very grass.

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"Who are you," she said, "that sit so late beside my well?"

And the children told her their story, how they had first lost the hogs, and then their way, and were afraid to go home to the wicked stewards.

"Well," said the lady, "you are the fairest swineherds that ever came this way. Choose whether you will go home and keep hogs for Hardhold and Drypenny, or live in the free forest with me."

"We will stay with you," said the children, "for we do not like keeping swine. Besides, our fathers went through this forest, and we may meet them some day coming home."

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While they spoke, the lady slipped her holly branch through the ivy, as if it had been a key,—

soon a door opened in the oak, and there was a fair house. The windows were of rock crystal, but they could not be seen from without. The walls and floors were covered with thick green moss, as soft as velvet. There were low seats and a round table, vessels of carved wood, a hearth inlaid with strange stones, an oven, and a storeroom for food against the winter.

When they stepped in, the lady said: "A hundred years have I lived here, and my name is Lady Greensleeves. No friend or servant have I except my dwarf Corner, who comes to me at the end of harvest with his handmill, his basket, and his axe. With these he grinds the nuts, and gathers the berries, and splits the firewood; and cheerily we live all the winter. But Corner loves the frost and fears the sun; and when the topmost branches begin to bud, he returns to his country far in the north, so I am lonely in the summertime."

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By these words the children saw how welcome they were. Lady Greensleeves gave them deer's milk and cakes of nut-flour, and soft green moss to sleep on. And they forgot all their troubles, the wicked stewards, and the straying swine.

Early in the morning a troop of does came to be milked, fairies brought flowers, and birds brought berries, to show Lady Greensleeves what had bloomed and ripened. She taught the children to make cheese of the does' milk, and wine of the woodberries. She showed them the stores of honey which wild bees had made, and left in the hollow trees, the rarest plants of the forest, and the herbs that made all the creatures tame.

All that summer Woodwender and Loveleaves lived with her in the great oak tree, free from toil and care. The children would have been happy, but they could hear no news of their fathers. At last the leaves began to fade, and the flowers to fall. Lady Greensleeves said that Corner was coming. One moonlight night she heaped sticks on the fire, and set her door open, when Woodwender and Loveleaves were going to sleep, saying she expected some friends to tell her the news of the forest.

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Loveleaves was not quite so curious as her father, the Lord of the White Castle, but she kept awake to see what would happen, and very much afraid the little girl was when in walked a great brown bear.

"Good evening, lady!" said the bear.

"Good evening, bear!" said Lady Greensleeves. "What is the news in your part of the forest?"

"Not much," said the bear; "only the fawns are growing very cunning—one can't catch above three in a day."

"That's bad news," said Lady Greensleeves; and at once in walked a great wild cat.

"Good evening, lady!" said the cat.

"Good evening, cat!" said Lady Greensleeves. "What is the news in your part of the forest?"

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"Not much," said the cat; "only the birds are growing very plentiful—it is not worth one's while to catch them."

"That's good news," said Lady Greensleeves; and in flew a great black raven.

"Good evening, lady!" said the raven.

"Good evening, raven!" said Lady Greensleeves. "What is the news in your part of the forest?"

"Not much," said the raven; "only in a hundred years or so we shall be very genteel and private, the trees will be so thick."

"How is that?" said Lady Greensleeves.

"Oh!" said the raven, "have you not heard how the king of the forest fairies laid a spell on two lords, who were travelling through his kingdom to see the old woman that weaves her own hair? They had thinned his oaks every year, cutting firewood for the poor. So the king met them in the likeness of a hunter, and asked them to drink out of his oaken goblet, because the day was warm. When the two lords drank, they forgot their lands and their people, their castles and their children, and minded nothing in all the world but the planting of acorns, which they do day and night, by the power of the spell, in the heart of the forest. They will never stop till someone makes them pause in their work before the sun sets, and then the spell will be broken."

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"Ah!" said Lady Greensleeves, "he is a great prince, that king of the forest fairies; and there is worse work in the world than planting acorns."

Soon after, the bear, the cat, and the raven bade Lady Greensleeves good night. She closed the door, put out the light, and went to sleep on the soft moss as usual.

In the morning Loveleaves told Woodwender what she had heard, and they went to Lady Greensleeves where she milked the does, and said:

"We heard what the raven told you last night, and we know the two lords are our fathers. Tell us how the spell may be broken."

"I fear the king of the forest fairies," said Lady Greensleeves, "because I live here alone, and have no friend but my dwarf Corner. But I will tell you

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what you may do. At the end of the path which leads from this dell turn your faces to the north, and you will find a narrow way sprinkled over with black feathers. Keep that path, no matter how it winds, and it will lead you straight to that part of the forest in which the ravens dwell. There you will find your fathers planting acorns under the forest trees. Watch till the sun is near setting, and tell them the most wonderful things you know to make them forget their work. But be sure to tell nothing but truth, and drink nothing but running water, or you will fall into the power of the fairy king."

The children thanked her for this good advice. She packed up cakes and cheese for them in a bag of woven grass, and they soon found the narrow way sprinkled over with black feathers. It was very long, and wound through the thick trees in so many circles that the children were often weary, and sat down to rest. When the night came, they found a mossy hollow in the trunk of an old tree, where they laid themselves down, and slept all the summer night—for Woodwender and Loveleaves never feared the forest.

So they went, eating their cakes and cheese when they were hungry, drinking from the running stream, and sleeping in the hollow trees, till on the evening of the seventh day they came into that part of the forest where the ravens lived. The tall trees were laden with nests and black with ravens. There was nothing to be heard but cawing.

In a great opening where the oaks grew thinnest, the children saw their own fathers busy planting acorns. Each lord had on the velvet cloak in which he left his castle, but it was worn to rags with rough work in the forest. Their hair and beards had grown long; their hands were soiled with earth; each had an old wooden spade, and on all sides lay heaps of acorns.

The children called their names, and ran to kiss them, each saying: "Dear father, come back to your castle and your people."

But the lords replied: "We know of no castles and no people. There is nothing in all this world but oak leaves and acorns."

Woodwender and Loveleaves told them of all their former state in vain. Nothing would make them pause for a minute. So the poor children first sat down and cried, and then slept on the cold grass, for the sun set, and the lords worked on.

When they awoke it was broad day. Woodwender cheered up Loveleaves, saying: "We are hungry, and there are two cakes in the bag, let us share one of them—who knows but something may happen."

So they divided the cake, and ran to the lords, saying: "Dear fathers, eat with us."

