The Cuckoo Clock

by Mary Louisa Molesworth

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THE CUCKOO CLOCK

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A LITTLE GIRL DANCED INTO THE ROOM a little girl danced into the room

THE CUCKOO CLOCK

BY

MRS. MOLESWORTH

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS IN COLOR BY

MARIA L. KIRK

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To

MARY JOSEPHINE

and to the dear memory of her brother

THOMAS GRINDAL

both friendly little critics of my children's stories

Edinburgh, 1877

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THE CUCKOO CLOCK

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A Little Girl Danced Into the Room "Have You Got a Cuckoo in a Cage?" She Could Not Help Very Softly Clapping Her Hands "Are You Comfortable?" Inquired the Cuckoo He Flapped His Wings, And Instantly a Palanquin Appeared at the Foot of the Steps She Peered in with Great Satisfaction "But I May See You Again," Said Phil It Was Rowed by a Little Figure

"Now, these little folks, like most girls and boys, Loved fairy tales even better than toys. * * * * * And they knew that in flowers on the spray Tiny spirits are hidden away, That frisk at night on the forest green, When earth is bathed in dewy sheen—And shining halls of pearl and gem, The Regions of Fancy—were open to them."

"... just as any little child has been guided towards the true paradise by its fairy dreams of bliss."—E. A. Abbott.

I THE OLD HOUSE

"Somewhat back from the village street Stands the old-fashioned country seat."

O

nce upon a time in an old town, in an old street, there stood a very old house. Such a house as you could hardly find nowadays, however you searched, for it belonged to a gone-by time—a time now quite passed away.

It stood in a street, but yet it was not like a town house, for though the front opened right on to the pavement, the back windows looked out upon a beautiful, quaintly terraced garden, with old trees growing so thick and close together that in summer it was like living on the edge of a forest to be near them; and even in winter the web of their interlaced branches hid all clear view behind.

There was a colony of rooks in this old garden. Year after year they held their parliaments and cawed and chattered and fussed; year after year they built their nests and hatched their eggs; year after year, I suppose, the old ones gradually died off and the young ones took their place, though, but for knowing this must be so, no one would have suspected it, for to all appearance the rooks were always the same—ever and always the same.

Time indeed seemed to stand still in and all about the old house, as if it and the people who inhabited it had got so old that they could not get any older, and had

outlived the possibility of change.

But one day at last there did come a change. Late in the dusk of an autumn afternoon a carriage drove up to the door of the old house, came rattling over the stones with a sudden noisy clatter that sounded quite impertinent, startling the rooks just as they were composing themselves to rest, and setting them all wondering what could be the matter.

A little girl was the matter! A little girl in a grey merino frock, and grey beaver bonnet, grey tippet and grey gloves—all grey together, even to her eyes, all except her round rosy face and bright brown hair. Her name even was rather grey, for it was Griselda.

A gentleman lifted her out of the carriage and disappeared with her into the house, and later that same evening the gentleman came out of the house and got into the carriage which had come back for him again, and drove away. That was all that the rooks saw of the change that had come to the old house. Shall we go inside to see more?

Up the shallow, wide, old-fashioned staircase, past the wainscoted walls, dark and shining like a mirror, down a long narrow passage with many doors, which but for their gleaming brass handles one would not have known were there, the oldest of the three old servants led little Griselda, so tired and sleepy that her supper had been left almost untasted, to the room prepared for her. It was a queer room, for everything in the house was queer; but in the dancing light of the fire burning brightly in the tiled grate, it looked cheerful enough.

"I am glad there's a fire," said the child. "Will it keep alight till the morning, do you think?"

The old servant shook her head.

"'Twould not be safe to leave it so that it would burn till morning," she said. "When you are in bed and asleep, little missie, you won't want the fire. Bed's the warmest

place."

"It isn't for that I want it," said Griselda; "it's for the light I like it. This house all looks so dark to me, and yet there seem to be lights hidden in the walls too, they shine so."

The old servant smiled.

"It will all seem strange to you, no doubt," she said; "but you'll get to like it, missie. 'Tis a good old house, and those that know best love it well."

"Whom do you mean?" said Griselda. "Do you mean my great-aunts?"

"Ah, yes, and others beside," replied the old woman. "The rooks love it well, and others beside. Did you ever hear tell of the 'good people,' missie, over the sea where you come from?"

"Fairies, do you mean?" cried Griselda, her eyes sparkling. "Of course I've heard of them, but I never saw any. Did you ever?"

"I couldn't say," answered the old woman. "My mind is not young like yours, missie, and there are times when strange memories come back to me as of sights and sounds in a dream. I am too old to see and hear as I once could. We are all old here, missie. 'Twas time something young came to the old house again."

"How strange and queer everything seems!" thought Griselda, as she got into bed. "I don't feel as if I belonged to it a bit. And they are all so old; perhaps they won't like having a child among them?"

The very same thought that had occurred to the rooks! They could not decide as to the fors and againsts at all, so they settled to put it to the vote the next morning, and in the meantime they and Griselda all went to sleep.

I never heard if they slept well that night; after such unusual excitement it was hardly to be expected they would. But Griselda, being a little girl and not a rook, was so tired that two minutes after she had tucked herself up in bed she was quite

sound asleep, and did not wake for several hours.

"I wonder what it will all look like in the morning," was her last waking thought. "If it was summer now, or spring, I shouldn't mind—there would always be something nice to do then."

As sometimes happens, when she woke again, very early in the morning, long before it was light, her thoughts went straight on with the same subject.

"If it was summer now, or spring," she repeated to herself, just as if she had not been asleep at all—like the man who fell into a trance for a hundred years just as he was saying "it is bitt—" and when he woke up again finished the sentence as if nothing had happened—"erly cold." "If only it was spring," thought Griselda.

Just as she had got so far in her thoughts, she gave a great start. What was it she heard? Could her wish have come true? Was this fairyland indeed that she had got to, where one only needs to wish, for it to be? She rubbed her eyes, but it was too dark to see; that was not very fairyland like, but her ears she felt certain had not deceived her: she was quite, quite sure that she had heard the cuckoo!

She listened with all her might, but she did not hear it again. Could it, after all, have been fancy? She grew sleepy at last, and was just dropping off when—yes, there it was again, as clear and distinct as possible—"Cuckoo, cuckoo, cuckoo!" three, four, five times, then perfect silence as before.

"What a funny cuckoo," said Griselda to herself. "I could almost fancy it was in the house. I wonder if my great-aunts have a tame cuckoo in a cage? I don't think I ever heard of such a thing, but this is such a queer house; everything seems different in it—perhaps they have a tame cuckoo. I'll ask them in the morning. It's very nice to hear, whatever it is."

"HAVE YOU GOT A CUCKOO IN A CAGE?" "have you got a cuckoo in a cage?"

And, with a pleasant feeling of companionship, a sense that she was not the only living creature awake in this dark world, Griselda lay listening, contentedly enough,

for the sweet, fresh notes of the cuckoo's friendly greeting. But before it sounded again through the silent house she was once more fast asleep. And this time she slept till daylight had found its way into all but the very darkest nooks and crannies of the ancient dwelling.

She dressed herself carefully, for she had been warned that her aunts loved neatness and precision; she fastened each button of her grey frock, and tied down her hair as smooth as such a brown tangle could be tied down; and, absorbed with these weighty cares, she forgot all about the cuckoo for the time. It was not till she was sitting at breakfast with her aunts that she remembered it, or rather was reminded of it, by some little remark that was made about the friendly robins on the terrace walk outside.

"Oh, aunt," she exclaimed, stopping short half-way the journey to her mouth of a spoonful of bread and milk, "have you got a cuckoo in a cage?"

"A cuckoo in a cage," repeated her elder aunt, Miss Grizzel; "what is the child talking about?"

"In a cage!" echoed Miss Tabitha, "a cuckoo in a cage!"

"There is a cuckoo somewhere in the house," said Griselda; "I heard it in the night. It couldn't have been out-of-doors, could it? It would be too cold."

The aunts looked at each other with a little smile. "So like her grandmother," they whispered. Then said Miss Grizzel—

"We have a cuckoo, my dear, though it isn't in a cage, and it isn't exactly the sort of cuckoo you are thinking of. It lives in a clock."

"In a clock," repeated Miss Tabitha, as if to confirm her sister's statement.

"In a clock!" exclaimed Griselda, opening her grey eyes very wide.

It sounded something like the three bears, all speaking one after the other, only Griselda's voice was not like Tiny's; it was the loudest of the three.

"In a clock!" she exclaimed; "but it can't be alive, then?"

"Why not?" said Miss Grizzel.

"I don't know," replied Griselda, looking puzzled.

"I knew a little girl once," pursued Miss Grizzel, "who was quite of opinion the cuckoo was alive, and nothing would have persuaded her it was not. Finish your breakfast, my dear, and then if you like you shall come with me and see the cuckoo for yourself."

"Thank you, Aunt Grizzel," said Griselda, going on with her bread and milk.

"Yes," said Miss Tabitha, "you shall see the cuckoo for yourself."

"Thank you, Aunt Tabitha," said Griselda. It was rather a bother to have always to say "thank you," or "no, thank you," twice, but Griselda thought it was polite to do so, as Aunt Tabitha always repeated everything that Aunt Grizzel said. It wouldn't have mattered so much if Aunt Tabitha had said it at once after Miss Grizzel, but as she generally made a little pause between, it was sometimes rather awkward. But of course it was better to say "thank you" or "no, thank you" twice over than to hurt Aunt Tabitha's feelings.

After breakfast Aunt Grizzel was as good as her word. She took Griselda through several of the rooms in the house, pointing out all the curiosities, and telling all the histories of the rooms and their contents; and Griselda liked to listen, only in every room they came to, she wondered when they would get to the room where lived the cuckoo.

Aunt Tabitha did not come with them, for she was rather rheumatic. On the whole, Griselda was not sorry. It would have taken such a very long time, you see, to have had all the histories twice over, and possibly, if Griselda had got tired, she might have forgotten about the "thank you's" or "no, thank you's" twice over.

The old house looked quite as queer and quaint by daylight as it had seemed the

evening before; almost more so indeed, for the view from the windows added to the sweet, odd "old-fashionedness" of everything.

"We have beautiful roses in summer," observed Miss Grizzel, catching sight of the direction in which the child's eyes were wandering.

"I wish it was summer. I do love summer," said Griselda. "But there is a very rosy scent in the rooms even now, Aunt Grizzel, though it is winter, or nearly winter."

Miss Grizzel looked pleased.

"My pot-pourri," she explained.

They were just then standing in what she called the "great saloon," a handsome old room, furnished with gold-and-white chairs, that must once have been brilliant, and faded yellow damask hangings. A feeling of awe had crept over Griselda as they entered this ancient drawing-room. What grand parties there must have been in it long ago! But as for dancing in it now—dancing, or laughing, or chattering—such a thing was quite impossible to imagine!

Miss Grizzel crossed the room to where stood in one corner a marvellous Chinese cabinet, all black and gold and carving. It was made in the shape of a temple, or a palace—Griselda was not sure which. Any way, it was very delicious and wonderful. At the door stood, one on each side, two solemn mandarins; or, to speak more correctly, perhaps I should say, a mandarin and his wife, for the right-hand figure was evidently intended to be a lady.

Miss Grizzel gently touched their heads. Forthwith, to Griselda's astonishment, they began solemnly to nod.

"Oh, how do you make them do that, Aunt Grizzel?" she exclaimed.

"Never you mind, my dear; it wouldn't do for you to try to make them nod. They wouldn't like it," replied Miss Grizzel mysteriously. "Respect to your elders, my dear, always remember that. The mandarins are many years older than you—older

than I myself, in fact."

Griselda wondered, if this were so, how it was that Miss Grizzel took such liberties with them herself, but she said nothing.

"Here is my last summer's pot-pourri," continued Miss Grizzel, touching a great china jar on a little stand, close beside the cabinet. "You may smell it, my dear."

Nothing loth, Griselda buried her round little nose in the fragrant leaves.

"It's lovely," she said. "May I smell it whenever I like, Aunt Grizzel?"

"We shall see," replied her aunt. "It isn't every little girl, you know, that we could trust to come into the great saloon alone."

"No," said Griselda meekly.

Miss Grizzel led the way to a door opposite to that by which they had entered. She opened it and passed through, Griselda following, into a small ante-room.

"It is on the stroke of ten," said Miss Grizzel, consulting her watch; "now, my dear, you shall make acquaintance with our cuckoo."

The cuckoo "that lived in a clock!" Griselda gazed round her eagerly. Where was the clock? She could see nothing in the least like one, only up on the wall in one corner was what looked like a miniature house, of dark brown carved wood. It was not so very like a house, but it certainly had a roof—a roof with deep projecting eaves; and, looking closer, yes, it was a clock, after all, only the figures, which had once been gilt, had grown dim with age, like everything else, and the hands at a little distance were hardly to be distinguished from the face.

Miss Grizzel stood perfectly still, looking up at the clock; Griselda beside her, in breathless expectation. Presently there came a sort of distant rumbling. Something was going to happen. Suddenly two little doors above the clock face, which Griselda had not known were there, sprang open with a burst and out flew a cuckoo, flapped his wings, and uttered his pretty cry, "Cuckoo! cuckoo! cuckoo!" Miss Grizzel

counted aloud, "Seven, eight, nine, ten." "Yes, he never makes a mistake," she added triumphantly. "All these long years I have never known him wrong. There are no such clocks made nowadays, I can assure you, my dear."

"But is it a clock? Isn't he alive?" exclaimed Griselda. "He looked at me and nodded his head, before he flapped his wings and went in to his house again—he did indeed, aunt," she said earnestly; "just like saying, 'How do you do?' to me."

Again Miss Grizzel smiled, the same odd yet pleased smile that Griselda had seen on her face at breakfast. "Just what Sybilla used to say," she murmured. "Well, my dear," she added aloud, "it is quite right he should say, 'How do you do?' to you. It is the first time he has seen you, though many a year ago he knew your dear grandmother, and your father, too, when he was a little boy. You will find him a good friend, and one that can teach you many lessons."

"What, Aunt Grizzel?" inquired Griselda, looking puzzled.

"Punctuality, for one thing, and faithful discharge of duty," replied Miss Grizzel.

"May I come to see the cuckoo—to watch for him coming out, sometimes?" asked Griselda, who felt as if she could spend all day looking up at the clock, watching for her little friend's appearance.

"You will see him several times a day," said her aunt, "for it is in this little room I intend you to prepare your tasks. It is nice and quiet, and nothing to disturb you, and close to the room where your Aunt Tabitha and I usually sit."

So saying, Miss Grizzel opened a second door in the little ante-room, and, to Griselda's surprise, at the foot of a short flight of stairs through another door, half open, she caught sight of her Aunt Tabitha, knitting quietly by the fire, in the room in which they had breakfasted.

"What a very funny house it is, Aunt Grizzel," she said, as she followed her aunt down the steps. "Every room has so many doors, and you come back to where you were just when you think you are ever so far off. I shall never be able to find my

way about."

"Oh yes, you will, my dear, very soon," said her aunt encouragingly.

"She is very kind," thought Griselda; "but I wish she wouldn't call my lessons tasks. It makes them sound so dreadfully hard. But, any way, I'm glad I'm to do them in the room where that dear cuckoo lives."

II IMPATIENT GRISELDA

"... fairies but seldom appear; If we do wrong we must expect That it will cost us dear!"

I

t was all very well for a few days. Griselda found plenty to amuse herself with while the novelty lasted, enough to prevent her missing very badly the home she had left "over the sea," and the troop of noisy merry brothers who teased and petted her. Of course she missed them, but not "dreadfully." She was neither homesick nor "dull."

It was not quite such smooth sailing when lessons began. She did not dislike lessons; in fact, she had always thought she was rather fond of them. But the having to do them alone was not lively, and her teachers were very strict. The worst of all was the writing and arithmetic master, a funny little old man who wore knee-breeches and took snuff, and called her aunt "Madame," bowing formally whenever he addressed her. He screwed Griselda up into such an unnatural attitude to write her copies, that she really felt as if she would never come straight and loose again; and the arithmetic part of his instructions was even worse. Oh! what sums in addition he gave her! Griselda had never been partial to sums, and her rather easy-going governess at home had not, to tell the truth, been partial to them either. And Mr.—I can't remember the little old gentleman's name. Suppose we call him Mr. Kneebreeches—Mr. Kneebreeches, when he found this out, conscientiously put her back to the very beginning.

It was dreadful, really. He came twice a week, and the days he didn't come were as bad as those he did, for he left her a whole row, I was going to say, but you couldn't call Mr. Kneebreeches' addition sums "rows," they were far too fat and wide across to be so spoken of!—whole slatefuls of these terrible mountains of figures to climb wearily to the top of. And not to climb once up merely. The terrible thing was Mr. Kneebreeches' favourite method of what he called "proving." I can't explain it—it is far beyond my poor powers—but it had something to do with cutting off the top line, after you had added it all up and had actually done the sum, you understand—cutting off the top line and adding the long rows up again without it, and then joining it on again somewhere else.

"I wouldn't mind so much," said poor Griselda, one day, "if it was any good. But you see, Aunt Grizzel, it isn't. For I'm just as likely to do the proving wrong as the sum itself—more likely, for I'm always so tired when I get to the proving—and so all that's proved is that something's wrong, and I'm sure that isn't any good, except to make me cross."

"Hush!" said her aunt gravely. "That is not the way for a little girl to speak. Improve these golden hours of youth, Griselda; they will never return."

"I hope not," muttered Griselda, "if it means doing sums."

Miss Grizzel fortunately was a little deaf; she did not hear this remark. Just then the cuckoo clock struck eleven.

"Good little cuckoo," said Miss Grizzel. "What an example he sets you. His life is spent in the faithful discharge of duty;" and so saying she left the room.

The cuckoo was still telling the hour—eleven took a good while. It seemed to Griselda that the bird repeated her aunt's last words. "Faith—ful, dis—charge, of—your, du—ty," he said, "faith—ful."

"You horrid little creature!" exclaimed Griselda in a passion; "what business have you to mock me?"

She seized a book, the first that came to hand, and flung it at the bird who was just beginning his eleventh cuckoo. He disappeared with a snap, disappeared without flapping his wings, or, as Griselda always fancied he did, giving her a friendly nod, and in an instant all was silent.

Griselda felt a little frightened. What had she done? She looked up at the clock. It seemed just the same as usual, the cuckoo's doors closely shut, no sign of any disturbance. Could it have been her fancy only that he had sprung back more hastily than he would have done but for her throwing the book at him? She began to hope so, and tried to go on with her lessons. But it was no use. Though she really gave her best attention to the long addition sums, and found that by so doing she managed them much better than before, she could not feel happy or at ease. Every few minutes she glanced up at the clock, as if expecting the cuckoo to come out, though she knew quite well there was no chance of his doing so till twelve o'clock, as it was only the hours, not the half hours and quarters, that he told.

"I wish it was twelve o'clock," she said to herself anxiously more than once.

If only the clock had not been so very high up on the wall, she would have been tempted to climb up and open the little doors, and peep in to satisfy herself as to the cuckoo's condition. But there was no possibility of this. The clock was far, very far above her reach, and there was no high piece of furniture standing near, upon which she could have climbed to get to it. There was nothing to be done but to wait for twelve o'clock.

And, after all, she did not wait for twelve o'clock, for just about half-past eleven, Miss Grizzel's voice was heard calling to her to put on her hat and cloak quickly, and come out to walk up and down the terrace with her.

"It is fine just now," said Miss Grizzel, "but there is a prospect of rain before long. You must leave your lessons for the present, and finish them in the afternoon."

"I have finished them," said Griselda, meekly.

"All?" inquired her aunt.

"Yes, all," replied Griselda.

"Ah, well, then, this afternoon, if the rain holds off, we shall drive to Merrybrow Hall, and inquire for the health of your dear godmother, Lady Lavander," said Miss Grizzel.

Poor Griselda! There were few things she disliked more than a drive with her aunts. They went in the old yellow chariot, with all the windows up, and of course Griselda had to sit with her back to the horses, which made her very uncomfortable when she had no air, and had to sit still for so long.

Merrybrow Hall was a large house, quite as old and much grander, but not nearly so wonderful as the home of Griselda's aunts. It was six miles off, and it took a very long time indeed to drive there in the rumbling old chariot, for the old horses were fat and wheezy, and the old coachman fat and wheezy too. Lady Lavander was, of course, old too—very old indeed, and rather grumpy and very deaf. Miss Grizzel and Miss Tabitha had the greatest respect for her; she always called them "My dear," as if they were quite girls, and they listened to all she said as if her words were of gold. For some mysterious reason she had been invited to be Griselda's godmother; but, as she had never shown her any proof of affection beyond giving her a prayer-book, and hoping, whenever she saw her, that she was "a good little miss," Griselda did not feel any particular cause for gratitude to her.

The drive seemed longer and duller than ever this afternoon, but Griselda bore it meekly; and when Lady Lavander, as usual, expressed her hopes about her, the little girl looked down modestly, feeling her cheeks grow scarlet. "I am not a good little girl at all," she felt inclined to call out. "I'm very bad and cruel. I believe I've killed the dear little cuckoo."

What would the three old ladies have thought if she had called it out? As it was, Lady Lavander patted her approvingly, said she loved to see young people modest

and humble-minded, and gave her a slice of very highly-spiced, rather musty gingerbread, which Griselda couldn't bear.

All the way home Griselda felt in a fever of impatience to rush up to the ante-room and see if the cuckoo was all right again. It was late and dark when the chariot at last stopped at the door of the old house. Miss Grizzel got out slowly, and still more slowly Miss Tabitha followed her. Griselda was obliged to restrain herself and move demurely.

"It is past your supper-time, my dear," said Miss Grizzel. "Go up at once to your room, and Dorcas shall bring some supper to you. Late hours are bad for young people."

Griselda obediently wished her aunts good-night, and went quietly upstairs. But once out of sight, at the first landing, she changed her pace. She turned to the left instead of to the right, which led to her own room, and flew rather than ran along the dimly-lighted passage, at the end of which a door led into the great saloon. She opened the door. All was quite dark. It was impossible to fly or run across the great saloon! Even in daylight this would have been a difficult matter. Griselda felt her way as best she could, past the Chinese cabinet and the pot-pourri jar till she got to the ante-room door. It was open, and now, knowing her way better, she hurried in. But what was the use? All was silent, save the tick-tick of the cuckoo clock in the corner. Oh, if only the cuckoo would come out and call the hour as usual, what a weight would be lifted off Griselda's heart!

She had no idea what o'clock it was. It might be close to the hour, or it might be just past it. She stood listening for a few minutes, then hearing Miss Grizzel's voice in the distance, she felt that she dared not stay any longer, and turned to feel her way out of the room again. Just as she got to the door it seemed to her that something softly brushed her cheek, and a very, very faint "cuckoo" sounded, as it were, in the air close to her.

Startled, but not frightened, Griselda stood perfectly still.

"Cuckoo," she said, softly. But there was no answer.

Again the tones of Miss Grizzel's voice coming upstairs reached her ear.

"I must go," said Griselda; and finding her way across the saloon without, by great good luck, tumbling against any of the many breakable treasures with which it was filled, she flew down the long passage again, reaching her own room just before Dorcas appeared with her supper.

Griselda slept badly that night. She was constantly dreaming of the cuckoo, fancying she heard his voice, and then waking with a start to find it was only fancy. She looked pale and heavy-eyed when she came down to breakfast the next morning; and her Aunt Tabitha, who was alone in the room when she entered, began immediately asking her what was the matter.

"I am sure you are going to be ill, child," she said, nervously. "Sister Grizzel must give you some medicine. I wonder what would be the best. Tansy tea is an excellent thing when one has taken cold, or——"

But the rest of Miss Tabitha's sentence was never heard, for at this moment Miss Grizzel came hurriedly into the room—her cap awry, her shawl disarranged, her face very pale. I hardly think any one had ever seen her so discomposed before.

"Sister Tabitha!" she exclaimed, "what can be going to happen? The cuckoo clock has stopped."

"The cuckoo clock has stopped!" repeated Miss Tabitha, holding up her hands; "impossible!"

"But it has, or rather I should say—dear me, I am so upset I cannot explain myself—the cuckoo has stopped. The clock is going on, but the cuckoo has not told the hours, and Dorcas is of opinion that he left off doing so yesterday. What can be going to happen? What shall we do?"

"What can we do?" said Miss Tabitha. "Should we send for the watch-maker?"

Miss Grizzel shook her head.

"'Twould be worse than useless. Were we to search the world over, we could find no one to put it right. Fifty years and more, Tabitha, fifty years and more, it has never missed an hour! We are getting old, Tabitha, our day is nearly over; perhaps 'tis to remind us of this."

Miss Tabitha did not reply. She was weeping silently. The old ladies seemed to have forgotten the presence of their niece, but Griselda could not bear to see their distress. She finished her breakfast as quickly as she could, and left the room.

On her way upstairs she met Dorcas.

"Have you heard what has happened, little missie?" said the old servant.

"Yes," replied Griselda.

"My ladies are in great trouble," continued Dorcas, who seemed inclined to be more communicative than usual, "and no wonder. For fifty years that clock has never gone wrong."

"Can't it be put right?" asked the child.

Dorcas shook her head.

"No good would come of interfering," she said. "What must be, must be. The luck of the house hangs on that clock. Its maker spent a good part of his life over it, and his last words were that it would bring good luck to the house that owned it, but that trouble would follow its silence. It's my belief," she added solemnly, "that it's a fairy clock, neither more nor less, for good luck it has brought there's no denying. There are no cows like ours, missie—their milk is a proverb hereabouts; there are no hens like ours for laying all the year round; there are no roses like ours. And there's always a friendly feeling in this house, and always has been. 'Tis not a house for wrangling and jangling, and sharp words. The 'good people' can't stand that. Nothing

drives them away like ill-temper or anger."

Griselda's conscience gave her a sharp prick. Could it be her doing that trouble was coming upon the old house? What a punishment for a moment's fit of ill-temper.

"I wish you wouldn't talk that way, Dorcas," she said; "it makes me so unhappy."

"What a feeling heart the child has!" said the old servant as she went on her way downstairs. "It's true—she is very like Miss Sybilla."

That day was a very weary and sad one for Griselda. She was oppressed by a feeling she did not understand. She knew she had done wrong, but she had sorely repented it, and "I do think the cuckoo might have come back again," she said to herself, "if he is a fairy; and if he isn't, it can't be true what Dorcas says."

Her aunts made no allusion to the subject in her presence, and almost seemed to have forgotten that she had known of their distress. They were more grave and silent than usual, but otherwise things went on in their ordinary way. Griselda spent the morning "at her tasks," in the ante-room, but was thankful to get away from the tick-tick of the clock in the corner and out into the garden.

But there, alas! it was just as bad. The rooks seemed to know that something was the matter; they set to work making such a chatter immediately Griselda appeared that she felt inclined to run back into the house again.

"I am sure they are talking about me," she said to herself. "Perhaps they are fairies too. I am beginning to think I don't like fairies."

She was glad when bed-time came. It was a sort of reproach to her to see her aunts so pale and troubled; and though she tried to persuade herself that she thought them very silly, she could not throw off the uncomfortable feeling.

She was so tired when she went to bed—tired in the disagreeable way that comes from a listless, uneasy day—that she fell asleep at once and slept heavily. When she woke, which she did suddenly, and with a start, it was still perfectly dark, like the

first morning that she had wakened in the old house. It seemed to her that she had not wakened of herself—something had roused her. Yes! there it was again, a very, very soft distant "cuckoo." Was it distant? She could not tell. Almost she could have fancied it was close to her.

"If it's that cuckoo come back again, I'll catch him!" exclaimed Griselda.

She darted out of bed, felt her way to the door, which was closed, and opening it let in a rush of moonlight from the unshuttered passage window. In another moment her little bare feet were pattering along the passage at full speed, in the direction of the great saloon.

For Griselda's childhood among the troop of noisy brothers had taught her one lesson—she was afraid of nothing. Or rather perhaps I should say she had never learnt that there was anything to be afraid of! And is there?

III OBEYING ORDERS

"Little girl, thou must thy part fulfil, If we're to take kindly to ours: Then pull up the weeds with a will, And fairies will cherish the flowers."

T

here was moonlight, though not so much, in the saloon and the ante-room, too; for though the windows, like those in Griselda's bed-room, had the shutters closed, there was a round part at the top, high up, which the shutters did not reach to, and in crept, through these clear uncovered panes, quite as many moonbeams, you may be sure, as could find their way.

Griselda, eager though she was, could not help standing still a moment to admire the effect.

"It looks prettier with the light coming in at those holes at the top than even if the shutters were open," she said to herself. "How goldy-silvery the cabinet looks; and,

yes, I do declare, the mandarins are nodding! I wonder if it is out of politeness to me, or does Aunt Grizzel come in last thing at night and touch them to make them keep nodding till morning? I suppose they're a sort of policemen to the palace; and I dare say there are all sorts of beautiful things inside. How I should like to see all through it!"

But at this moment the faint tick-tick of the cuckoo clock in the next room, reaching her ear, reminded her of the object of this midnight expedition of hers. She hurried into the ante-room.

It looked darker than the great saloon, for it had but one window. But through the uncovered space at the top of this window there penetrated some brilliant moonbeams, one of which lighted up brightly the face of the clock with its queer over-hanging eaves.

Griselda approached it and stood below, looking up.

"Cuckoo," she said softly—very softly.

But there was no reply.

"Cuckoo," she repeated rather more loudly. "Why won't you speak to me? I know you are there, and you're not asleep, for I heard your voice in my own room. Why won't you come out, cuckoo?"

"Tick-tick," said the clock, but there was no other reply.

Griselda felt ready to cry.

"Cuckoo," she said reproachfully, "I didn't think you were so hard-hearted. I have been so unhappy about you, and I was so pleased to hear your voice again, for I thought I had killed you, or hurt you very badly; and I didn't mean to hurt you, cuckoo. I was sorry the moment I had done it, dreadfully sorry. Dear cuckoo, won't you forgive me?"

SHE COULD NOT HELP VERY SOFTLY CLAPPING HER HANDS she could

not help very softly clapping her hands

There was a little sound at last—a faint coming sound, and by the moonlight Griselda saw the doors open, and out flew the cuckoo. He stood still for a moment, looked round him as it were, then gently flapped his wings, and uttered his usual note—"Cuckoo."

Griselda stood in breathless expectation, but in her delight she could not help very softly clapping her hands.

The cuckoo cleared his throat. You never heard such a funny little noise as he made; and then, in a very clear, distinct, but yet "cuckoo-y" voice, he spoke.

"Griselda," he said, "are you truly sorry?"

"I told you I was," she replied. "But I didn't feel so very naughty, cuckoo. I didn't, really. I was only vexed for one minute, and when I threw the book I seemed to be a very little in fun, too. And it made me so unhappy when you went away, and my poor aunts have been dreadfully unhappy too. If you hadn't come back I should have told them tomorrow what I had done. I would have told them before, but I was afraid it would have made them more unhappy. I thought I had hurt you dreadfully."

"So you did," said the cuckoo.

"But you look quite well," said Griselda.

"It was my feelings," replied the cuckoo; "and I couldn't help going away. I have to obey orders like other people."

Griselda stared. "How do you mean?" she asked.

"Never mind. You can't understand at present," said the cuckoo. "You can understand about obeying your orders, and you see, when you don't, things go wrong."

"Yes," said Griselda humbly, "they certainly do. But, cuckoo," she continued, "I never used to get into tempers at home—hardly never, at least; and I liked my

lessons then, and I never was scolded about them."