But the lords said: "There is no use for meat or drink. Let us plant our acorns."

Loveleaves and Woodwender sat down, and ate that cake in great sorrow. When they had finished, both went to a stream that ran close by, and began to drink the clear water with a large acorn shell. And as they drank there came through the oaks a gay young hunter, his mantle was green as the grass; about his neck there hung a crystal bugle, and in his hand he carried a huge oaken goblet, carved with flowers and leaves, and rimmed with crystal.

Up to the brim the cup was filled with milk, on which the rich cream floated. And as the hunter came near, he said: "Fair children, leave that muddy water, and come and drink with me."

But Woodwender and Loveleaves answered: "Thanks, good hunter, but we have promised to drink nothing but running water."

Still the hunter came nearer with his goblet, saying: "The water is dirty; it may do for swineherds and woodcutters, but not for such fair children as you. Tell me, are you not the children of mighty kings? Were you not brought up in palaces?"

But the boy and girl answered him: "No: we were brought up in castles, and are the children of yonder lords. Tell us how the spell that is upon them may be broken."

At once the hunter turned from them with an angry look, poured out the milk upon the ground, and went away with his empty goblet.

Loveleaves and Woodwender were sorry to see the rich cream spilled, but they remembered the warning of Lady Greensleeves; and seeing they could do no better, each got a withered branch and began to help the lords, scratching up the ground with the sharp end, and planting acorns. But their fathers took no notice of them, nor of all that they could say. When the sun grew



A DOOR OPENED IN THE ROCK

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warm at noon, they went again to drink at the running stream.

Then through the oaks came another hunter, older than the first, and clothed in yellow. About his neck there hung a silver bugle, and in his hand he carried an oaken goblet, carved with leaves and fruit, rimmed with silver, and filled with mead to the brim. This hunter also asked them to drink, told them the stream was full of frogs, and asked them if they were not a young prince and princess dwelling in the woods for their pleasure.

But when Woodwender and Loveleaves answered as before: "We have promised to drink only running water, and are the children of yonder lords; tell us how the spell may be broken," he turned from them with an angry look, poured out the mead, and went his way. [71]

All that afternoon the children worked beside their fathers, planting acorns with the withered branches. But the lords would mind neither them nor their words. And when the evening drew near they were very hungry. So the children divided their last cake; and since they could not make the lords eat with them, they went to the banks of the stream, and began to eat and drink, though their hearts were very heavy.

The sun was getting low, and the ravens were coming home to their nests in the high trees. But one, that seemed old and weary, alighted near them to drink at the stream. As they ate, the raven lingered, and picked up the small crumbs that fell.

"Brother," said Loveleaves, "this raven is surely hungry. Let us give it a little bit, though it is our last cake." [72]

Woodwender agreed, and each gave a bit to the raven. But its great bill finished the morsels in a moment, and hopping nearer, it looked them in the face by turns.

"The poor raven is still hungry," said Woodwender, and he gave it another bit. When that was gobbled, it came to Loveleaves, who gave it a bit too, and so on till the raven had eaten the whole of their last cake.

"Well," said Woodwender, "at least we can have a drink."

But as they stooped to the water, there came through the oaks another hunter, older than the last, and clothed in scarlet. About his neck there hung a golden bugle, and in his hand he carried a huge oaken goblet, carved with ears of corn and clusters of grapes, rimmed with gold, and filled to the brim with wine.

He also said: "Leave this muddy water, and drink with me. It is full of toads, and not fit for such fair children. Surely you are from fairyland, and were brought up in its queen's palace!" [73]

But the children said: "We will drink nothing but this water, and yonder lords are our fathers. Tell us how the spell may be broken."

And the hunter turned from them with an angry look, poured out the wine on the grass, and went his way.

When he was gone, the old raven looked up into their faces, and said: "I have eaten your last cake, and I will tell you how the spell may be broken. Yonder is the sun, going down behind the western trees. Before it sets, go to the lords, and tell them how their stewards used you, and made you herd hogs for Hardhold and Drypenny. When you see them listening, catch up their wooden spades, and keep them if you can till the sun goes down."

Woodwender and Loveleaves thanked the raven, and where it flew they never stopped to see, but running to the lords began to tell as they were bidden. At first the lords would not listen; but as the children told how they had been made to sleep on straw, how they had been sent to herd hogs in the wild pasture, and what trouble they had with the unruly swine, the acorn planting grew slower, and at last the lords dropped their spades. [74]

Then Woodwender, catching up his father's spade, ran to the stream and threw it in. Loveleaves did the same for the Lord of the White Castle. That moment the sun went down behind the western oaks, and the lords stood up, looking, like men just awakened, on the forest, on the sky, and on their children.

So this strange story has ended, for Woodwender and Loveleaves went home rejoicing with their fathers. Each lord returned to his castle, and all their people were merry. The fine toys and the silk clothes, the flower gardens and the best rooms, were taken from Hardhold and Drypenny, and the lords' children got them again. And the wicked stewards, with their cross boy and girl, were sent to herd swine, and live in huts in the wild pasture, which everybody said became them better.

The Lord of the White Castle never again wished to see the old woman that wove her own hair, and the Lord of the Grey Castle continued to be his friend. As for Woodwender and Loveleaves, they met with no more misfortunes, but grew up, and were married, and got the two castles and broad lands of their fathers. Nor did they forget the lonely Lady Greensleeves, for it was known in the east country that she and her dwarf Corner always came to feast with them in the Christmas time, and at midsummer they always went to live with her in the great oak in the forest. [75]

CHILDE CHARITY

Another evening King Winwealth fell into low spirits, and sent down a message for Snowflower to come to the highest hall. So the little girl went up with her grandmother's chair, upon which she laid down her head, saying: "Chair of my grandmother, tell me a story." The clear voice from under the cushion said: "Listen to the story of Childe Charity."

Once upon a time, there lived in the west country a little girl who had neither father nor mother. They both died when she was very young, and left their daughter to the care of her uncle, who was the richest farmer in all that country. He had houses and lands, flocks and herds, many servants to work about his house and fields, a wife who had brought him a great dowry, and two fair daughters.

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All their neighbours, being poor, looked up to the family—inasmuch that they thought themselves great people. The father and mother were as proud as peacocks. The daughters thought themselves the greatest beauties in the world, and not one of the family would speak civilly to anybody they thought low.

Now it happened that though she was their near relation, they had this opinion of the orphan girl, partly because she had no fortune, and partly because of her humble, kindly nature. It was said that the more needy any creature was, the more ready was she to befriend it. So the people of the west country called her Childe Charity, and if she had any other name, I never heard it.

Childe Charity was thought very mean in that proud house. Her uncle would not own her for his niece. Her cousins would not keep her company. Her aunt sent her to work in the dairy, and to sleep in the back garret, where they kept all sorts of lumber and dry herbs for the winter.

All the servants learned the same lesson, and Childe Charity had more work than rest among them. All the day she scoured pails, scrubbed dishes, and washed crockery ware. But every night she slept in the back garret as sound as a princess could in her palace.

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Her uncle's house was large and white, and stood among green meadows by a river's side. In front it had a porch covered with a vine; behind, it had a farmyard and high granaries. Within were two parlours for the rich, and two kitchens for the poor, which the neighbours thought very grand; and one day in the harvest season, when this rich farmer's corn had been all cut down and housed, he invited them to a harvest supper.

The west-country people came in their holiday clothes. Such heaps of cakes and cheese, such baskets of apples and barrels of ale had never been at a feast before. They were making merry in kitchen and parlour, when a poor old woman came to the back door, begging for scraps of food and a night's lodging. Her clothes were coarse and ragged; her hair was scanty and grey; her back was bent; her teeth were gone. She had a squinting eye, a clubbed foot, and crooked fingers. In short, she was the poorest and ugliest old woman that ever came begging.

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The first who saw her was the kitchen maid, and she ordered her to be gone for an ugly witch. The next was the herd-boy, and he threw her a bone. But Childe Charity, hearing the noise, came out from her seat at the foot of the lowest table, and asked the old woman to take her share of the supper, and sleep that night in her bed in the back garret.

The old woman sat down without a word of thanks. All the people laughed at Childe Charity for giving her bed and her supper to a beggar. Her proud cousins said it was just like her mean spirit, but Childe Charity did not mind them. She scraped the pots for her supper that night, and slept on a sack among the lumber, while the old woman rested in her warm bed. And next morning, before the little girl awoke, she was up and gone, without so much as saying thank you, or good morning.

[80]

That day all the servants were sick after the feast, and mostly cross too—so you may judge how civil they were; when, at supper time, who should come to the back door but the old woman, again asking for broken scraps of food and a night's lodging. No one would listen to her or give her a morsel, till Childe Charity rose from her seat at the foot of the lowest table, and kindly asked her to take her supper, and sleep in her bed in the back garret.

Again the old woman sat down without a word. Childe Charity scraped the pots for her supper, and slept on the sack. In the morning the old woman was gone; but for six nights after, as sure as the supper was spread, there was she at the back door, and the little girl always asked her in.

Childe Charity's aunt said she would let her get enough of beggars. Her cousins made game of what they called her genteel visitor. Sometimes the old woman said: "Child, why don't you make this bed softer? and why are your blankets so thin?" but she never gave her a word of thanks, nor a civil good morning.

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At last, on the ninth night from her first coming, when Childe Charity was getting used to scrape the pots and sleep on the sack, her knock came to the door, and there she stood with an ugly ashy-coloured dog, so stupid-looking and clumsy that no herd-boy would keep him.

"Good evening, my little girl!" she said, when Childe Charity opened the door. "I will not have your supper and bed to-night. I am going on a long



**THERE CAME IN A COMPANY OF
LITTLE LADIES**

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journey to see a friend. But here is a dog of mine, whom nobody in all the west country will keep for me. He is a little cross, and not very handsome; but I leave him to your care till the shortest day in all the year. Then you and I will count for his keeping."

When the old woman had said the last word, she set off with such speed that Childe Charity lost sight of her in a minute. The ugly dog began to fawn upon her, but he snarled at everybody else. The servants said he was a disgrace to the house. The cousins wanted him drowned, and it was with great trouble that Childe Charity got leave to keep him in an old ruined cow-house.

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Ugly and cross as the dog was, he fawned on her, and the old woman had left him to her care. So the little girl gave him part of all her meals; and when the hard frost came, took him to her own back garret, because the cow-house was damp and cold in the long nights. The dog lay quietly on some straw in a corner. Childe Charity slept soundly, but every morning the servants would say to her:

"What great light and fine talking was that in your back garret?"

"There was no light but the moon shining in through the shutterless window, and no talk that I heard," said Childe Charity; and she thought they must have been dreaming.

But night after night, when any of them awoke in the dark and silent hour that comes before the morning, they saw a light brighter and clearer than the Christmas fire, and heard voices like those of lords and ladies in the back garret.

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Partly from fear, and partly from laziness, none of the servants would rise to see what might be there; till at length, when the winter nights were at the longest, the little parlour maid, who did least work and got most favour, because she gathered news for her mistress, crept out of bed when all the rest were sleeping, and set herself to watch at a small hole in the door.

She saw the dog lying quietly in the corner, Childe Charity sleeping soundly in her bed, and the moon shining through the shutterless window. But an hour before daybreak there came a glare of lights, and a sound of far-off bugles. The window opened, and in marched a troop of little men clothed in crimson and gold, and bearing every man a torch, till the room looked bright as day.

They marched up with great respect to the dog, where he lay on the straw, and the most richly clothed among them said: "Royal Prince, we have prepared the banquet hall. What will your Highness please that we do next?"

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"You have done well," said the dog. "Now prepare the feast, and see that all things are in the best order; for the Princess and I mean to bring a stranger who never feasted in our halls before."

"Your Highness's commands shall be obeyed," said the little man, making another bow; and he and his company passed out of the window. By and by there was another glare of lights, and a sound like far-off flutes. The window opened, and there came in a company of little ladies clad in velvet, and carrying each a crystal lamp.

They also walked up to the dog, and the gayest one said: "Royal Prince, we have prepared the carpets and curtains. What will your Highness please that we do next?"

"You have done well," said the dog. "Now prepare the robes, and let all things be of the best; for the Princess and I will bring with us a stranger who never feasted in our halls before."

"Your Highness's commands shall be obeyed," said the little lady, making a low curtsy; and she and her company passed out through the window, which closed quietly behind them.

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The dog stretched himself out upon the straw, the little girl turned in her sleep, and the moon shone in on the back garret. The parlour maid was so much amazed, and so eager to tell this story to her mistress, that she could not close her eyes that night, and was up before cock-crow. But when she told it, her mistress called her a silly wench to have such foolish dreams, and scolded her so that she did not dare to speak about what she had seen to the servants.