"What's wrong here, then?" said the cuckoo. "It isn't often that things go wrong in this house."

"That's what Dorcas says," said Griselda. "It must be with my being a child—my aunts and the house and everything have got out of children's ways,"

"About time they did," remarked the cuckoo drily.

"And so," continued Griselda, "it is really very dull. I have lots of lessons, but it isn't so much that I mind. It is that I've no one to play with."

"There's something in that," said the cuckoo. He flapped his wings and was silent for a minute or two. "I'll consider about it," he observed at last.

"Thank you," said Griselda, not exactly knowing what else to say.

"And in the meantime," continued the cuckoo, "you'd better obey present orders and go back to bed."

"Shall I say good-night to you, then?" asked Griselda somewhat timidly.

"You're quite welcome to do so," replied the cuckoo. "Why shouldn't you?"

"You see I wasn't sure if you would like it," returned Griselda, "for of course you're not like a person, and—and—I've been told all sorts of queer things about what fairies like and don't like."

"Who said I was a fairy?" inquired the cuckoo.

"Dorcas did, and, of course, my own common sense did too," replied Griselda. "You must be a fairy—you couldn't be anything else."

"I might be a fairyfied cuckoo," suggested the bird.

Griselda looked puzzled.

"I don't understand," she said, "and I don't think it could make much difference. But whatever you are, I wish you would tell me one thing."

"What?" said the cuckoo.

"I want to know, now that you've forgiven me for throwing the book at you, have you come back for good?"

"Certainly not for evil," replied the cuckoo.

Griselda gave a little wriggle. "Cuckoo, you're laughing at me," she said. "I mean, have you come back to stay and cuckoo as usual and make my aunts happy again?"

"You'll see in the morning," said the cuckoo. "Now go off to bed."

"Good night," said Griselda, "and thank you, and please don't forget to let me know when you've considered."

"Cuckoo, cuckoo," was her little friend's reply. Griselda thought it was meant for good night, but the fact of the matter was that at that exact second of time it was two o'clock in the morning.

She made her way back to bed. She had been standing some time talking to the cuckoo, but, though it was now well on in November, she did not feel the least cold, nor sleepy! She felt as happy and light-hearted as possible, and she wished it was morning, that she might get up. Yet the moment she laid her little brown curly head on the pillow, she fell asleep; and it seemed to her that just as she dropped off a soft feathery wing brushed her cheek gently and a tiny "Cuckoo" sounded in her ear.

When she woke it was bright morning, really bright morning, for the wintry sun was already sending some clear yellow rays out into the pale grey-blue sky.

"It must be late," thought Griselda, when she had opened the shutters and seen how light it was. "I must have slept a long time. I feel so beautifully unsleepy now. I must dress quickly—how nice it will be to see my aunts look happy again! I don't even care if they scold me for being late."

But, after all, it was not so much later than usual; it was only a much brighter morning than they had had for some time. Griselda did dress herself very quickly,

however. As she went downstairs two or three of the clocks in the house, for there were several, were striking eight. These clocks must have been a little before the right time, for it was not till they had again relapsed into silence that there rang out from the ante-room the clear sweet tones, eight times repeated, of "Cuckoo."

Miss Grizzel and Miss Tabitha were already at the breakfast-table, but they received their little niece most graciously. Nothing was said about the clock, however, till about half-way through the meal, when Griselda, full of eagerness to know if her aunts were aware of the cuckoo's return, could restrain herself no longer.

"Aunt Grizzel," she said, "isn't the cuckoo all right again?"

"Yes, my dear. I am delighted to say it is," replied Miss Grizzel.

"Did you get it put right, Aunt Grizzel?" inquired Griselda, slyly.

"Little girls should not ask so many questions," replied Miss Grizzel, mysteriously. "It is all right again, and that is enough. During fifty years that cuckoo has never, till yesterday, missed an hour. If you, in your sphere, my dear, do as well during fifty years, you won't have done badly."

"No, indeed, you won't have done badly," repeated Miss Tabitha.

But though the two old ladies thus tried to improve the occasion by a little lecturing, Griselda could see that at the bottom of their hearts they were both so happy that, even if she had been very naughty indeed, they could hardly have made up their minds to scold her.

She was not at all inclined to be naughty this day. She had something to think about and look forward to, which made her quite a different little girl, and made her take heart in doing her lessons as well as she possibly could.

"I wonder when the cuckoo will have considered enough about my having no one to play with?" she said to herself, as she was walking up and down the terrace at the back of the house.

"Caw, caw!" screamed a rook just over her head, as if in answer to her thought.

Griselda looked up at him.

"Your voice isn't half so pretty as the cuckoo's, Mr. Rook," she said. "All the same, I dare say I should make friends with you, if I understood what you meant. How funny it would be to know all the languages of the birds and the beasts, like the prince in the fairy tale! I wonder if I should wish for that, if a fairy gave me a wish? No, I don't think I would. I'd far rather have the fairy carpet that would take you anywhere you liked in a minute. I'd go to China to see if all the people there look like Aunt Grizzel's mandarins; and I'd first of all, of course, go to fairyland."

"You must come in now, little missie," said Dorcas's voice. "Miss Grizzel says you have had play enough, and there's a nice fire in the ante-room for you to do your lessons by."

"Play!" repeated Griselda indignantly, as she turned to follow the old servant. "Do you call walking up and down the terrace 'play,' Dorcas? I mustn't loiter even to pick a flower, if there were any, for fear of catching cold, and I mustn't run for fear of overheating myself. I declare, Dorcas, if I don't have some play soon, or something to amuse me, I think I'll run away."

"Nay, nay, missie, don't talk like that. You'd never do anything so naughty, and you so like Miss Sybilla, who was so good."

"Dorcas, I'm tired of being told I'm like Miss Sybilla," said Griselda, impatiently. "She was my grandmother; no one would like to be told they were like their grandmother. It makes me feel as if my face must be all screwy up and wrinkly, and as if I should have spectacles on and a wig."

"That is not like what Miss Sybilla was when I first saw her," said Dorcas. "She was younger than you, missie, and as pretty as a fairy."

"Was she?" exclaimed Griselda, stopping short.

"Yes, indeed she was. She might have been a fairy, so sweet she was and gentle—and yet so merry. Every creature loved her; even the animals about seemed to know her, as if she was one of themselves. She brought good luck to the house, and it was a sad day when she left it."

"I thought you said it was the cuckoo that brought good luck?" said Griselda.

"Well, so it was. The cuckoo and Miss Sybilla came here the same day. It was left to her by her mother's father, with whom she had lived since she was a baby, and when he died she came here to her sisters. She wasn't own sister to my ladies, you see, missie. Her mother had come from Germany, and it was in some strange place there, where her grandfather lived, that the cuckoo clock was made. They make wonderful clocks there, I've been told, but none more wonderful than our cuckoo, I'm sure."

"No, I'm sure not," said Griselda, softly. "Why didn't Miss Sybilla take it with her when she was married and went away?"

"She knew her sisters were so fond of it. It was like a memory of her left behind for them. It was like a part of her. And do you know, missie, the night she died—she died soon after your father was born, a year after she was married—for a whole hour, from twelve to one, that cuckoo went on cuckooing in a soft, sad way, like some living creature in trouble. Of course, we did not know anything was wrong with her, and folks said something had caught some of the springs of the works; but I didn't think so, and never shall. And——"

But here Dorcas's reminiscences were abruptly brought to a close by Miss Grizzel's appearance at the other end of the terrace.

"Griselda, what are you loitering so for? Dorcas, you should have hastened, not delayed Miss Griselda."

So Griselda was hurried off to her lessons, and Dorcas to her kitchen. But Griselda did not much mind. She had plenty to think of and wonder about, and she liked to do her lessons in the ante-room, with the tick-tick of the clock in her ears, and the

feeling that perhaps the cuckoo was watching her through some invisible peep-hole in his closed doors.

"And if he sees," thought Griselda, "if he sees how hard I am trying to do my lessons well, it will perhaps make him be quick about 'considering.'"

So she did try very hard. And she didn't speak to the cuckoo when he came out to say it was four o'clock. She was busy, and he was busy. She felt it was better to wait till he gave her some sign of being ready to talk to her again.

For fairies, you know, children, however charming, are sometimes rather queer to have to do with. They don't like to be interfered with, or treated except with very great respect, and they have their own ideas about what is proper and what isn't, I can assure you.

I suppose it was with working so hard at her lessons—most people say it was with having been up the night before, running about the house in the moonlight; but as she had never felt so "fresh" in her life as when she got up that morning, it could hardly have been that—that Griselda felt so tired and sleepy that evening, she could hardly keep her eyes open. She begged to go to bed quite half an hour earlier than usual, which made Miss Tabitha afraid again that she was going to be ill. But as there is nothing better for children than to go to bed early, even if they are going to be ill, Miss Grizzel told her to say good-night, and to ask Dorcas to give her a wine-glassful of elderberry wine, nice and hot, after she was in bed.

Griselda had no objection to the elderberry wine, though she felt she was having it on false pretences. She certainly did not need it to send her to sleep, for almost before her head touched the pillow she was as sound as a top. She had slept a good long while, when again she wakened suddenly—just as she had done the night before, and again with the feeling that something had wakened her. And the queer thing was that the moment she was awake she felt so very awake—she had no inclination to stretch and yawn and hope it wasn't quite time to get up, and think

how nice and warm bed was, and how cold it was outside! She sat straight up, and peered out into the darkness, feeling quite ready for an adventure.

"Is it you, cuckoo?" she said softly.

There was no answer, but listening intently, the child fancied she heard a faint rustling or fluttering in the corner of the room by the door. She got up and, feeling her way, opened it, and the instant she had done so she heard, a few steps only in front of her it seemed, the familiar notes, very, very soft and whispered, "Cuckoo, cuckoo."

It went on and on, down the passage, Griselda trotting after. There was no moon to-night, heavy clouds had quite hidden it, and outside the rain was falling heavily. Griselda could hear it on the window-panes, through the closed shutters and all. But dark as it was, she made her way along without any difficulty, down the passage, across the great saloon, in through the ante-room door, guided only by the little voice now and then to be heard in front of her. She came to a standstill right before the clock, and stood there for a minute or two patiently waiting.

She had not very long to wait. There came the usual murmuring sound, then the doors above the clock face opened—she heard them open, it was far too dark to see—and in his ordinary voice, clear and distinct (it was just two o'clock, so the cuckoo was killing two birds with one stone, telling the hour and greeting Griselda at once), the bird sang out, "Cuckoo, cuckoo."

"Good evening, cuckoo," said Griselda, when he had finished.

"Good morning, you mean," said the cuckoo.

"Good morning, then, cuckoo," said Griselda. "Have you considered about me, cuckoo?"

The cuckoo cleared his throat.

"Have you learnt to obey orders yet, Griselda?" he inquired.

"I'm trying," replied Griselda. "But you see, cuckoo, I've not had very long to learn in—it was only last night you told me, you know."

The cuckoo sighed.

"You've a great deal to learn, Griselda."

"I dare say I have," she said. "But I can tell you one thing, cuckoo—whatever lessons I have, I couldn't ever have any worse than those addition sums of Mr. Kneebreeches'. I have made up my mind about that, for to-day, do you know, cuckoo——"

"Yesterday," corrected the cuckoo. "Always be exact in your statements, Griselda."

"Well, yesterday, then," said Griselda, rather tartly; "though when you know quite well what I mean, I don't see that you need be so very particular. Well, as I was saying, I tried and tried, but still they were fearful. They were, indeed."

"You've a great deal to learn, Griselda," repeated the cuckoo.

"I wish you wouldn't say that so often," said Griselda. "I thought you were going to play with me."

"There's something in that," said the cuckoo, "there's something in that. I should like to talk about it. But we could talk more comfortably if you would come up here and sit beside me."

Griselda thought her friend must be going out of his mind.

"Sit beside you up there!" she exclaimed. "Cuckoo, how could I? I'm far, far too big."

"Big!" returned the cuckoo. "What do you mean by big? It's all a matter of fancy. Don't you know that if the world and everything in it, counting yourself of course, was all made little enough to go into a walnut, you'd never find out the difference."

"Wouldn't I?" said Griselda, feeling rather muddled; "but, not counting myself, cuckoo, I would then, wouldn't I?"

"Nonsense," said the cuckoo hastily; "you've a great deal to learn, and one thing is, not to argue. Nobody should argue; it's a shocking bad habit, and ruins the digestion. Come up here and sit beside me comfortably. Catch hold of the chain; you'll find you can manage if you try."

"But it'll stop the clock," said Griselda. "Aunt Grizzel said I was never to touch the weights or the chains."

"Stuff," said the cuckoo; "it won't stop the clock. Catch hold of the chains and swing yourself up. There now—I told you you could manage it."

IV THE COUNTRY OF THE NODDING MANDARINS

"We're all nodding, nid-nid-nodding."

H

ow she managed it she never knew; but, somehow or other, it was managed. She seemed to slide up the chain just as easily as in a general way she would have slidden down, only without any disagreeable anticipation of a bump at the end of the journey. And when she got to the top how wonderfully different it looked from anything she could have expected! The doors stood open, and Griselda found them quite big enough, or herself quite small enough—which it was she couldn't tell, and as it was all a matter of fancy she decided not to trouble to inquire—to pass through quite comfortably.

And inside there was the most charming little snuggery imaginable. It was something like a saloon railway carriage—it seemed to be all lined and carpeted and everything, with rich mossy red velvet; there was a little round table in the middle and two arm-chairs, on one of which sat the cuckoo—"quite like other people," thought Griselda to herself—while the other, as he pointed out to Griselda by a little nod, was evidently intended for her.

"Thank you," said she, sitting down on the chair as she spoke.

"Are you comfortable?" inquired the cuckoo.

"Quite," replied Griselda, looking about her with great satisfaction. "Are all cuckoo clocks like this when you get up inside them?" she inquired. "I can't think how there's room for this dear little place between the clock and the wall. Is it a hole cut out of the wall on purpose, cuckoo?"

"ARE YOU COMFORTABLE?" INQUIRED THE CUCKOO "are you comfortable?" inquired the cuckoo

"Hush!" said the cuckoo, "we've got other things to talk about. First, shall I lend you one of my mantles? You may feel cold."

"I don't just now," replied Griselda; "but perhaps I might."

She looked at her little bare feet as she spoke, and wondered why they weren't cold, for it was very chilblainy weather.

The cuckoo stood up, and with one of his claws reached from a corner where it was hanging a cloak which Griselda had not before noticed. For it was hanging wrong side out, and the lining was red velvet, very like what the sides of the little room were covered with, so it was no wonder she had not noticed it.

Had it been hanging the right side out she must have done so; this side was so very wonderful!

It was all feathers—feathers of every shade and colour, but beautifully worked in, somehow, so as to lie quite smoothly and evenly, one colour melting away into another like those in a prism, so that you could hardly tell where one began and another ended.

"What a lovely cloak!" said Griselda, wrapping it round her and feeling even more comfortable than before, as she watched the rays of the little lamp in the roof—I think I was forgetting to tell you that the cuckoo's boudoir was lighted by a dear

little lamp set into the red velvet roof like a pearl in a ring—playing softly on the brilliant colours of the feather mantle.

"It's better than lovely," said the cuckoo, "as you shall see. Now, Griselda," he continued, in the tone of one coming to business—"now, Griselda, let us talk."

"We have been talking," said Griselda, "ever so long. I am very comfortable. When you say 'let us talk' like that, it makes me forget all I wanted to say. Just let me sit still and say whatever comes into my head."

"That won't do," said the cuckoo; "we must have a plan of action."

"A what?" said Griselda.

"You see you have a great deal to learn," said the cuckoo triumphantly. "You don't understand what I say."

"But I didn't come up here to learn," said Griselda; "I can do that down there;" and she nodded her head in the direction of the ante-room table. "I want to play."

"Just so," said the cuckoo; "that's what I want to talk about. What do you call 'play'—blindman's-buff and that sort of thing?"

"No," said Griselda, considering. "I'm getting rather too big for that kind of play. Besides, cuckoo, you and I alone couldn't have much fun at blindman's-buff; there'd be only me to catch you or you to catch me."

"Oh, we could easily get more," said the cuckoo. "The mandarins would be pleased to join."

"The mandarins!" repeated Griselda. "Why, cuckoo, they're not alive! How could they play?"

The cuckoo looked at her gravely for a minute, then shook his head.

"You have a great deal to learn," he said solemnly. "Don't you know that everything's alive?"

"No," said Griselda, "I don't; and I don't know what you mean, and I don't think I

want to know what you mean. I want to talk about playing."

"Well," said the cuckoo, "talk."

"What I call playing," pursued Griselda, "is—I have thought about it now, you see—is being amused. If you will amuse me, cuckoo, I will count that you are playing with me."

"How shall I amuse you?" inquired he.

"Oh, that's for you to find out!" exclaimed Griselda. "You might tell me fairy stories, you know: if you're a fairy you should know lots; or—oh yes, of course that would be far nicer—if you are a fairy you might take me with you to fairyland."

Again the cuckoo shook his head.

"That," said he, "I cannot do."

"Why not?" said Griselda. "Lots of children have been there."

"I doubt it," said the cuckoo. "Some may have been, but not lots. And some may have thought they had been there who hadn't really been there at all. And as to those who have been there, you may be sure of one thing—they were not taken, they found their own way. No one ever was taken to fairyland—to the real fairyland. They may have been taken to the neighbouring countries, but not to fairyland itself."

"And how is one ever to find one's own way there?" asked Griselda.

"That I cannot tell you either," replied the cuckoo. "There are many roads there; you may find yours some day. And if ever you do find it, be sure you keep what you see of it well swept and clean, and then you may see further after a while. Ah, yes, there are many roads and many doors into fairyland!"

"Doors!" cried Griselda. "Are there any doors into fairyland in this house?"

"Several," said the cuckoo; "but don't waste your time looking for them at present. It would be no use."

"Then how will you amuse me?" inquired Griselda, in a rather disappointed tone.

"Don't you care to go anywhere except to fairyland?" said the cuckoo.

"Oh yes, there are lots of places I wouldn't mind seeing. Not geography sort of places—it would be just like lessons to go to India and Africa and all those places—but queer places, like the mines where the goblins make diamonds and precious stones, and the caves down under the sea where the mermaids live. And—oh, I've just thought—now I'm so nice and little, I would like to go all over the mandarins' palace in the great saloon."

"That can be easily managed," said the cuckoo; "but—excuse me for an instant," he exclaimed suddenly. He gave a spring forward and disappeared. Then Griselda heard his voice outside the doors, "Cuckoo, cuckoo, cuckoo." It was three o'clock.

The doors opened again to let him through, and he re-settled himself on his chair. "As I was saying," he went on, "nothing could be easier. But that palace, as you call it, has an entrance on the other side, as well as the one you know."

"Another door, do you mean?" said Griselda. "How funny! Does it go through the wall? And where does it lead to?"

"It leads," replied the cuckoo, "it leads to the country of the Nodding Mandarins."

"What fun!" exclaimed Griselda, clapping her hands. "Cuckoo, do let us go there. How can we get down? You can fly, but must I slide down the chain again?"

"Oh dear, no," said the cuckoo, "by no means. You have only to stretch out your feather mantle, flap it as if it was wings— so"—he flapped his own wings encouragingly—"wish, and there you'll be."

"Where?" said Griselda bewilderedly.

"Wherever you wish to be, of course," said the cuckoo. "Are you ready? Here goes."

"Wait—wait a moment," cried Griselda. "Where am I to wish to be?"

"Bless the child!" exclaimed the cuckoo. "Where do you wish to be? You said you wanted to visit the country of the Nodding Mandarins."

"Yes; but am I to wish first to be in the palace in the great saloon?"

"Certainly," replied the cuckoo. "That is the entrance to Mandarin Land, and you said you would like to see through it. So—you're surely ready now?"

"A thought has just struck me," said Griselda. "How will you know what o'clock it is, so as to come back in time to tell the next hour? My aunts will get into such a fright if you go wrong again! Are you sure we shall have time to go to the mandarins' country to-night?"

"Time!" repeated the cuckoo; "what is time? Ah, Griselda, you have a very great deal to learn! What do you mean by time?"

"I don't know," replied Griselda, feeling rather snubbed. "Being slow or quick—I suppose that's what I mean."

"And what is slow, and what is quick?" said the cuckoo. "All a matter of fancy! If everything that's been done since the world was made till now, was done over again in five minutes, you'd never know the difference."

"Oh, cuckoo, I wish you wouldn't!" cried poor Griselda; "you're worse than sums, you do so puzzle me. It's like what you said about nothing being big or little, only it's worse. Where would all the days and hours be if there was nothing but minutes? Oh, cuckoo, you said you'd amuse me, and you do nothing but puzzle me."

"It was your own fault. You wouldn't get ready," said the cuckoo, "Now, here goes! Flap and wish."

Griselda flapped and wished. She felt a sort of rustle in the air, that was all—then she found herself standing with the cuckoo in front of the Chinese cabinet, the door of which stood open, while the mandarins on each side, nodding politely, seemed to invite them to enter. Griselda hesitated.

"Go on," said the cuckoo, patronizingly; "ladies first."

Griselda went on. To her surprise, inside the cabinet it was quite light, though where

the light came from that illuminated all the queer corners and recesses and streamed out to the front, where stood the mandarins, she could not discover.

The "palace" was not quite as interesting as she had expected. There were lots of little rooms in it opening on to balconies commanding, no doubt, a splendid view of the great saloon; there were ever so many little stair-cases leading to more little rooms and balconies; but it all seemed empty and deserted.

"I don't care for it," said Griselda, stopping short at last; "it's all the same, and there's nothing to see. I thought my aunts kept ever so many beautiful things in here, and there's nothing."

"Come along, then," said the cuckoo. "I didn't expect you'd care for the palace, as you called it, much. Let us go out the other way."

He hopped down a sort of little staircase near which they were standing, and Griselda followed him willingly enough. At the foot they found themselves in a vestibule, much handsomer than the entrance at the other side, and the cuckoo, crossing it, lifted one of his claws and touched a spring in the wall. Instantly a pair of large doors flew open in the middle, revealing to Griselda the prettiest and most curious sight she had ever seen.

A flight of wide, shallow steps led down from this doorway into a long, long avenue bordered by stiffly growing trees, from the branches of which hung innumerable lamps of every colour, making a perfect network of brilliance as far as the eye could reach.

HE FLAPPED HIS WINGS, AND A PALANQUIN APPEARED AT THE FOOT OF THE STEPS he flapped his wings, and a palanquin appeared at the foot of the steps

"Oh, how lovely!" cried Griselda, clapping her hands. "It'll be like walking along a rainbow. Cuckoo, come quick."

"Stop," said the cuckoo; "we've a good way to go. There's no need to walk.

Palanquin!"

He flapped his wings, and instantly a palanquin appeared at the foot of the steps. It was made of carved ivory, and borne by four Chinese-looking figures with pigtails and bright-coloured jackets. A feeling came over Griselda that she was dreaming, or else that she had seen this palanquin before. She hesitated. Suddenly she gave a little jump of satisfaction.

"I know," she exclaimed. "It's exactly like the one that stands under a glass shade on Lady Lavander's drawing-room mantelpiece. I wonder if it is the very one? Fancy me being able to get into it!"

She looked at the four bearers. Instantly they all nodded.

"What do they mean?" asked Griselda, turning to the cuckoo.

"Get in," he replied.

"Yes, I'm just going to get in," she said; "but what do they mean when they nod at me like that?"

"They mean, of course, what I tell you—'Get in,'" said the cuckoo.

"Why don't they say so, then?" persisted Griselda, getting in, however, as she spoke.

"Griselda, you have a very great——" began the cuckoo, but Griselda interrupted him.

"Cuckoo," she exclaimed, "if you say that again, I'll jump out of the palanquin and run away home to bed. Of course I've a great deal to learn—that's why I like to ask questions about everything I see. Now, tell me where we are going."

"In the first place," said the cuckoo, "are you comfortable?"

"Very," said Griselda, settling herself down among the cushions.

It was a change from the cuckoo's boudoir. There were no chairs or seats, only a number of very, very soft cushions covered with green silk. There were green silk curtains all round, too, which you could draw or not as you pleased, just by touching

a spring. Griselda stroked the silk gently. It was not "fruzzley" silk, if you know what that means; it did not make you feel as if your nails wanted cutting, or as if all the rough places on your skin were being rubbed up the wrong way; its softness was like that of a rose or pansy petal.

"What nice silk!" said Griselda. "I'd like a dress of it. I never noticed that the palanquin was lined so nicely," she continued, "for I suppose it is the one from Lady Lavander's mantelpiece? There couldn't be two so exactly like each other."

The cuckoo gave a sort of whistle.

"What a goose you are, my dear!" he exclaimed. "Excuse me," he continued, seeing that Griselda looked rather offended; "I didn't mean to hurt your feelings, but you won't let me say the other thing, you know. The palanquin from Lady Lavander's! I should think not. You might as well mistake one of those horrible paper roses that Dorcas sticks in her vases for one of your aunt's Gloires de Dijon! The palanquin from Lady Lavander's—a clumsy human imitation not worth looking at!"

"I didn't know," said Griselda humbly. "Do they make such beautiful things in Mandarin Land?"

"Of course," said the cuckoo.

Griselda sat silent for a minute or two, but very soon she recovered her spirits.

"Will you please tell me where we are going?" she asked again.

"You'll see directly," said the cuckoo; "not that I mind telling you. There's to be a grand reception at one of the palaces to-night. I thought you'd like to assist at it. It'll give you some idea of what a palace is like. By-the-by, can you dance?"

"A little," replied Griselda.

"Ah, well, I dare say you will manage. I've ordered a court dress for you. It will be all ready when we get there."

"Thank you," said Griselda.

In a minute or two the palanquin stopped. The cuckoo got out, and Griselda followed him.

She found that they were at the entrance to a very much grander palace than the one in her aunt's saloon. The steps leading up to the door were very wide and shallow, and covered with a gold embroidered carpet, which looked as if it would be prickly to her bare feet, but which, on the contrary, when she trod upon it, felt softer than the softest moss. She could see very little besides the carpet, for at each side of the steps stood rows and rows of mandarins, all something like, but a great deal grander than, the pair outside her aunt's cabinet; and as the cuckoo hopped and Griselda walked up the staircase, they all, in turn, row by row, began solemnly to nod. It gave them the look of a field of very high grass, through which, any one passing, leaves for the moment a trail, till all the heads bob up again into their places.

"What do they mean?" whispered Griselda.

"It's a royal salute," said the cuckoo.

"A salute!" said Griselda. "I thought that meant kissing or guns."

"Hush!" said the cuckoo, for by this time they had arrived at the top of the staircase; "you must be dressed now."

Two mandariny-looking young ladies, with porcelain faces and three-cornered head-dresses, stepped forward and led Griselda into a small ante-room, where lay waiting for her the most magnificent dress you ever saw. But how do you think they dressed her? It was all by nodding. They nodded to the blue and silver embroidered jacket, and in a moment it had fitted itself on to her. They nodded to the splendid scarlet satin skirt, made very short in front and very long behind, and before Griselda knew where she was, it was adjusted quite correctly. They nodded to the head-dress, and the sashes, and the necklaces and bracelets, and forthwith they all arranged themselves. Last of all, they nodded to the dearest, sweetest little pair of high-heeled shoes imaginable—all silver, and blue, and gold, and scarlet, and

everything mixed up together, only they were rather a stumpy shape about the toes and Griselda's bare feet were encased in them, and, to her surprise, quite comfortably so.

"They don't hurt me a bit," she said aloud; "yet they didn't look the least the shape of my foot."

But her attendants only nodded; and turning round, she saw the cuckoo waiting for her. He did not speak either, rather to her annoyance, but gravely led the way through one grand room after another to the grandest of all, where the entertainment was evidently just about to begin. And everywhere there were mandarins, rows and rows, who all set to work nodding as fast as Griselda appeared. She began to be rather tired of royal salutes, and was glad when, at last, in profound silence, the procession, consisting of the cuckoo and herself, and about half a dozen "mandarins," came to a halt before a kind of daïs, or raised seat, at the end of the hall.

Upon this daïs stood a chair—a throne of some kind, Griselda supposed it to be—and upon this was seated the grandest and gravest personage she had yet seen.

"Is he the king of the mandarins?" she whispered. But the cuckoo did not reply; and before she had time to repeat the question, the very grand and grave person got down from his seat, and coming towards her offered her his hand, at the same time nodding—first once, then two or three times together, then once again. Griselda seemed to know what he meant. He was asking her to dance.

"Thank you," she said. "I can't dance very well, but perhaps you won't mind,"

The king, if that was his title, took not the slightest notice of her reply, but nodded again—once, then two or three times together, then once alone, just as before. Griselda did not know what to do, when suddenly she felt something poking her head. It was the cuckoo—he had lifted his claw, and was tapping her head to make her nod. So she nodded—once, twice together, then once—that appeared to be

enough. The king nodded once again; an invisible band suddenly struck up the loveliest music, and off they set to the places of honour reserved for them in the centre of the room, where all the mandarins were assembling.

What a dance that was! It began like a minuet and ended something like the haymakers. Griselda had not the least idea what the figures or steps were, but it did not matter. If she did not know, her shoes or something about her did; for she got on famously. The music was lovely—"so the mandarins can't be deaf, though they are dumb," thought Griselda, "which is one good thing about them." The king seemed to enjoy it as much as she did, though he never smiled or laughed; any one could have seen he liked it by the way he whirled and twirled himself about. And between the figures, when they stopped to rest for a little, Griselda got on very well too. There was no conversation, or rather, if there was, it was all nodding.

So Griselda nodded too, and though she did not know what her nods meant, the king seemed to understand and be quite pleased; and when they had nodded enough, the music struck up again, and off they set, harder than before.

And every now and then tiny little mandariny boys appeared with trays filled with the most delicious fruits and sweetmeats. Griselda was not a greedy child, but for once in her life she really did feel rather so. I cannot possibly describe these delicious things; just think of whatever in all your life was the most "lovely" thing you ever eat, and you may be sure they tasted like that. Only the cuckoo would not eat any, which rather distressed Griselda. He walked about among the dancers, apparently quite at home; and the mandarins did not seem at all surprised to see him, though he did look rather odd, being nearly, if not quite, as big as any of them. Griselda hoped he was enjoying himself, considering that she had to thank him for all the fun she was having, but she felt a little conscience-stricken when she saw that he wouldn't eat anything.

"Cuckoo," she whispered; she dared not talk out loud—it would have seemed so

remarkable, you see. "Cuckoo," she said, very, very softly, "I wish you would eat something. You'll be so tired and hungry."

"No, thank you," said the cuckoo; and you can't think how pleased Griselda was at having succeeded in making him speak. "It isn't my way. I hope you are enjoying yourself?"

"Oh, very much," said Griselda. "I——"

"Hush!" said the cuckoo; and looking up, Griselda saw a number of mandarins, in a sort of procession, coming their way.

When they got up to the cuckoo they set to work nodding, two or three at a time, more energetically than usual. When they stopped, the cuckoo nodded in return, and then hopped off towards the middle of the room.

"They're very fond of good music, you see," he whispered as he passed Griselda; "and they don't often get it."

V PICTURES

"And she is always beautiful And always is eighteen!"