Nevertheless Childe Charity's aunt thought there might be something in it worth knowing. So next night, when all the house were asleep, she crept out of bed, and set herself to watch at the back garret door. There she saw just what the maid told her—the little men with the torches, and the little ladies with the crystal lamps, come in to the dog, and the same words pass, only he said to the one, "Now prepare the presents," and to the other, "Prepare the jewels." When they were

gone, the dog stretched himself on the straw, Childe Charity turned in her sleep, and the moon shone in on the back garret.

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The mistress could not close her eyes any more than the maid, so eager was she to tell the story. She woke up Childe Charity's rich uncle before cock-crow. But when he heard it, he laughed at her for a foolish woman, and advised her not to repeat the like before her neighbours, lest they should think she had lost her senses.

The mistress could say no more, and the day passed. But that night the master thought he would like to see what went on in the garret. So when all the house were asleep he slipped out of bed, and set himself to watch at the hole in the door. The same thing happened again that the maid and the mistress saw. The little men in crimson with their torches, and the little ladies in rose-coloured velvet with their lamps, came in at the window and bowed low to the dog, the one saying, "Royal Prince, we have prepared the presents," and the other, "Royal Prince, we have prepared the jewels."

The dog said to them all: "You have done well. To-morrow, come and meet me and the Princess with horses and chariots, and let all things be done in the best way. For we will bring a stranger from this house who has never travelled with us, nor feasted in our halls before."

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The little men and the little ladies said: "Your Highness's commands shall be obeyed."

When they had gone out through the window, the ugly dog stretched himself out on the straw, Childe Charity turned in her sleep, and the moon shone in on the back garret.

The master could not close his eyes any more than the maid or the mistress. He remembered to have heard his grandfather say, that somewhere near his meadows there lay a path leading to the fairies' country, and the haymakers used to see it shining through the grey summer morning, as the fairy bands went home.

Nobody had heard or seen the like for many years; but the master thought that the doings in his back garret must be a fairy business, and the ugly dog a person of great account. His chief wonder was, however, what visitor the fairies intended to take from his house; and after thinking the matter over, he was sure it must be one of his daughters—they were so handsome, and had such fine clothes.

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So Childe Charity's rich uncle made it his first business that morning to get ready a breakfast of roast mutton for the ugly dog, and carry it to him in the cow-house. But not a morsel would the dog taste.

"The fairies have strange ways," said the master to himself. But he called his daughters and bade them dress themselves in their best, for he could not say which of them might be called into great company before nightfall. Childe Charity's cousins, hearing this, put on the richest of their silks and laces, and strutted like peacocks from kitchen to parlour all day.

They were in very bad humour when night fell, and nobody had come. But just as the family were sitting down to supper the ugly dog began to bark, and the old woman's knock was heard at the back door.

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Childe Charity opened it, and was going to offer her bed and supper as usual, when the old woman said: "This is the shortest day in all the year, and I am going home to hold a feast after my travels. I see you have taken good care of my dog, and now if you will come with me to my house, he and I will do our best to entertain you. Here is our company."

As the old woman spoke there was a sound of far-off flutes and bugles, then a glare of lights. And a great company, clad so grandly that they shone with gold and jewels, came in open chariots, covered with gilding and drawn by snow-white horses. The first and finest of the chariots was empty. The old woman led Childe Charity to it by the hand, and the ugly dog jumped in before her.

The proud cousins, in all their finery, had by this time come to the door, but nobody wanted them. No sooner was the old woman and her dog within the chariot than a wonderful change passed over them, for the ugly old woman turned at once to a beautiful young princess, with long yellow curls and a robe of green and gold; while the ugly dog at her side started up a fair young prince, with nut-brown hair and a robe of purple and silver.

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"We are," said they, as the chariots drove on, "a prince and princess of Fairyland, and there was a wager between us whether or not there were good people still to be found in these false and greedy times. One said 'Yes', and the other said 'No'."

"And I have lost," said the Prince, "and must pay the feast and presents."

Childe Charity never heard any more of that story. Some of the farmer's household, who were looking after them, said the chariots had gone one way across the meadows, some said they had gone another, and till this day they cannot agree upon the way they went.

But Childe Charity went with that noble company into a country such as she had never seen—for primroses covered all the ground, and the light was always like that of a summer evening. They took her to a royal palace, where there was nothing but feasting and dancing for seven days. She had robes of pale green and velvet to wear, and slept in a room inlaid with ivory.

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When the feast was done, the Prince and Princess gave her such heaps of gold and jewels that she could not carry them; but they gave her a chariot to go home in, drawn by six white horses. On the seventh night, which happened to be Christmas time, when the farmer's family had settled in their own minds that she would never come back, and were sitting down to supper, they heard the sound of her coachman's bugle, and saw her alight with all the jewels and gold at the very back door where she had brought in the ugly old woman.

The fairy chariot drove away, and never again came back to that farmhouse after. But Childe Charity scoured and scrubbed no more, for she grew a great lady, even in the eyes of her proud cousins.

CHAPTER V

[92]

SOUR AND CIVIL

Once again King Winwealth wished to hear a story told by the wonderful chair, and orders were given for Snowflower to bring it to the King's hall. She again brought the chair and laid her head on the cushion, saying: "Chair of my grandmother, tell me a story." The voice from under the cushion at once said: "Listen to the story of Sour and Civil."

Once upon a time there stood upon the seacoast of the west country a small village of low cottages, where no one lived but fishermen. All round it was a broad beach of snow-white sand, where nothing was to be seen but gulls and other seabirds, and long tangled seaweeds cast up by the tide that came and went night and day, summer and winter.

There was no harbour or port on all that shore. Ships passed by at a distance, with their white sails set, and on the land side there lay wide grassy downs, where peasants lived and shepherds fed their flocks. There families never wanted for plenty of herrings and mackerel; and what they had to spare the landsmen bought from them at the village markets on the downs, giving them in exchange butter, cheese, and corn.

[93]

The two best fishermen in that village were the sons of two old widows, who had no other children, and happened to be near neighbours. Their family names were short, for they called the one Sour and the other Civil. They were not related to one another so far as I ever heard. But they had only one boat, and always fished together, though their names expressed the difference of their natures—for Civil never used a hard word where a soft one would do, and when Sour was not snarling at somebody, he was sure to be grumbling at everything.

Nevertheless they agreed very well, and were lucky fishers. Both were strong, active, and of good courage. On winter's night or summer's morning they would steer out to sea far beyond the boats of their neighbours, and never came home without some fish to cook and some to spare. Their mothers were proud of them, each in her own way—for the saying held good, "Like mother, like son". Dame Civil thought the whole world didn't hold a better than her son; and her boy was the only creature at whom Dame Sour didn't scold and frown.