W

hen he got to the middle of the room the cuckoo cleared his throat, flapped his wings, and began to sing. Griselda was quite astonished. She had had no idea that her friend was so accomplished. It wasn't "cuckooing" at all; it was real singing, like that of the nightingale or the thrush, or like something prettier than either. It made Griselda think of woods in summer, and of tinkling brooks flowing through them, with the pretty brown pebbles sparkling up through the water; and then it made her think of something sad—she didn't know what; perhaps it was of the babes in the wood and the robins covering them up with leaves—and then again, in a moment, it sounded as if all the merry elves and sprites that ever were heard of had escaped

from fairyland, and were rolling over and over with peals of rollicking laughter. And at last, all of a sudden, the song came to an end.

"Cuckoo! cuckoo! cuckoo!" rang out three times, clear and shrill. The cuckoo flapped his wings, made a bow to the mandarins, and retired to his old corner.

There was no buzz of talk, as is usual after a performance has come to a close, but there was a great buzz of nodding, and Griselda, wishing to give the cuckoo as much praise as she could, nodded as hard as any of them. The cuckoo really looked quite shy at receiving so much applause. But in a minute or two the music struck up and the dancing began again—one, two, three: it seemed a sort of mazurka this time, which suited the mandarins very well, as it gave them a chance of nodding to mark the time.

Griselda had once learnt the mazurka, so she got on even better than before—only she would have liked it more if her shoes had had sharper toes; they looked so stumpy when she tried to point them. All the same, it was very good fun, and she was not too well pleased when she suddenly felt the little sharp tap of the cuckoo on her head, and heard him whisper—

"Griselda, it's time to go."

"Oh dear, why?" she asked. "I'm not a bit tired. Why need we go yet?"

"Obeying orders," said the cuckoo; and after that, Griselda dared not say another word. It was very nearly as bad as being told she had a great deal to learn.

"Must I say good-bye to the king and all the people?" she inquired; but before the cuckoo had time to answer, she gave a little squeal. "Oh, cuckoo," she cried, "you've trod on my foot."

"I beg your pardon," said the cuckoo.

"I must take off my shoe; it does so hurt," she went on.

"Take it off, then," said the cuckoo.

Griselda stooped to take off her shoe. "Are we going home in the pal——?" she began to say; but she never finished the sentence, for just as she had got her shoe off she felt the cuckoo throw something round her. It was the feather mantle.

And Griselda knew nothing more till she opened her eyes the next morning, and saw the first early rays of sunshine peeping in through the chinks of the closed shutters of her little bed-room.

She rubbed her eyes, and sat up in bed. Could it have been a dream?

"What could have made me fall asleep so all of a sudden?" she thought. "I wasn't the least sleepy at the mandarins' ball. What fun it was! I believe that cuckoo made me fall asleep on purpose to make me fancy it was a dream. Was it a dream?"

She began to feel confused and doubtful, when suddenly she felt something hurting her arm, like a little lump in the bed. She felt with her hand to see if she could smooth it away, and drew out—one of the shoes belonging to her court dress! The very one she had held in her hand at the moment the cuckoo spirited her home again to bed.

"Ah, Mr. Cuckoo!" she exclaimed, "you meant to play me a trick, but you haven't succeeded, you see."

She jumped out of bed and unfastened one of the window-shutters, then jumped in again to admire the little shoe in comfort. It was even prettier than she had thought it at the ball. She held it up and looked at it. It was about the size of the first joint of her little finger. "To think that I should have been dancing with you on last night!" she said to the shoe. "And yet the cuckoo says being big or little is all a matter of fancy. I wonder what he'll think of to amuse me next?"

She was still holding up the shoe and admiring it when Dorcas came with the hot water.

"Look, Dorcas," she said.

"Bless me, it's one of the shoes off the Chinese dolls in the saloon," exclaimed the old servant. "How ever did you get that, missie? Your aunts wouldn't be pleased."

"It just isn't one of the Chinese dolls' shoes, and if you don't believe me, you can go and look for yourself," said Griselda. "It's my very own shoe, and it was given me to my own self."

Dorcas looked at her curiously, but said no more, only as she was going out of the room Griselda heard her saying something about "so very like Miss Sybilla."

"I wonder what 'Miss Sybilla' was like?" thought Griselda. "I have a good mind to ask the cuckoo. He seems to have known her very well."

It was not for some days that Griselda had a chance of asking the cuckoo anything. She saw and heard nothing of him—nothing, that is to say, but his regular appearance to tell the hours as usual.

"I suppose," thought Griselda, "he thinks the mandarins' ball was fun enough to last me a good while. It really was very good-natured of him to take me to it, so I mustn't grumble."

A few days after this poor Griselda caught cold. It was not a very bad cold, I must confess, but her aunts made rather a fuss about it. They wanted her to stay in bed, but to this Griselda so much objected that they did not insist upon it.

"It would be so dull," she said piteously. "Please let me stay in the ante-room, for all my things are there; and, then, there's the cuckoo."

Aunt Grizzel smiled at this, and Griselda got her way. But even in the ante-room it was rather dull. Miss Grizzel and Miss Tabitha were obliged to go out, to drive all the way to Merrybrow Hall, as Lady Lavander sent a messenger to say that she had an attack of influenza, and wished to see her friends at once.

Miss Tabitha began to cry—she was so tender-hearted.

"Troubles never come singly," said Miss Grizzel, by way of consolation.

"No, indeed, they never come singly," said Miss Tabitha, shaking her head and wiping her eyes.

So off they set; and Griselda, in her arm-chair by the ante-room fire, with some queer little old-fashioned books of her aunts', which she had already read more than a dozen times, beside her by way of amusement, felt that there was one comfort in her troubles—she had escaped the long weary drive to her godmother's.

But it was very dull. It got duller and duller. Griselda curled herself up in her chair, and wished she could go to sleep, though feeling quite sure she couldn't, for she had stayed in bed much later than usual this morning, and had been obliged to spend the time in sleeping, for want of anything better to do.

She looked up at the clock.

"I don't know even what to wish for," she said to herself. "I don't feel the least inclined to play at anything, and I shouldn't care to go to the mandarins again. Oh, cuckoo, cuckoo, I am so dull; couldn't you think of anything to amuse me?"

It was not near "any o'clock." But after waiting a minute or two, it seemed to Griselda that she heard the soft sound of "coming" that always preceded the cuckoo's appearance. She was right. In another moment she heard his usual greeting, "Cuckoo, cuckoo!"

"Oh, cuckoo!" she exclaimed, "I am so glad you have come at last. I am so dull, and it has nothing to do with lessons this time. It's that I've got such a bad cold, and my head's aching, and I'm so tired of reading, all by myself."

"What would you like to do?" said the cuckoo. "You don't want to go to see the mandarins again?"

"Oh no; I couldn't dance."

"Or the mermaids down under the sea?"

"Oh, dear, no," said Griselda, with a little shiver, "it would be far too cold. I would

just like to stay where I am, if some one would tell me stories. I'm not even sure that I could listen to stories. What could you do to amuse me, cuckoo?"

"Would you like to see some pictures?" said the cuckoo. "I could show you pictures without your taking any trouble."

"Oh yes, that would be beautiful," cried Griselda. "What pictures will you show me? Oh, I know. I would like to see the place where you were born—where that very, very clever man made you and the clock, I mean."

"Your great-great-grandfather," said the cuckoo. "Very well. Now, Griselda, shut your eyes. First of all, I am going to sing."

Griselda shut her eyes, and the cuckoo began his song. It was something like what he had sung at the mandarins' palace, only even more beautiful. It was so soft and dreamy, Griselda felt as if she could have sat there for ever, listening to it.

The first notes were low and murmuring. Again they made Griselda think of little rippling brooks in summer, and now and then there came a sort of hum as of insects buzzing in the warm sunshine near. This humming gradually increased, till at last Griselda was conscious of nothing more—everything seemed to be humming, herself too, till at last she fell asleep.

When she opened her eyes, the ante-room and everything in it, except the arm-chair on which she was still curled up, had disappeared—melted away into a misty cloud all round her, which in turn gradually faded, till before her she saw a scene quite new and strange. It was the first of the cuckoo's "pictures."

An old, quaint room, with a high, carved mantelpiece, and a bright fire sparkling in the grate. It was not a pretty room—it had more the look of a workshop of some kind; but it was curious and interesting. All round, the walls were hung with clocks and strange mechanical toys. There was a fiddler slowly fiddling, a gentleman and lady gravely dancing a minuet, a little man drawing up water in a bucket out of a glass vase in which gold fish were swimming about—all sorts of queer figures; and

the clocks were even queerer. There was one intended to represent the sun, moon, and planets, with one face for the sun and another for the moon, and gold and silver stars slowly circling round them; there was another clock with a tiny trumpeter perched on a ledge above the face, who blew a horn for the hours. I cannot tell you half the strange and wonderful things there were.

Griselda was so interested in looking at all these queer machines, that she did not for some time observe the occupant of the room. And no wonder; he was sitting in front of a little table, so perfectly still, much more still than the un-living figures around him. He was examining, with a magnifying glass, some small object he held in his hand, so closely and intently that Griselda, forgetting she was only looking at a "picture," almost held her breath for fear she should disturb him. He was a very old man, his coat was worn and threadbare in several places, looking as if he spent a great part of his life in one position. Yet he did not look poor, and his face, when at last he lifted it, was mild and intelligent and very earnest.

While Griselda was watching him closely there came a soft tap at the door, and a little girl danced into the room. The dearest little girl you ever saw, and so funnily dressed! Her thick brown hair, rather lighter than Griselda's, was tied in two long plaits down her back. She had a short red skirt with silver braid round the bottom, and a white chemisette with beautiful lace at the throat and wrists, and over that again a black velvet bodice, also trimmed with silver. And she had a great many trinkets, necklaces, and bracelets, and ear-rings, and a sort of little silver coronet; no, it was not like a coronet, it was a band with a square piece of silver fastened so as to stand up at each side of her head something like a horse's blinkers, only they were not placed over her eyes.

She made quite a jingle as she came into the room, and the old man looked up with a smile of pleasure.

"Well, my darling, and are you all ready for your fête?" he said; and though the

language in which he spoke was quite strange to Griselda, she understood his meaning perfectly well.

"Yes, dear grandfather; and isn't my dress lovely?" said the child. "I should be so happy if only you were coming too, and would get yourself a beautiful velvet coat like Mynheer van Huyten."

The old man shook his head.

"I have no time for such things, my darling," he replied; "and besides, I am too old. I must work—work hard to make money for my pet when I am gone, that she may not be dependent on the bounty of those English sisters."

"But I won't care for money when you are gone, grandfather," said the child, her eyes filling with tears. "I would rather just go on living in this little house, and I am sure the neighbours would give me something to eat, and then I could hear all your clocks ticking, and think of you. I don't want you to sell all your wonderful things for money for me, grandfather. They would remind me of you, and money wouldn't."

"Not all, Sybilla, not all," said the old man. "The best of all, the chef-d'œuvre of my life, shall not be sold. It shall be yours, and you will have in your possession a clock that crowned heads might seek in vain to purchase."

His dim old eyes brightened, and for a moment he sat erect and strong.

"Do you mean the cuckoo clock?" said Sybilla, in a low voice.

"Yes, my darling, the cuckoo clock, the crowning work of my life—a clock that shall last long after I, and perhaps thou, my pretty child, are crumbling into dust; a clock that shall last to tell my great-grandchildren to many generations that the old Dutch mechanic was not altogether to be despised."

Sybilla sprang into his arms.

"You are not to talk like that, little grandfather," she said. "I shall teach my children

and my grandchildren to be so proud of you—oh, so proud!—as proud as I am of you, little grandfather."

"Gently, my darling," said the old man, as he placed carefully on the table the delicate piece of mechanism he held in his hand, and tenderly embraced the child. "Kiss me once again, my pet, and then thou must go; thy little friends will be waiting."

As he said these words the mist slowly gathered again before Griselda's eyes—the first of the cuckoo's pictures faded from her sight.

When she looked again the scene was changed, but this time it was not a strange one, though Griselda had gazed at it for some moments before she recognized it. It was the great saloon, but it looked very different from what she had ever seen it. Forty years or so make a difference in rooms as well as in people!

The faded yellow damask hangings were rich and brilliant. There were bouquets of lovely flowers arranged about the tables; wax lights were sending out their brightness in every direction, and the room was filled with ladies and gentlemen in gay attire.

Among them, after a time, Griselda remarked two ladies, no longer very young, but still handsome and stately, and something whispered to her that they were her two aunts, Miss Grizzel and Miss Tabitha.

"Poor aunts!" she said softly to herself; "how old they have grown since then."

But she did not long look at them; her attention was attracted by a much younger lady—a mere girl she seemed, but oh, so sweet and pretty! She was dancing with a gentleman whose eyes looked as if they saw no one else, and she herself seemed brimming over with youth and happiness. Her very steps had joy in them.

"Well, Griselda," whispered a voice, which she knew was the cuckoo's; "so you don't like to be told you are like your grandmother, eh?"

Griselda turned round sharply to look for the speaker, but he was not to be seen. And when she turned again, the picture of the great saloon had faded away.

One more picture.

Griselda looked again. She saw before her a country road in full summer time; the sun was shining, the birds were singing, the trees covered with their bright green leaves—everything appeared happy and joyful. But at last in the distance she saw, slowly approaching, a group of a few people, all walking together, carrying in their centre something long and narrow, which, though the black cloth covering it was almost hidden by the white flowers with which it was thickly strewn, Griselda knew to be a coffin.

It was a funeral procession, and in the place of chief mourner, with pale, set face, walked the same young man whom Griselda had last seen dancing with the girl Sybilla in the great saloon.

The sad group passed slowly out of sight; but as it disappeared there fell upon the ear the sounds of sweet music, lovelier far than she had heard before—lovelier than the magic cuckoo's most lovely songs—and somehow, in the music, it seemed to the child's fancy there were mingled the soft strains of a woman's voice.

"It is Sybilla singing," thought Griselda dreamily, and with that she fell asleep again.

When she woke she was in the arm-chair by the ante-room fire, everything around her looking just as usual, the cuckoo clock ticking away calmly and regularly. Had it been a dream only? Griselda could not make up her mind.

"But I don't see that it matters if it was," she said to herself. "If it was a dream, the cuckoo sent it to me all the same, and I thank you very much indeed, cuckoo," she went on, looking up at the clock. "The last picture was rather sad, but still it was very nice to see it, and I thank you very much, and I'll never say again that I don't like to be told I'm like my dear pretty grandmother."

The cuckoo took no notice of what she said, but Griselda did not mind. She was

getting used to his "ways."

"I expect he hears me quite well," she thought; "and even if he doesn't, it's only civil to try to thank him."

She sat still contentedly enough, thinking over what she had seen, and trying to make more "pictures" for herself in the fire. Then there came faintly to her ears the sound of carriage wheels, opening and shutting of doors, a little bustle of arrival.

"My aunts must have come back," thought Griselda; and so it was. In a few minutes Miss Grizzel, closely followed by Miss Tabitha, appeared at the ante-room door.

"Well, my love," said Miss Grizzel anxiously, "and how are you? Has the time seemed very long while we were away?"

"Oh no, thank you, Aunt Grizzel," replied Griselda, "not at all. I've been quite happy, and my cold's ever so much better, and my headache's quite gone."

"Come, that is good news," said Miss Grizzel. "Not that I'm exactly surprised," she continued, turning to Miss Tabitha, "for there really is nothing like tansy tea for a feverish cold."

"Nothing," agreed Miss Tabitha; "there really is nothing like it."

"Aunt Grizzel," said Griselda, after a few moments' silence, "was my grandmother quite young when she died?"

"Yes, my love, very young," replied Miss Grizzel with a change in her voice.

"And was her husband very sorry?" pursued Griselda.

"Heart-broken," said Miss Grizzel. "He did not live long after, and then you know, my dear, your father was sent to us to take care of. And now he has sent you—the third generation of young creatures confided to our care."

"Yes," said Griselda. "My grandmother died in the summer, when all the flowers were out; and she was buried in a pretty country place, wasn't she?"

"Yes," said Miss Grizzel, looking rather bewildered.

"And when she was a little girl she lived with her grandfather, the old Dutch mechanic," continued Griselda, unconsciously using the very words she had heard in her vision. "He was a nice old man; and how clever of him to have made the cuckoo clock, and such lots of other pretty, wonderful things. I don't wonder little Sybilla loved him; he was so good to her. But, oh, Aunt Grizzel, how pretty she was when she was a young lady! That time that she danced with my grandfather in the great saloon. And how very nice you and Aunt Tabitha looked then, too."

Miss Grizzel held her very breath in astonishment; and no doubt if Miss Tabitha had known she was doing so, she would have held hers too. But Griselda lay still, gazing at the fire, quite unconscious of her aunt's surprise.

"Your papa told you all these old stories, I suppose, my dear," said Miss Grizzel at last.

"Oh no," said Griselda dreamily. "Papa never told me anything like that. Dorcas told me a very little, I think; at least, she made me want to know, and I asked the cuckoo, and then, you see, he showed me it all. It was so pretty."

Miss Grizzel glanced at her sister.

"Tabitha, my dear," she said in a low voice, "do you hear?"

And Miss Tabitha, who really was not very deaf when she set herself to hear, nodded in awe-struck silence.

"Tabitha," continued Miss Grizzel in the same tone, "it is wonderful! Ah, yes, how true it is, Tabitha, that 'there are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in our philosophy'" (for Miss Grizzel was a well-read old lady, you see); "and from the very first, Tabitha, we always had a feeling that the child was strangely like Sybilla."

"Strangely like Sybilla," echoed Miss Tabitha.

"May she grow up as good, if not quite as beautiful—that we could scarcely expect;

and may she be longer spared to those that love her," added Miss Grizzel, bending over Griselda, while two or three tears slowly trickled down her aged cheeks. "See, Tabitha, the dear child is fast asleep. How sweet she looks! I trust by to-morrow morning she will be quite herself again; her cold is so much better.

VI RUBBED THE WRONG WAY

"For now and then there comes a day When everything goes wrong."

G

riselda's cold was much better by "to-morrow morning." In fact, I might almost say it was quite well.

But Griselda herself did not feel quite well, and saying this reminds me that it is hardly sense to speak of a cold being better or well—for a cold's being "well" means that it is not there at all, out of existence, in short, and if a thing is out of existence how can we say anything about it? Children, I feel quite in a hobble—I cannot get my mind straight about it—please think it over and give me your opinion. In the meantime, I will go on about Griselda.

She felt just a little ill—a sort of feeling that sometimes is rather nice, sometimes "very extremely" much the reverse! She felt in the humour for being petted, and having beef-tea, and jelly, and sponge cake with her tea, and for a day or two this was all very well. She was petted, and she had lots of beef-tea, and jelly, and grapes, and sponge cakes, and everything nice, for her aunts, as you must have seen by this time, were really very, very kind to her in every way in which they understood how to be so.

But after a few days of the continued petting, and the beef-tea and the jelly and all the rest of it, it occurred to Miss Grizzel, who had a good large bump of "common sense," that it might be possible to overdo this sort of thing.

"Tabitha," she said to her sister, when they were sitting together in the evening after Griselda had gone to bed, "Tabitha, my dear, I think the child is quite well again now. It seems to me it would be well to send a note to good Mr. Kneebreeches, to say that she will be able to resume her studies the day after to-morrow."

"The day after to-morrow," repeated Miss Tabitha. "The day after to-morrow—to say that she will be able to resume her studies the day after to-morrow—oh yes, certainly. It would be very well to send a note to good Mr. Kneebreeches, my dear Grizzel."

"I thought you would agree with me," said Miss Grizzel, with a sigh of relief (as if poor Miss Tabitha during all the last half-century had ever ventured to do anything else), getting up to fetch her writing materials as she spoke. "It is such a satisfaction to consult together about what we do. I was only a little afraid of being hard upon the child, but as you agree with me, I have no longer any misgiving."

"Any misgiving, oh dear, no!" said Miss Tabitha. "You have no reason for any misgiving, I am sure, my dear Grizzel."

So the note was written and despatched, and the next morning when, about twelve o'clock, Griselda made her appearance in the little drawing-room where her aunts usually sat, looking, it must be confessed, very plump and rosy for an invalid, Miss Grizzel broached the subject.

"I have written to request Mr. Kneebreeches to resume his instructions to-morrow," she said quietly. "I think you are quite well again now, so Dorcas must wake you at your usual hour."

Griselda had been settling herself comfortably on a corner of the sofa. She had got a nice book to read, which her father, hearing of her illness, had sent her by post, and she was looking forward to the tempting plateful of jelly which Dorcas had brought her for luncheon every day since she had been ill. Altogether, she was feeling very "lazy-easy" and contented. Her aunt's announcement felt like a sudden downpour of

cold water, or rush of east wind. She sat straight up in her sofa, and exclaimed in a tone of great annoyance—

"Oh, Aunt Grizzel!"

"Well, my dear?" said Miss Grizzel, placidly.

"I wish you wouldn't make me begin lessons again just yet. I know they'll make my head ache again, and Mr. Kneebreeches will be so cross. I know he will, and he is so horrid when he is cross."

"Hush!" said Miss Grizzel, holding up her hand in a way that reminded Griselda of the cuckoo's favourite "obeying orders." Just then, too, in the distance the ante-room clock struck twelve. "Cuckoo! cuckoo! cuckoo!" on it went. Griselda could have stamped with irritation, but somehow, in spite of herself, she felt compelled to say nothing. She muttered some not very pretty words, coiled herself round on the sofa, opened her book, and began to read.

But it was not as interesting as she had expected. She had not read many pages before she began to yawn, and she was delighted to be interrupted by Dorcas and the jelly.

But the jelly was not as nice as she had expected, either. She tasted it, and thought it was too sweet; and when she tasted it again, it seemed too strong of cinnamon; and the third taste seemed too strong of everything. She laid down her spoon, and looked about her discontentedly.

"What is the matter, my dear?" said Miss Grizzel. "Is the jelly not to your liking?"

"I don't know," said Griselda shortly. She ate a few spoonfuls, and then took up her book again. Miss Grizzel said nothing more, but to herself she thought that Mr. Kneebreeches had not been recalled any too soon.

All day long it was much the same. Nothing seemed to come right to Griselda. It was a dull, cold day, what is called "a black frost"; not a bright, clear, pretty, cold

day, but the sort of frost that really makes the world seem dead—makes it almost impossible to believe that there will ever be warmth and sound and "growing-ness" again.

Late in the afternoon Griselda crept up to the ante-room, and sat down by the window. Outside it was nearly dark, and inside it was not much more cheerful—for the fire was nearly out, and no lamps were lighted; only the cuckoo clock went on tick-ticking briskly as usual.

"I hate winter," said Griselda, pressing her cold little face against the colder window-pane, "I hate winter, and I hate lessons. I would give up being a person in a minute if I might be a—a—what would I best like to be? Oh yes, I know—a butterfly. Butterflies never see winter, and they certainly never have any lessons or any kind of work to do. I hate must-ing to do anything."

"Cuckoo," rang out suddenly above her head. It was only four o'clock striking, and as soon as he had told it the cuckoo was back behind his doors again in an instant, just as usual. There was nothing for Griselda to feel offended at, but somehow she got quite angry.

"I don't care what you think, cuckoo!" she exclaimed defiantly. "I know you came out on purpose just now, but I don't care. I do hate winter, and I do hate lessons, and I do think it would be nicer to be a butterfly than a little girl."

In her secret heart I fancy she was half in hopes that the cuckoo would come out again, and talk things over with her. Even if he were to scold her, she felt that it would be better than sitting there alone with nobody to speak to, which was very dull work indeed. At the bottom of her conscience there lurked the knowledge that what she should be doing was to be looking over her last lessons with Mr. Kneebreeches, and refreshing her memory for the next day; but, alas! knowing one's duty is by no means the same thing as doing it, and Griselda sat on by the window doing nothing but grumble and work herself up into a belief that she was one of the

most-to-be-pitied little girls in all the world. So that by the time Dorcas came to call her to tea, I doubt if she had a single pleasant thought or feeling left in her heart.

Things grew no better after tea, and before long Griselda asked if she might go to bed. She was "so tired," she said; and she certainly looked so, for ill-humour and idleness are excellent "tirers," and will soon take the roses out of a child's cheeks, and the brightness out of her eyes. She held up her face to be kissed by her aunts in a meekly reproachful way, which made the old ladies feel quite uncomfortable.

"I am by no means sure that I have done right in recalling Mr. Kneebreeches so soon, Sister Tabitha," remarked Miss Grizzel, uneasily, when Griselda had left the room. But Miss Tabitha was busy counting her stitches, and did not give full attention to Miss Grizzel's observation, so she just repeated placidly, "Oh yes, Sister Grizzel, you may be sure you have done right in recalling Mr. Kneebreeches."

"I am glad you think so," said Miss Grizzel, with again a little sigh of relief. "I was only distressed to see the child looking so white and tired,"

Upstairs Griselda was hurry-scurrying into bed. There was a lovely fire in her room—fancy that! Was she not a poor neglected little creature? But even this did not please her. She was too cross to be pleased with anything; too cross to wash her face and hands, or let Dorcas brush her hair out nicely as usual; too cross, alas, to say her prayers! She just huddled into bed, huddling up her mind in an untidy hurry and confusion, just as she left her clothes in an untidy heap on the floor. She would not look into herself, was the truth of it; she shrank from doing so because she knew things had been going on in that silly little heart of hers in a most unsatisfactory way all day, and she wanted to go to sleep and forget all about it.

She did go to sleep, very quickly too. No doubt she really was tired; tired with crossness and doing nothing, and she slept very soundly. When she woke up she felt so refreshed and rested that she fancied it must be morning. It was dark, of course, but that was to be expected in mid-winter, especially as the shutters were closed.

"I wonder," thought Griselda, "I wonder if it really is morning. I should like to get up early—I went so early to bed. I think I'll just jump out of bed and open a chink of the shutters. I'll see at once if it's nearly morning, by the look of the sky."

She was up in a minute, feeling her way across the room to the window, and without much difficulty she found the hook of the shutters, unfastened it, and threw one side open. Ah no, there was no sign of morning to be seen. There was moonlight, but nothing else, and not so very much of that, for the clouds were hurrying across the "orbêd maiden's" face at such a rate, one after the other, that the light was more like a number of pale flashes than the steady, cold shining of most frosty moonlight nights. There was going to be a change of weather, and the cloud armies were collecting together from all quarters; that was the real explanation of the hurrying and skurrying Griselda saw overhead, but this, of course, she did not understand. She only saw that it looked wild and stormy, and she shivered a little, partly with cold, partly with a half-frightened feeling that she could not have explained.

"I had better go back to bed," she said to herself; "but I am not a bit sleepy."

She was just drawing-to the shutter again, when something caught her eye, and she stopped short in surprise. A little bird was outside on the window-sill—a tiny bird crouching in close to the cold glass. Griselda's kind heart was touched in an instant. Cold as she was, she pushed back the shutter again, and drawing a chair forward to the window, managed to unfasten it—it was not a very heavy one—and to open it wide enough to slip her hand gently along to the bird. It did not start or move.

"Can it be dead?" thought Griselda anxiously.

But no, it was not dead. It let her put her hand round it and draw it in, and to her delight she felt that it was soft and warm, and it even gave a gentle peck on her thumb.

"Poor little bird, how cold you must be," she said kindly. But, to her amazement, no sooner was the bird safely inside the room, than it managed cleverly to escape from

her hand. It fluttered quietly up on to her shoulder, and sang out in a soft but cheery tone, "Cuckoo, cuckoo—cold, did you say, Griselda? Not so very, thank you."

Griselda stept back from the window.

"It's you, is it?" she said rather surlily, her tone seeming to infer that she had taken a great deal of trouble for nothing.

"Of course it is, and why shouldn't it be? You're not generally so sorry to see me. What's the matter?"

"Nothing's the matter," replied Griselda, feeling a little ashamed of her want of civility; "only, you see, if I had known it was you——" She hesitated.

"You wouldn't have clambered up and hurt your poor fingers in opening the window if you had known it was me—is that it, eh?" said the cuckoo.

Somehow, when the cuckoo said "eh?" like that, Griselda was obliged to tell just what she was thinking.

"No, I wouldn't have needed to open the window," she said. "You can get in or out whenever you like; you're not like a real bird. Of course, you were just tricking me, sitting out there and pretending to be a starved robin."

There was a little indignation in her voice, and she gave her head a toss, which nearly upset the cuckoo.

"Dear me, dear me!" exclaimed the cuckoo. "You have a great deal to complain of, Griselda. Your time and strength must be very valuable for you to regret so much having wasted a little of them on me."

Griselda felt her face grow red. What did he mean? Did he know how yesterday had been spent? She said nothing, but she drooped her head, and one or two tears came slowly creeping up to her eyes.

"Child!" said the cuckoo, suddenly changing his tone, "you are very foolish. Is a kind thought or action ever wasted? Can your eyes see what such good seeds grow

into? They have wings, Griselda—kindnesses have wings and roots, remember that—wings that never droop, and roots that never die. What do you think I came and sat outside your window for?"

"Cuckoo," said Griselda humbly, "I am very sorry."

"Very well," said the cuckoo, "we'll leave it for the present. I have something else to see about. Are you cold, Griselda?"

"Very," she replied. "I would very much like to go back to bed, cuckoo, if you please; and there's plenty of room for you too, if you'd like to come in and get warm."

"There are other ways of getting warm besides going to bed," said the cuckoo. "A nice brisk walk, for instance. I was going to ask you to come out into the garden with me."

Griselda almost screamed.

"Out into the garden! Oh, cuckoo!" she exclaimed, "how can you think of such a thing? Such a freezing cold night. Oh no, indeed, cuckoo, I couldn't possibly."

"Very well, Griselda," said the cuckoo; "if you haven't yet learnt to trust me, there's no more to be said. Good-night."

He flapped his wings, cried out "Cuckoo" once only, flew across the room, and almost before Griselda understood what he was doing, had disappeared.

She hurried after him, stumbling against the furniture in her haste, and by the uncertain light. The door was not open, but the cuckoo had got through it—"by the keyhole, I dare say," thought Griselda; "he can 'scrooge' himself up any way"—for a faint "Cuckoo" was to be heard on its other side. In a moment Griselda had opened it, and was speeding down the long passage in the dark, guided only by the voice from time to time heard before her, "Cuckoo, cuckoo."

She forgot all about the cold, or rather, she did not feel it, though the floor was of

uncarpeted old oak, whose hard, polished surface would have usually felt like ice to a child's soft, bare feet. It was a very long passage, and to-night, somehow, it seemed longer than ever. In fact, Griselda could have fancied she had been running along it for half a mile or more, when at last she was brought to a standstill by finding she could go no further. Where was she? She could not imagine! It must be a part of the house she had never explored in the daytime, she decided. In front of her was a little stair running downwards, and ending in a doorway. All this Griselda could see by a bright light that streamed in by the keyhole and through the chinks round the door—a light so brilliant that the little girl blinked her eyes, and for a moment felt quite dazzled and confused.

"It came so suddenly," she said to herself; "some one must have lighted a lamp in there all at once. But it can't be a lamp, it's too bright for a lamp. It's more like the sun; but how ever could the sun be shining in a room in the middle of the night? What shall I do? Shall I open the door and peep in?"

"Cuckoo, cuckoo," came the answer, soft but clear, from the other side.

"Can it be a trick of the cuckoo's to get me out into the garden?" thought Griselda; and for the first time since she had run out of her room a shiver of cold made her teeth chatter and her skin feel creepy.

"Cuckoo, cuckoo," sounded again, nearer this time, it seemed to Griselda.

"He's waiting for me. I will trust him," she said resolutely. "He has always been good and kind, and it's horrid of me to think he's going to trick me."