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The village was divided in opinion about the young fishermen. Some thought Civil the better; some said, without Sour he would catch nothing. So things went on, till one day about the fall of winter, when mists were gathering darkly on sea and sky, and the air was chill and frosty, all the boat-men of the hamlet went out to fish, and so did Sour and Civil.

That day they had not their usual luck. Cast their nets where they would, not a single fish came in. Their neighbours caught boatfuls, and went home, Sour said, laughing at them. But when the sea was growing crimson with the sunset, their nets were empty, and they were tired. Civil himself did not like to go home without fish—it would hurt the high opinion formed of them in the village. Besides, the sea was calm and the evening fair, and, as a last attempt, they steered still farther out, and cast their nets beside a rock which rose rough and grey above the water, and was called the Merman's Seat—from an old report that the fishermen's fathers had seen the mermen, or sea-people, sitting there on moonlight nights.

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Nobody believed that rumour now, but the villagers did not like to fish there. The water was said to be very deep, and sudden squalls were apt to trouble it. But Sour and Civil were right glad to see by the moving of their lines that there was something in their net, and gladder still when they found it so heavy that all their strength was required to draw it up.

Scarcely had they landed it on the Merman's Seat, when their joy was changed to sorrow, for besides a few starved mackerel, the net held nothing but a huge ugly fish as long as Civil (who was taller than Sour), with a large snout, a long beard, and a skin covered with prickles.

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"Such a horrid ugly creature!" said Sour, as they shook it out of the net on the rough rock, and gathered up the mackerel. "We needn't fish here any more. How they will mock us in the village for staying out so late, and bringing home so little!"

"Let us try again," said Civil, as he set his creel of mackerel in the boat.

"Not another cast will I make to-night;" and what more Sour would have said, was cut short by the great fish, for, looking round at them, it spoke out:

"I suppose you don't think me worth taking home in your dirty boat; but I can tell you that if you were down in my country, neither of you would be thought fit to keep me company."

Sour and Civil were very much surprised to hear the fish speak. The first could not think of a cross word to say, but Civil made answer in his usual way. [97]

"Indeed, my lord, we beg your pardon, but our boat is too light to carry such a fish as you."

"You do well to call me lord," said the fish, "for so I am, though it was hard to expect you could have known how great I was in this dress. However, help me off the rock, for I must go home; and for your civil way of speaking I will give you my daughter in marriage, if you will come and see me this day twelvemonth."

Civil helped the great fish off the rock with as great respect as his fear would allow him. Sour was so frightened at the whole business, that he said not a word till they got safe home. But from that day forward, when he wanted to put Civil down, it was his custom to tell him and his mother that he would get no wife but the ugly fish's daughter.

Old Dame Sour heard this story from her son, and told it over the whole village. Some people wondered, but the most part laughed at it as a good joke; and Civil and his mother were never known to be angry but on that day. Dame Civil advised her son never to fish with Sour again; and Civil got an old skiff which one of the fishermen was going to break up for firewood, and cobbled it up for himself. [98]

In that skiff he went to sea all the winter, and all the summer. But though Civil was brave and skilful, he could catch little, because his boat was bad—and everybody but his mother began to think him of no value. Sour having the good boat, got a new comrade, and had the praise of being the best fisherman.

Poor Civil's heart was getting low as the summer wore away. The fish had grown scarce on that coast, and the fishermen had to steer farther out to sea. One evening when he had toiled all day and caught nothing, Civil thought he would go farther too, and try his fortune beside the Merman's rock.

The sea was calm and the evening fair. Civil did not remember that it was the very day on which his troubles began by the great fish talking to him twelve months before. As he neared the rock the sun was setting, and much surprised was the fisherman to see upon it three fair ladies, with sea-green gowns and strings of great pearls wound round their long fair hair. [99]

Two of them were waving their hands to him. They were the tallest and most stately ladies he had ever seen. But Civil could perceive as he came nearer that there was no colour in their cheeks, that their hair had a strange bluish shade, like that of deep sea-water, and there was a fiery look in their eyes that frightened him.

The third, who was not so tall, did not notice him at all, but kept her eyes fixed on the setting sun. Though her look was full of sadness, Civil could see that there was a faint rosy bloom on her cheek, that her hair was a golden yellow, and her eyes were mild and clear like those of his mother.

"Welcome! welcome! noble fisherman!" cried the two ladies. "Our father has sent us for you to visit him." [100]

With one bound they leaped into his boat, bringing with them the smaller lady, who said: "Oh! bright sun and brave sky that I see so seldom!"

But Civil heard no more, for his boat went down miles deep in the sea, and he thought himself drowning. But one lady had caught him by the right arm, and the other by the left, and pulled him into the mouth of a rocky cave, still down and down, as if on a steep hillside. The cave was very long, but it grew wider as they came to the bottom.

Then Civil saw a faint light, and walked out with his fair company into the country of the sea-people. In that land there grew neither grass nor flowers, bushes nor trees, but the ground was covered with bright-coloured shells and pebbles. There were hills of marble, and rocks of spar. Over all was a cold blue sky with no sun, but a light clear and silvery as that of the harvest moon. The fisherman could see no smoking chimneys, but there were caves in the rocks of spar, and halls in the marble hills, where lived the sea-people—with whom, as old stories say, fishermen and sailors used to meet on lonely capes and headlands in the simple times of the world. [101]

Forth they came from all parts to see the stranger. Mermen with long white beards, and mermaids such as walk with the fishermen, all clad in sea-green and decked with strings of pearls; but every one with the same colourless face, and the same wild light in their eyes.

The mermaids led Civil up one of the marble hills to a great cavern with halls and rooms like a palace. Their floors were of white marble, their walls of red granite, and the roofs inlaid with coral. Thousands of crystal lamps lit the palace. There were seats and tables hewn out of shining spar, and a great company sat feasting. But what most amazed Civil was the number of cups, flagons, and goblets, made of gold and silver, of such different shapes and patterns that they seemed to have been gathered from all the countries in the world. In the chief hall there sat a merman on a stately chair, with more jewels than all the rest about him. [102]

Before him the mermaids brought Civil, saying: "Father, here is our guest."

"Welcome, noble fisherman!" cried the merman, in a voice which Civil remembered with terror, for it was that of the great ugly fish; "welcome to our halls! Sit down and feast with us, and then choose which of my daughters you will have for a bride."