She ran down the little stair, she seized the handle of the door. It turned easily; the door opened—opened, and closed again noiselessly behind her, and what do you think she saw?

"Shut your eyes for a minute, Griselda," said the cuckoo's voice beside her; "the light will dazzle you at first. Shut them, and I will brush them with a little daisy dew, to strengthen them."

Griselda did as she was told. She felt the tip of the cuckoo's softest feather pass gently two or three times over her eyelids, and a delicious scent seemed immediately to float before her.

"I didn't know daisies had any scent," she remarked.

"Perhaps you didn't. You forget, Griselda, that you have a great——"

"Oh, please don't, cuckoo. Please, please don't, dear cuckoo," she exclaimed, dancing about with her hands clasped in entreaty, but her eyes still firmly closed. "Don't say that, and I'll promise to believe whatever you tell me. And how soon may I open my eyes, please, cuckoo?"

"Turn round slowly, three times. That will give the dew time to take effect," said the cuckoo. "Here goes—one—two—three. There, now."

Griselda opened her eyes.

VII BUTTERFLY-LAND

"I'd be a butterfly."

G

riselda opened her eyes.

What did she see?

The loveliest, loveliest garden that ever or never a little girl's eyes saw. As for describing it, I cannot. I must leave a good deal to your fancy. It was just a delicious garden.

There was a charming mixture of all that is needed to make a garden perfect—grass, velvety lawn rather; water, for a little brook ran tinkling in and out, playing bopeep among the bushes; trees, of course, and flowers, of course, flowers of every shade and shape. But all these beautiful things Griselda did not at first give as much attention to as they deserved; her eyes were so occupied with a quite unusual sight

that met them.

This was butterflies! Not that butterflies are so very uncommon; but butterflies, as Griselda saw them, I am quite sure, children, none of you ever saw, or are likely to see. There were such enormous numbers of them, and the variety of their colours and sizes was so great. They were fluttering about everywhere; the garden seemed actually alive with them.

Griselda stood for a moment in silent delight, feasting her eyes on the lovely things before her, enjoying the delicious sunshine which kissed her poor little bare feet, and seemed to wrap her all up in its warm embrace. Then she turned to her little friend.

"Cuckoo," she said, "I thank you so much. This is fairyland, at last!"

The cuckoo smiled, I was going to say, but that would be a figure of speech only, would it not? He shook his head gently.

"No, Griselda," he said kindly; "this is only butterfly-land."

"Butterfly-land!" repeated Griselda, with a little disappointment in her tone.

"Well," said the cuckoo, "it's where you were wishing to be yesterday, isn't it?"

Griselda did not particularly like these allusions to "yesterday." She thought it would be as well to change the subject.

"It's a beautiful place, whatever it is," she said, "and I'm sure, cuckoo, I'm very much obliged to you for bringing me here. Now may I run about and look at everything? How delicious it is to feel the warm sunshine again! I didn't know how cold I was. Look, cuckoo, my toes and fingers are quite blue; they're only just beginning to come right again. I suppose the sun always shines here. How nice it must be to be a butterfly; don't you think so, cuckoo? Nothing to do but fly about."

She stopped at last, quite out of breath.

"Griselda," said the cuckoo, "if you want me to answer your questions, you must ask them one at a time. You may run about and look at everything if you like, but you

had better not be in such a hurry. You will make a great many mistakes if you are—you have made some already."

"How?" said Griselda.

"Have the butterflies nothing to do but fly about? Watch them."

Griselda watched.

"They do seem to be doing something," she said, at last, "but I can't think what. They seem to be nibbling at the flowers, and then flying away something like bees gathering honey. Butterflies don't gather honey, cuckoo?"

"No," said the cuckoo. "They are filling their paint-boxes."

"What do you mean?" said Griselda.

"Come and see," said the cuckoo.

He flew quietly along in front of her, leading the way through the prettiest paths in all the pretty garden. The paths were arranged in different colours, as it were; that is to say, the flowers growing along their sides were not all "mixty-maxty," but one shade after another in regular order—from the palest blush pink to the very deepest damask crimson; then, again, from the soft greenish blue of the small grass forget-me-not to the rich warm tinge of the brilliant cornflower. Every tint was there; shades, to which, though not exactly strange to her, Griselda could yet have given no name, for the daisy dew, you see, had sharpened her eyes to observe delicate variations of colour, as she had never done before.

"How beautifully the flowers are planned," she said to the cuckoo. "Is it just to look pretty, or why?"

"It saves time," replied the cuckoo. "The fetch-and-carry butterflies know exactly where to go to for the tint the world-flower-painters want."

"Who are the fetch-and-carry butterflies, and who are the world-flower-painters?" asked Griselda.

"Wait a bit and you'll see, and use your eyes," answered the cuckoo. "It'll do your tongue no harm to have a rest now and then."

Griselda thought it as well to take his advice, though not particularly relishing the manner in which it was given. She did use her eyes, and as she and the cuckoo made their way along the flower alleys, she saw that the butterflies were never idle. They came regularly, in little parties of twos and threes, and nibbled away, as she called it, at flowers of the same colour but different shades, till they had got what they wanted. Then off flew butterfly No. 1 with perhaps the palest tint of maize, or yellow, or lavender, whichever he was in quest of, followed by No. 2 with the next deeper shade of the same, and No. 3 bringing up the rear.

Griselda gave a little sigh.

"What's the matter?" said the cuckoo.

"They work very hard," she replied, in a melancholy tone.

"It's a busy time of year," observed the cuckoo, drily.

After a while they came to what seemed to be a sort of centre to the garden. It was a huge glass house, with numberless doors, in and out of which butterflies were incessantly flying—reminding Griselda again of bees and a beehive. But she made no remark till the cuckoo spoke again.

"Come in," he said.

Griselda had to stoop a good deal, but she did manage to get in without knocking her head or doing any damage. Inside was just a mass of butterflies. A confused mass it seemed at first, but after a while she saw that it was the very reverse of confused. The butterflies were all settled in rows on long, narrow, white tables, and before each was a tiny object about the size of a flattened-out pin's head, which he was most carefully painting with one of his tentacles, which, from time to time, he moistened by rubbing it on the head of a butterfly waiting patiently behind him. Behind this butterfly again stood another, who after a while took his place, while the

first attendant flew away.

"To fill his paint-box again," remarked the cuckoo, who seemed to read Griselda's thoughts.

"But what are they painting, cuckoo?" she inquired eagerly.

"All the flowers in the world," replied the cuckoo. "Autumn, winter, and spring, they're hard at work. It's only just for the three months of summer that the butterflies have any holiday, and then a few stray ones now and then wander up to the world, and people talk about 'idle butterflies'! And even then it isn't true that they are idle. They go up to take a look at the flowers, to see how their work has turned out, and many a damaged petal they repair, or touch up a faded tint, though no one ever knows it."

"I know it now," said Griselda. "I will never talk about idle butterflies again—never. But, cuckoo, do they paint all the flowers here, too? What a fearful lot they must have to do!"

"No," said the cuckoo; "the flowers down here are fairy flowers. They never fade or die, they are always just as you see them. But the colours of your flowers are all taken from them, as you have seen. Of course they don't look the same up there," he went on, with a slight contemptuous shrug of his cuckoo shoulders; "the coarse air and the ugly things about must take the bloom off. The wild flowers do the best, to my thinking; people don't meddle with them in their stupid, clumsy way."

"But how do they get the flowers sent up to the world, cuckoo?" asked Griselda.

"They're packed up, of course, and taken up at night when all of you are asleep," said the cuckoo. "They're painted on elastic stuff, you see, which fits itself as the plant grows. Why, if your eyes were as they are usually, Griselda, you couldn't even see the petals the butterflies are painting now."

"And the packing up," said Griselda; "do the butterflies do that too?"

"No," said the cuckoo, "the fairies look after that."

"How wonderful!" exclaimed Griselda. But before the cuckoo had time to say more a sudden tumult filled the air. It was butterfly dinner-time!

"Are you hungry, Griselda?" said the cuckoo.

"Not so very," replied Griselda.

"It's just as well perhaps that you're not," he remarked, "for I don't know that you'd be much the better for dinner here."

"Why not?" inquired Griselda curiously. "What do they have for dinner? Honey? I like that very well, spread on the top of bread-and-butter, of course—I don't think I should care to eat it alone."

"You won't get any honey," the cuckoo was beginning; but he was interrupted. Two handsome butterflies flew into the great glass hall, and making straight for the cuckoo, alighted on his shoulders. They fluttered about him for a minute or two, evidently rather excited about something, then flew away again, as suddenly as they had appeared.

"Those were royal messengers," said the cuckoo, turning to Griselda. "They have come with a message from the king and queen to invite us to a banquet which is to be held in honour of your visit."

"What fun!" cried Griselda. "Do let's go at once, cuckoo. But, oh dear me," she went on, with a melancholy change of tone, "I was forgetting, cuckoo. I can't go to the banquet. I have nothing on but my night-gown. I never thought of it before, for I'm not a bit cold."

"Never mind," said the cuckoo, "I'll soon have that put to rights."

He flew off, and was back almost immediately, followed by a whole flock of butterflies. They were of a smaller kind than Griselda had hitherto seen, and they were of two colours only; half were blue, half yellow. They flew up to Griselda, who

felt for a moment as if she were really going to be suffocated by them, but only for a moment. There seemed a great buzz and flutter about her, and then the butterflies set to work to dress her. And how do you think they dressed her? With themselves! They arranged themselves all over her in the cleverest way. One set of blue ones clustered round the hem of her little night-gown, making a thick "ruche," as it were; and then there came two or three thinner rows of yellow, and then blue again. Round her waist they made the loveliest belt of mingled blue and yellow, and all over the upper part of her night-gown, in and out among the pretty white frills which Dorcas herself "goffered," so nicely, they made themselves into fantastic trimmings of every shape and kind; bows, rosettes—I cannot tell you what they did not imitate.

Perhaps the prettiest ornament of all was the coronet or wreath they made of themselves for her head, dotting over her curly brown hair too with butterfly spangles, which quivered like dew-drops as she moved about. No one would have known Griselda; she looked like a fairy queen, or princess, at least, for even her little white feet had what looked like butterfly shoes upon them, though these, you will understand, were only a sort of make-believe, as, of course, the shoes were soleless.

"Now," said the cuckoo, when at last all was quiet again, and every blue and every yellow butterfly seemed settled in his place, "now, Griselda, come and look at yourself."

SHE PEERED IN WITH GREAT SATISFACTION she peered in with great satisfaction

He led the way to a marble basin, into which fell the waters of one of the tinkling brooks that were to be found everywhere about the garden, and bade Griselda look into the water mirror. It danced about rather;

but still she was quite able to see herself. She peered in with great satisfaction, turning herself round so as to see first over one shoulder, then over the other.

"It is lovely," she said at last. "But, cuckoo, I'm just thinking—how shall I possibly

be able to sit down without crushing ever so many?"

"Bless you, you needn't trouble about that," said the cuckoo; "the butterflies are quite able to take care of themselves. You don't suppose you are the first little girl they have ever made a dress for?"

Griselda said no more, but followed the cuckoo, walking rather "gingerly," notwithstanding his assurances that the butterflies could take care of themselves. At last the cuckoo stopped, in front of a sort of banked-up terrace, in the centre of which grew a strange-looking plant with large, smooth, spreading-out leaves, and on the two topmost leaves, their splendid wings glittering in the sunshine, sat two magnificent butterflies. They were many times larger than any Griselda had yet seen; in fact, the cuckoo himself looked rather small beside them, and they were so beautiful that Griselda felt quite over-awed. You could not have said what colour they were, for at the faintest movement they seemed to change into new colours, each more exquisite than the last. Perhaps I could best give you an idea of them by saying that they were like living rainbows.

"Are those the king and queen?" asked Griselda in a whisper.

"Yes," said the cuckoo. "Do you admire them?"

"I should rather think I did," said Griselda. "But, cuckoo, do they never do anything but lie there in the sunshine?"

"Oh, you silly girl," exclaimed the cuckoo, "always jumping at conclusions. No, indeed, that is not how they manage things in butterfly-land. The king and queen have worked harder than any other butterflies. They are chosen every now and then, out of all the others, as being the most industrious and the cleverest of all the world-flower-painters, and then they are allowed to rest, and are fed on the finest essences, so that they grow as splendid as you see. But even now they are not idle; they superintend all the work that is done, and choose all the new colours."

"Dear me!" said Griselda, under her breath, "how clever they must be."

Just then the butterfly king and queen stretched out their magnificent wings, and rose upwards, soaring proudly into the air.

"Are they going away?" said Griselda in a disappointed tone.

"Oh no," said the cuckoo; "they are welcoming you. Hold out your hands."

Griselda held out her hands, and stood gazing up into the sky. In a minute or two the royal butterflies appeared again, slowly, majestically circling downwards, till at length they alighted on Griselda's little hands, the king on the right, the queen on the left, almost covering her fingers with their great dazzling wings.

"You do look nice now," said the cuckoo, hopping back a few steps and looking up at Griselda approvingly; "but it's time for the feast to begin, as it won't do for us to be late."

The king and queen appeared to understand. They floated away from Griselda's hands and settled themselves, this time, at one end of a beautiful little grass plot or lawn, just below the terrace where grew the large-leaved plant. This was evidently their dining-room, for no sooner were they in their places than butterflies of every kind and colour came pouring in, in masses, from all directions. Butterflies small and butterflies large; butterflies light and butterflies dark; butterflies blue, pink, crimson, green, gold-colour—every colour, and far, far more colours than you could possibly imagine.

They all settled down, round the sides of the grassy dining-table, and in another minute a number of small white butterflies appeared, carrying among them flower petals carefully rolled up, each containing a drop of liquid. One of these was presented to the king, and then one to the queen, who each sniffed at their petal for an instant, and then passed it on to the butterfly next them, whereupon fresh petals were handed to them, which they again passed on.

"What are they doing, cuckoo?" said Griselda; "that's not eating."

"It's their kind of eating," he replied. "They don't require any other kind of food than

a sniff of perfume; and as there are perfumes extracted from every flower in butterfly-land, and there are far more flowers than you could count between now and Christmas, you must allow there is plenty of variety of dishes."

"Um-m," said Griselda; "I suppose there is. But all the same, cuckoo, it's a very good thing I'm not hungry, isn't it? May I pour the scent on my pocket-handkerchief when it comes round to me? I have my handkerchief here, you see. Isn't it nice that I brought it? It was under my pillow, and I wrapped it round my hand to open the shutter, for the hook scratched it once."

"You may pour one drop on your handkerchief," said the cuckoo, "but not more. I shouldn't like the butterflies to think you greedy."

But Griselda grew very tired of the scent feast long before all the petals had been passed round. The perfumes were very nice, certainly, but there were such quantities of them—double quantities in honour of the guest, of course! Griselda screwed up her handkerchief into a tight little ball, so that the one drop of scent should not escape from it, and then she kept sniffing at it impatiently, till at last the cuckoo asked her what was the matter.

"I am so tired of the feast," she said. "Do let us do something else, cuckoo."

"It is getting rather late," said the cuckoo. "But see, Griselda, they are going to have an air-dance now."

"What's that?" said Griselda.

"Look, and you'll see," he replied.

Flocks and flocks of butterflies were rising a short way into the air, and there arranging themselves in bands according to their colours.

"Come up to the bank," said the cuckoo to Griselda; "you'll see them better."

Griselda climbed up the bank, and as from there she could look down on the butterfly show, she saw it beautifully. The long strings of butterflies twisted in and

out of each other in the most wonderful way, like ribbons of every hue plaiting themselves and then in an instant unplaiting themselves again. Then the king and queen placed themselves in the centre, and round and round in moving circles twisted and untwisted the brilliant bands of butterflies.

"It's like a kaleidoscope," said Griselda; "and now it's like those twisty-twirly dissolving views that papa took me to see once. It's just like them. Oh, how pretty! Cuckoo, are they doing it all on purpose to please me?"