Civil had never felt himself so greatly frightened in all his life. How was he to get home to his mother? and what would the old dame think when the dark night came without bringing him home? There was no use in talking—Civil had wisdom enough to see that. He therefore tried to take things quietly; and, having thanked the merman for so kindly inviting him, he took the seat set apart for him on his right hand.

Civil was hungry with the long day at sea, but there was no want of fare on that table; meats and wines, such as he had never tasted, were set before him in the richest of golden dishes, but, hungry as he was, the fisherman felt that everything there had the taste and smell of the sea. [103]

If the fisherman had been the lord of lands and castles he would not have been treated with more respect. The two mermaids sat by him—one filled his plate, another filled his goblet; but the third only looked at him in a hidden, warning way when nobody saw her. Civil soon finished his share of the feast, and then the merman showed him all the fine things of his cavern.

The halls were full of company, some feasting, some dancing, and some playing all kinds of games, and in every hall there was a large number of gold and silver vessels. But Civil was most surprised when the merman brought him to a marble room full of heaps of precious stones. There were diamonds there whose value the fisherman knew not—pearls larger than ever a diver had gathered—emeralds and rubies, that would have made the jewellers of the world wonder.

The merman then said: "This is my eldest daughter's dowry."

"Good luck attend her!" said Civil. "It is the dowry of a queen."

But the merman led him on to another room. It was filled with heaps of gold coin, which seemed gathered from all times and nations. The images of all the kings that ever reigned were there. [104]

The merman said: "This is my second daughter's dowry."

"Good luck attend her!" said Civil. "It is a dowry for a princess."

"So you may say," replied the merman. "But make up your mind which of the maidens you will marry, for the third has no portion at all, because she is not my daughter; but only, as you may see, a poor silly girl taken into my family for charity."

"Truly, my lord," said Civil, whose mind was already made up, "both your daughters are too rich and far too noble for me; therefore I choose the third. Since she is poor she will best do for a poor fisherman."

"If you choose her," said the merman, "you must wait long for a wedding. I cannot allow a girl of lower estate to be married before my own daughters." And he said a great deal more to persuade him. But Civil would not change his mind, and they returned to the hall. [105]

There was no more attention for the fisherman, but everybody watched him well. Turn where he would, master or guest had their eyes upon him, though he made them the best speeches he could remember, and praised all their splendid things. One thing, however, was strange—there was no end to the fun and feasting. Nobody seemed tired, and nobody thought of sleep.

When Civil's very eyes closed with weariness, and he slept on one of the marble benches—no matter how many hours—there were the company feasting and dancing away; there were the thousand lamps within, and the cold moonlight without. Civil wished himself back with his mother, his net, and his cobbled skiff. Fishing would have been easier than those everlasting feasts; but there was nothing else among the sea-people—no night of rest, no working day.

Civil knew not how time went on, till, waking up from a long sleep, he saw, for the first time, that the feast was over, and the company gone. The lamps still burned, and the tables, with all their riches, stood in the empty halls; but there was no face to be seen, no sound to be heard, only a low voice singing beside the outer door. And there, sitting all alone, he found the mild-eyed maiden. [106]

"Fair lady," said Civil, "tell me what means this quietness, and where are all the merry company?"

"You are a man of the land," said the lady, "and know not the sea-people. They never sleep but once a year, and that is at Christmas time. Then they go into the deep caverns, where there is always darkness, and sleep till the new year comes."

"It is a strange habit," said Civil; "but all folks have their way. Fair lady, as you and I are to be good friends, tell me, whence come all the wines and meats, and gold and silver vessels, seeing there are neither cornfields nor flocks here, nor any workmen?"

"The sea-people are heirs of the sea," replied the maiden; "to them come all the stores and riches that are lost in it. I know not the ways by which they come; but the lord of these halls keeps the keys of seven gates, where they go out and in. But one of the gates, which has not been open for thrice seven years, leads to a path under the sea, by which, I heard the merman say in his cups, one might reach the land. [107]

"Good fisherman," she went on, "if by chance you gain his favour, and ever open that gate, let me bear you company; for I was born where the sun shines and the grass grows, though my country and my parents are unknown to me. All I remember is sailing in a great ship, when a storm arose, and it was wrecked, and not one soul escaped drowning but me. I was then a little child, and a brave sailor had bound me to a floating plank before he was washed away. Here the sea-people came round me like great fishes, and I went down with them to this rich and weary country. Sometimes, as a great favour, they take me up with them to see the sun; but that is seldom, for they never like to part with one who has seen their country; and, fisherman, if you ever leave them, remember to take nothing with you that belongs to them, for if it were but a shell or a pebble, that will give them power over you and yours."

[108]

"Thanks for your news, fair lady," said Civil. "A lord's daughter, doubtless, you must have been, while I am but a poor fisherman. Yet, as we have fallen into the same misfortune, let us be friends, and it may be we shall find means to get back to the sunshine together."

"You are a man of good manners," said the lady, "therefore I shall gladly be your friend; but my fear is that we shall never see the sunshine again."

"Fair speeches brought me here," said Civil, "and fair speeches may help me back, but be sure I will not go without you."

This promise cheered the lady's heart, and she and Civil spent that Christmas time seeing the wonders of the sea country. They wandered through caves like that of the great merman. The feast that had been left was spread in every hall; the tables were covered with the most costly vessels; and heaps of jewels lay on the floors of unlocked rooms. But for the lady's warning, Civil would have liked to put away some of them for his mother.

[109]

The poor woman was sad of heart by this time, believing her son to be drowned. On the first night when he did not come home, she had gone to the sea and watched till morning. Then the fishermen steered out again, and Sour having found the skiff floating about, brought it home, saying the foolish young man was no doubt lost; but what better could be expected when he had no discreet person to take care of him?

This vexed Dame Civil sore. She never expected to see her son again; but, feeling lonely in her cottage at the evening hour when he used to come home, the good woman got into the habit of going down at sunset and sitting beside the sea. That winter happened to be mild on the coast of the west country, and one evening when the Christmas time was near, and the rest of the village preparing to make merry, Dame Civil sat, as usual, on the sands.

[110]

The tide was ebbing and the sun going down, when from the eastward came a lady clad in black, mounted on a black horse, and followed by a squire in the same sad clothing.

As the lady came near, she said: "Woe is me for my daughter, and for all that I have lost by the sea!"

"You say well, noble lady," said Dame Civil. "Woe is me also for my son, for I have none beside him."

When the lady heard that, she alighted from her horse, and sat down by the fisherman's mother, saying: "Listen to my story. I was the widow of a great lord in the heart of the east country. He left me a fair castle, and an only daughter, who was the joy of my heart. Her name was Faith Feignless. But, while she was yet a child, a great fortune-teller told me that my daughter would marry a fisherman. I thought this would be a great disgrace to my noble family, and therefore sent my daughter with her nurse in a good ship, bound for a far-away city where my relations live, intending to follow myself as soon as I could get my lands and castles sold."

[111]

"But the ship was wrecked," the lady went on, "and my daughter drowned; and I have wandered over the world with my good Squire Trusty, mourning on every shore with those who have lost friends by the sea. Some with whom I have mourned grew to forget their sorrow, and would lament with me no more. Others being sour and selfish, mocked me, saying, my grief was nothing to them. But you have good manners, and I will remain with you, however humble be your dwelling. My squire carries gold enough to pay for all I need."

So the mourning lady and her good Squire Trusty went home with Dame Civil, and she was no longer lonely in her sorrow, for when the dame said:

"Oh! if my son were alive, I should never let him go to sea in a cobbled skiff!" the lady answered:

"Oh! if my daughter were but living, I should never think it a disgrace though she married a fisherman!"

The Christmas passed as it always does in the west country—shepherds made merry on the downs, and fishermen on the shore. But when the merrymakings and ringing of bells were over in all the land, the sea-people woke up to their feasts and dances.

[112]

Like one who had forgotten all that was past, the merman again showed Civil the room of gold and the room of jewels, advising him to choose between his two daughters. But the fisherman still answered that the ladies were too noble, and far too rich for him.

Yet as he looked at the glittering heap, Civil could not help remembering the poor people of

the west country, and the thought slipped out, "How happy my old neighbours would be to find themselves here!"

"Say you so?" said the merman, who always wanted visitors.

"Yes," said Civil, "I have neighbours up yonder in the west country, whom it would be hard to send home again if they got sight of half this wealth." And the honest fisherman thought of Dame Sour and her son.

The merman was greatly pleased with these speeches—he thought there was a chance of getting many land-people down, and by and by said to Civil, "Suppose you took up a few jewels, and went up to tell your poor neighbours how welcome we might make them?"

[113]

The hope of getting back to his country made Civil's heart glad, but he had promised not to go without the lady, and therefore answered prudently what was indeed true.

"Many thanks, my lord," he said, "for choosing such a humble man as I am to carry your message. But the people of the west country never believe anything without two witnesses at the least. Yet if the poor maid whom I have chosen could be allowed to go with me, I think they would believe us both."

The merman said nothing in reply; but his people, who had heard Civil's speech, talked it over among themselves till they grew sure that the whole west country would come down, if they only had news of the riches, and asked their lord to send up Civil and the poor maid in order to let them know.

[114]

As it seemed for the public good, the great merman agreed. But, having made up his mind to have them back, he gathered out of his rich rooms some of the largest pearls and diamonds, and said:

"Take these as a present from me, to let the west-country people see what I can do for my visitors."

Civil and the lady took the presents, saying: "Oh, my lord, you are too kind. We want nothing but the pleasure of telling of your wonderful riches up yonder."

"Tell everybody to come down, and they will get the like," said the merman; "and follow my eldest daughter, for she carries the key of the land gate."

Civil and the lady followed the mermaid through a winding gallery, which led from the chief hall far into the marble hill. All was dark, and they had neither lamp nor torch, but at the end of the gallery they came to a great stone gate, which creaked like thunder on its hinges. Beyond that there was a narrow cave, sloping up and up like a steep hillside.

[115]

Civil and the lady thought they would never reach the top. But at last they saw a gleam of daylight, then a strip of blue sky, and the mermaid bade them stoop and creep through what seemed a narrow crack in the ground, and both stood on the broad seabeach as the day was breaking and the tide ebbing fast away.

"Good times to you among your west-country people," said the mermaid. "Tell any of them that would like to come down to visit us, that they must come here midway between the high and low watermark, when the tide is going out at morning or evening. Call thrice on the sea-people, and we will show them the way."

Before they could make answer, she had sunk down from their sight, and there was no track or passage there, but all was covered by the loose sand and seashells.

"Now," said the lady to Civil, "we have seen the heavens once more, and we will not go back. Cast in the merman's present quickly before the sun rises."

Taking the bag of pearls and diamonds, she flung it as far as she could into the sea.

[116]

Civil never was so unwilling to part with anything as that bag, but he thought it better to do as the lady had done, and tossed his into the sea also. They thought they heard a long moan come up from the waters; but Civil saw his mother's chimney beginning to smoke, and with the fair lady in her sea-green gown he hastened to the good dame's cottage.

The whole village were awakened that morning with cries of "Welcome back, my son!" "Welcome back, my daughter!" for the mournful lady knew it was her lost daughter, Faith Feignless, whom the fisherman had brought back, and all the neighbours gathered together to hear their story. When it was told, everybody praised Civil for the prudence he had shown, except Sour and his mother. They did nothing but rail upon him for losing such great chances of making himself and the whole country rich.

At last, when they heard over and over again of the merman's riches, neither mother nor son would stay any longer in the west country; and as nobody persuaded them, and they would not do what Civil told them, Sour got out his boat and steered away with his mother toward the Merman's rock.

[117]

From that voyage they never came back to the hamlet. Some say they went down and lived among the sea-people. Others say—I know not how they learned it—that Sour and his mother grumbled and growled so much that even the sea-people grew weary of them, and turned them

and their boat out on the open sea. What part of the world they chose to land on nobody is sure of. By all accounts they have been seen everywhere, and I should not be surprised if they were in this good company. As for Civil he married Faith Feignless, and became a great lord.

CHAPTER VI

[118]

PRINCE WISEWIT'S RETURN

King Winwealth was so pleased with the stories told by the wonderful chair that he gave Snowflower many presents, among which was a golden girdle, and promised that she should no longer go into low company, but feast with him and his nobles in the chief hall, and sleep in one of the best rooms of the palace.

Snowflower was delighted at the promise of feasting with those noble lords and ladies, whose wonderful stories she had heard from the chair. She bowed very low, and thanked King Winwealth from the bottom of her heart. All the company were glad to make room for her, and when her golden girdle was put on, little Snowflower looked as fine as the best of them.

"Mamma," whispered the Princess Greedalind, while she looked ready to cry for spite, "only see that low little girl who came here in a coarse frock and barefooted, what finery and favour she has gained by her story-telling chair! All the Court are praising her and overlooking me, though the feast was made in honour of my birthday. Mamma, I must have that chair from her. What business has a common little girl with anything so amusing?"

[119]

"So you shall, my daughter," said Queen Wantall—for by this time she saw that King Winwealth had, according to custom, fallen asleep on his throne. So calling two of her pages, Screw and Hardhands, she ordered them to bring the chair from the other end of the hall where Snowflower sat, and at once made it a present to Princess Greedalind.

Nobody in that Court ever thought of disputing Queen Wantall's commands, and poor Snowflower sat down in a corner to cry. While Princess Greedalind, putting on what she thought a very grand air, laid down her head on the cushion, saying: "Chair of my grandmother, tell me a story."

[120]

"Where did you get a grandmother?" cried the clear voice from under the cushion. And up went the chair with such force as to throw Princess Greedalind off on the floor, where she lay screaming, a good deal more angry than hurt.

All those at Court tried in vain to comfort her. But Queen Wantall, whose temper was still worse, vowed that she would punish the impudent thing, and sent for Sturdy, her chief woodman, to chop it up with his axe.

At the first stroke the cushion was cut open, and to the surprise of everybody a bird, whose snow-white feathers were tipped with purple, darted out, and flew away through an open window.

"Catch it! catch it!" cried the Queen and the Princess; and all but King Winwealth, who still slept on his throne, rushed out after the bird. It flew over the palace garden and into a wild common, where houses had been before Queen Wantall pulled them down to search for a gold mine, which Her Majesty never found, though three deep pits were dug to come at it.

[121]

To make the place look smart at the feast time, these pits had been covered over with loose branches and turf. All the rest of the company remembered this but Queen Wantall and Princess Greedalind. They were nearest to the bird, and poor Snowflower, by running hard, came close behind them, but Fairfortune, one of the King's pages, drew her back by the purple mantle, when, coming to the covered pit, branches and turf gave way, and down went the Queen and the Princess.

Everybody looked for the bird, but it was nowhere to be seen. But on the common where the people saw it alight, there stood a fair and royal Prince, clad in a robe of purple and a crown of changing colours, for sometimes it seemed of gold and sometimes of forest leaves.

Most of the people stood not knowing what to think, but all the fairy people and all the lords and ladies of the chair's stories, knew him, and cried: "Welcome to Prince Wisewit!"

King Winwealth heard that sound where he slept, and came out glad of heart to welcome back his brother. When her own pages came out with ropes and lanterns to search for Queen Wantall and Princess Greedalind, they found them safe and well at the bottom of the pit, having fallen on a heap of loose sand. The pit was of great depth, but some daylight shone down, and whatever were the yellow grains they saw glittering among the sand, the Queen and the Princess believed it was full of gold.

[122]

They called the miners false knaves, lazy rogues, and a score of bad names beside, for leaving so much wealth behind them, and utterly refused to come out of the pit; saying, that since Prince Wisewit was come, they could find no pleasure in the palace, but would stay there and dig for gold, and buy the world with it for themselves.

King Winwealth thought the plan was a good one for keeping peace in his palace. He commanded shovels and picks to be lowered to the Queen and Princess. The two pages, Screw and Hardhands, went down to help them, in hopes of halving the profits; and there they stayed, digging for gold. Some of the people about the Court said they would find it. Others believed they never could, and the gold was not found when this story was written.

[123]

As for Prince Wisewit, he went home with the rest of the company, leading Snowflower by the hand, and telling them all how he had been turned into a bird by the cunning fairy Fortunetta, who found him off his guard in the forest; how she had shut him up under the cushion of that curious chair, and given it to old Dame Frostyface; and how all his comfort had been in little Snowflower, to whom he told so many stories.

King Winwealth was so rejoiced to find his brother again, that he commanded another feast to be held for many days. All that time the gates of the palace stood open; all-comers were welcome, all complaints heard. The houses and lands which Queen Wantall had taken away, were given back to their rightful owners. Everybody got what they wanted most. There were no more noises of strife without, nor discontents within the palace; and on the last day of the feast who should arrive but Dame Frostyface, in her grey hood and cloak.

[124]

Snowflower was right glad to see her grandmother—so were the King and Prince, for they had known the Dame in their youth. They kept the feast for a few days more; and when it was ended everything was right in the kingdom. King Winwealth and Prince Wisewit reigned once more together; and because Snowflower was the best girl in all that country, they chose her to be their heiress, instead of Princess Greedalind.

From that day forward she wore white velvet and satin; she had seven pages, and lived in the grandest part of the palace. Dame Frostyface, too, was made a great lady. They put a new velvet cushion on her chair, and she sat in a gown of grey cloth, edged with gold, spinning on an ivory wheel in a fine painted parlour.

Prince Wisewit built a great summer-house covered with vines and roses, on the spot where her old cottage stood. He also made a highway through the forest, that all good people might come and go there at their leisure; and the cunning fairy Fortunetta, finding that her reign was over in those parts, set off on a journey round the world, and did not return in the time of this story.

[125]

Good boys and girls, who may chance to read it, that time is long ago. Great wars, work, and learning have passed over the world since then, and changed all its fashions. Kings make no seven-day feasts for all-comers now. Queens and princesses, however greedy, do not mine for gold. Chairs tell no tales. Wells work no wonders; and there are no such doings on hills and forests, for the fairies dance no more. Some say it was the hum of schools—some think it was the din of factories that frightened them. But nobody has seen them for many a year, except, it is said, one Hans Christian Andersen, in Denmark, whose tales of the fairies are so good that they must have been heard from themselves.

It is certain that no living man knows the later history of King Winwealth's country, nor what became of the people who lived and visited at his palace. Yet there are people who believe that the King still falls asleep on his throne and into low spirits in the evening; that Queen Wantall and Princess Greedalind have found the gold, and begun to buy; that Dame Frostyface yet spins—they cannot tell where; that Snowflower may still be seen at the new year's time in her dress of white velvet, looking out for the early spring; that Prince Wisewit has somehow fallen under a stronger spell and a thicker cushion, that he still tells stories to Snowflower and her friends, and when cushion and spell are broken by another stroke of Sturdy's hatchet—which they expect will happen some time—the Prince will make all things right again, and bring back the fairy times to the world.

[126]

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Transcriber's Notes:

The original did not have a Table of Contents. One was created for this edition.

This text often closed a quote before adding the final punctuation. An example may be found on page 7:

Then Snowflower remembered her grandmother's words, and, laying her head gently down, she said: "Chair of my grandmother, tell me a story".

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