"A good deal," said the cuckoo. "Stand up and clap your hands loud three times, to show them you're pleased."

Griselda obeyed. "Clap" number one—all the butterflies rose up into the air in a cloud; clap number two—they all fluttered and twirled and buzzed about, as if in the greatest excitement; clap number three—they all turned in Griselda's direction with a rush.

"They're going to kiss you, Griselda," cried the cuckoo.

Griselda felt her breath going. Up above her was the vast feathery cloud of butterflies, fluttering, rushing down upon her.

"Cuckoo, cuckoo," she screamed, "they'll suffocate me. Oh, cuckoo!"

"Shut your eyes, and clap your hands loud, very loud," called out the cuckoo.

And just as Griselda clapped her hands, holding her precious handkerchief between her teeth, she heard him give his usual cry, "Cuckoo, cuckoo."

Clap—where were they all?

Griselda opened her eyes—garden, butterflies, cuckoo, all had disappeared. She was in bed, and Dorcas was knocking at the door with the hot water.

"Miss Grizzel said I was to wake you at your usual time this morning, missie," she said. "I hope you don't feel too tired to get up."

"Tired! I should think not," replied Griselda. "I was awake this morning ages before

you, I can tell you, my dear Dorcas. Come here for a minute, Dorcas, please," she went on. "There now, sniff my handkerchief. What do you think of that?"

"It's beautiful," said Dorcas. "It's out of the big blue chinay bottle on your auntie's table, isn't it, missie?"

"Stuff and nonsense," replied Griselda; "it's scent of my own, Dorcas. Aunt Grizzel never had any like it in her life. There now! Please give me my slippers, I want to get up and look over my lessons for Mr. Kneebreeches before he comes. Dear me," she added to herself, as she was putting on her slippers, "how pretty my feet did look with the blue butterfly shoes! It was very good of the cuckoo to take me there, but I don't think I shall ever wish to be a butterfly again, now I know how hard they work! But I'd like to do my lessons well to-day. I fancy it'll please the dear old cuckoo."

VIII MASTER PHIL

"Who comes from the world of flowers? Daisy and crocus, and sea-blue bell, And violet shrinking in dewy cell— Sly cells that know the secrets of night, When earth is bathed in fairy light— Scarlet, and blue, and golden flowers."

A

nd so Mr. Kneebreeches had no reason to complain of his pupil that day.

And Miss Grizzel congratulated herself more heartily than ever on her wise management of children.

And Miss Tabitha repeated that Sister Grizzel might indeed congratulate herself.

And Griselda became gradually more and more convinced that the only way as yet discovered of getting through hard tasks is to set to work and do them; also, that grumbling, as things are at present arranged in this world, does not always, nor I may say often, do good; furthermore, that an ill-tempered child is not, on the whole, likely to be as much loved as a good-tempered one; lastly, that if you wait long

enough, winter will go and spring will come.

For this was the case this year, after all! Spring had only been sleepy and lazy, and in such a case what could poor old winter do but fill the vacant post till she came? Why he should be so scolded and reviled for faithfully doing his best, as he often is, I really don't know. Not that all the ill words he gets have much effect on him—he comes again just as usual, whatever we say of or to him. I suppose his feelings have long ago been frozen up, or surely before this he would have taken offence—well for us that he has not done so!

But when the spring did come at last this year, it would be impossible for me to tell you how Griselda enjoyed it. It was like new life to her as well as to the plants, and flowers, and birds, and insects. Hitherto, you see, she had been able to see very little of the outside of her aunt's house; and charming as the inside was, the outside, I must say, was still "charminger." There seemed no end to the little up-and-down paths and alleys, leading to rustic seats and quaint arbours; no limits to the little pine-wood, down into which led the dearest little zig-zaggy path you ever saw, all bordered with snow-drops and primroses and violets, and later on with periwinkles, and wood anemones, and those bright, starry, white flowers, whose name no two people agree about.

This wood-path was the place, I think, which Griselda loved the best. The bowling-green was certainly very delightful, and so was the terrace where the famous roses grew; but lovely as the roses were (I am speaking just now, of course, of later on in the summer, when they were all in bloom), Griselda could not enjoy them as much as the wild-flowers, for she was forbidden to gather or touch them, except with her funny round nose!

"You may scent them, my dear," said Miss Grizzel, who was of opinion that smell was not a pretty word; "but I cannot allow anything more."

And Griselda did "scent" them, I assure you. She burrowed her whole rosy face in

the big ones; but gently, for she did not want to spoil them, both for her aunt's sake, and because, too, she had a greater regard for flowers now that she knew the secret of how they were painted, and what a great deal of trouble the butterflies take about them.

But after a while one grows tired of "scenting" roses; and even the trying to walk straight across the bowling-green with her eyes shut, from the arbour at one side to the arbour exactly like it at the other, grew stupid, though no doubt it would have been capital fun with a companion to applaud or criticize.

So the wood-path became Griselda's favourite haunt. As the summer grew on, she began to long more than ever for a companion—not so much for play, as for some one to play with. She had lessons, of course, just as many as in the winter; but with the long days, there seemed to come a quite unaccountable increase of play-time, and Griselda sometimes found it hang heavy on her hands. She had not seen or heard anything of the cuckoo either, save, of course, in his "official capacity" of time-teller, for a very long time.

"I suppose," she thought, "he thinks I don't need amusing, now that the fine days are come and I can play in the garden; and certainly, if I had any one to play with, the garden would be perfectly lovely."

But, failing companions, she did the best she could for herself, and this was why she loved the path down into the wood so much. There was a sort of mystery about it; it might have been the path leading to the cottage of Red-Ridinghood's grandmother, or a path leading to fairyland itself. There were all kinds of queer, nice, funny noises to be heard there—in one part of it especially, where Griselda made herself a seat of some moss-grown stones, and where she came so often that she got to know all the little flowers growing close round about, and even the particular birds whose nests were hard by.

She used to sit there and fancy—fancy that she heard the wood-elves chattering

under their breath, or the little underground gnomes and kobolds hammering at their fairy forges. And the tinkling of the brook in the distance sounded like the enchanted bells round the necks of the fairy kine, who are sent out to pasture sometimes on the upper world hillsides. For Griselda's head was crammed full, perfectly full, of fairy lore; and the mandarins' country, and butterfly-land, were quite as real to her as the every-day world about her.

But all this time she was not forgotten by the cuckoo, as you will see.

One day she was sitting in her favourite nest, feeling, notwithstanding the sunshine, and the flowers, and the soft sweet air, and the pleasant sounds all about, rather dull and lonely. For though it was only May, it was really quite a hot day, and Griselda had been all the morning at her lessons, and had tried very hard, and done them very well, and now she felt as if she deserved some reward. Suddenly in the distance, she heard a well-known sound, "Cuckoo, cuckoo."

"Can that be the cuckoo?" she said to herself; and in a moment she felt sure that it must be. For, for some reason that I do not know enough about the habits of real "flesh and blood" cuckoos to explain, that bird was not known in the neighbourhood where Griselda's aunts lived. Some twenty miles or so further south it was heard regularly, but all this spring Griselda had never caught the sound of its familiar note, and she now remembered hearing it never came to these parts.

So, "it must be my cuckoo," she said to herself. "He must be coming out to speak to me. How funny! I have never seen him by daylight."

She listened. Yes, again there it was, "Cuckoo, cuckoo," as plain as possible, and nearer than before.

"Cuckoo," cried Griselda, "do come and talk to me. It's such a long time since I have seen you, and I have nobody to play with."

But there was no answer. Griselda held her breath to listen, but there was nothing to be heard.

"Unkind cuckoo!" she exclaimed. "He is tricking me, I do believe; and to-day too, just when I was so dull and lonely."

The tears came into her eyes, and she was beginning to think herself very badly used, when suddenly a rustling in the bushes beside her made her turn round, more than half expecting to see the cuckoo himself. But it was not he. The rustling went on for a minute or two without anything making its appearance, for the bushes were pretty thick just there, and any one scrambling up from the pine-wood below would have had rather hard work to get through, and indeed for a very big person such a feat would have been altogether impossible.

It was not a very big person, however, who was causing all the rustling, and crunching of branches, and general commotion, which now absorbed Griselda's attention. She sat watching for another minute in perfect stillness, afraid of startling by the slightest movement the squirrel or rabbit or creature of some kind which she expected to see. At last—was that a squirrel or rabbit—that rosy, round face, with shaggy, fair hair falling over the eager blue eyes, and a general look of breathlessness and over-heatedness and determination?

A squirrel or a rabbit! No, indeed, but a very sturdy, very merry, very ragged little boy.

"Where are that cuckoo? Does you know?" were the first words he uttered, as soon as he had fairly shaken himself, though not by any means all his clothes, free of the bushes (for ever so many pieces of jacket and knickerbockers, not to speak of one boot and half his hat, had been left behind on the way), and found breath to say something.

Griselda stared at him for a moment without speaking, she was so astonished. It was months since she had spoken to a child, almost since she had seen one, and about children younger than herself she knew very little at any time, being the baby of the family at home, you see, and having only big brothers older than herself for

play-fellows.

"Who are you?" she said at last. "What's your name, and what do you want?"

"My name's Master Phil, and I want that cuckoo," answered the little boy. "He camed up this way. I'm sure he did, for he called me all the way."

"He's not here," said Griselda, shaking her head; "and this is my aunts' garden. No one is allowed to come here but friends of theirs. You had better go home; and you have torn your clothes so."

"This aren't a garden," replied the little fellow undauntedly, looking round him; "this are a wood. There are blue-bells and primroses here, and that shows it aren't a garden—not anybody's garden, I mean, with walls round, for nobody to come in."

"But it is," said Griselda, getting rather vexed. "If it isn't a garden it's grounds, private grounds, and nobody should come without leave. This path leads down to the wood, and there's a door in the wall at the bottom to get into the lane. You may go down that way, little boy. No one comes scrambling up the way you did."

"But I want to find the cuckoo," said the little boy. "I do so want to find the cuckoo."

His voice sounded almost as if he were going to cry, and his pretty, hot, flushed face puckered up. Griselda's heart smote her; she looked at him more carefully. He was such a very little boy, after all; she did not like to be cross to him.

"How old are you?" she asked.

"Five and a bit. I had a birthday after the summer, and if I'm good, nurse says perhaps I'll have one after next summer too. Do you ever have birthdays?" he went on, peering up at Griselda. "Nurse says she used to when she was young, but she never has any now."

"Have you a nurse?" asked Griselda, rather surprised; for, to tell the truth, from "Master Phil's" appearance, she had not felt at all sure what sort of little boy he was, or rather what sort of people he belonged to.

"Of course I have a nurse, and a mother too," said the little boy, opening wide his eyes in surprise at the question. "Haven't you? Perhaps you're too big, though. People leave off having nurses and mothers when they're big, don't they? Just like birthdays. But I won't. I won't never leave off having a mother, any way. I don't care so much about nurse and birthdays, not kite so much. Did you care when you had to leave off, when you got too big?"

"I hadn't to leave off because I got big," said Griselda sadly. "I left off when I was much littler than you," she went on, unconsciously speaking as Phil would best understand her. "My mother died."

"I'm werry sorry," said Phil; and the way in which he said it quite overcame Griselda's unfriendliness. "But perhaps you've a nice nurse. My nurse is rather nice; but she will 'cold me to-day, won't she?" he added, laughing, pointing to the terrible rents in his garments. "These are my very oldestest things; that's a good thing, isn't it? Nurse says I don't look like Master Phil in these, but when I have on my blue welpet, then I look like Master Phil. I shall have my blue welpet when mother comes."

"Is your mother away?" said Griselda.

"Oh yes, she's been away a long time; so nurse came here to take care of me at the farm-house, you know. Mother was ill, but she's better now, and some day she'll come too."

"Do you like being at the farm-house? Have you anybody to play with?" said Griselda.

Phil shook his curly head. "I never have anybody to play with," he said. "I'd like to play with you if you're not too big. And do you think you could help me to find the cuckoo?" he added insinuatingly.

"What do you know about the cuckoo?" said Griselda.

"BUT I MAY SEE YOU AGAIN," SAID PHIL "but i may see you again," said phil

"He called me," said Phil, "he called me lots of times; and to-day nurse was busy, so I thought I'd come. And do you know," he added mysteriously, "I do believe the cuckoo's a fairy, and when I find him I'm going to ask him to show me the way to fairyland."

"He says we must all find the way ourselves," said Griselda, quite forgetting to whom she was speaking.

"Does he?" cried Phil, in great excitement. "Do you know him, then? and have you asked him? Oh, do tell me."

Griselda recollected herself. "You couldn't understand," she said. "Some day perhaps I'll tell you—I mean if ever I see you again."

"But I may see you again," said Phil, settling himself down comfortably beside Griselda on her mossy stone. "You'll let me come, won't you? I like to talk about fairies, and nurse doesn't understand. And if the cuckoo knows you, perhaps that's why he called me to come to play with you."

"How did he call you?" asked Griselda.

"First," said Phil gravely, "it was in the night. I was asleep, and I had been wishing I had somebody to play with, and then I d'eamed of the cuckoo—such a nice d'eam. And when I woke up I heard him calling me, and I wasn't d'eaming then. And then when I was in the field he called me, but I couldn't find him, and nurse said 'Nonsense.' And to-day he called me again, so I camed up through the bushes. And mayn't I come again? Perhaps if we both tried together we could find the way to fairyland. Do you think we could?"

"I don't know," said Griselda, dreamily. "There's a great deal to learn first, the cuckoo says."

"Have you learnt a great deal?" (he called it "a gate deal") asked Phil, looking up at Griselda with increased respect. "I don't know scarcely nothing. Mother was ill such a long time before she went away, but I know she wanted me to learn to read books.

But nurse is too old to teach me."

"Shall I teach you?" said Griselda. "I can bring some of my old books and teach you here after I have done my own lessons."

"And then mother would be surprised when she comes back," said Master Phil, clapping his hands. "Oh, do. And when I've learnt to read a great deal, do you think the cuckoo would show us the way to fairyland?"

"I don't think it was that sort of learning he meant," said Griselda. "But I dare say that would help. I think," she went on, lowering her voice a little, and looking down gravely into Phil's earnest eyes, "I think he means mostly learning to be very good—very, very good, you know."

"Gooder than you?" said Phil.

"Oh dear, yes; lots and lots gooder than me," replied Griselda.

"I think you're very good," observed Phil, in a parenthesis. Then he went on with his cross-questioning.

"Gooder than mother?"

"I don't know your mother, so how can I tell how good she is?" said Griselda.

"I can tell you," said Phil, importantly. "She is just as good as—as good as—as good as good. That's what she is."

"You mean she couldn't be better," said Griselda, smiling.

"Yes, that'll do, if you like. Would that be good enough for us to be, do you think?"

"We must ask the cuckoo," said Griselda. "But I'm sure it would be a good thing for you to learn to read. You must ask your nurse to let you come here every afternoon that it's fine, and I'll ask my aunt."

"I needn't ask nurse," said Phil composedly; "she'll never know where I am, and I needn't tell her. She doesn't care what I do, except tearing my clothes; and when she scolds me, I don't care."

"That isn't good, Phil," said Griselda gravely. "You'll never be as good as good if you speak like that."

"What should I say, then? Tell me," said the little boy submissively.

"You should ask nurse to let you come to play with me, and tell her I'm much bigger than you, and I won't let you tear your clothes. And you should tell her you're very sorry you've torn them to-day."

"Very well," said Phil, "I'll say that. But, oh see!" he exclaimed, darting off, "there's a field mouse! If only I could catch him!"

Of course he couldn't catch him, nor could Griselda either; very ready, though, she was to do her best. But it was great fun all the same, and the children laughed heartily and enjoyed themselves tremendously. And when they were tired they sat down again and gathered flowers for nosegays, and Griselda was surprised to find how clever Phil was about it. He was much quicker than she at spying out the prettiest blossoms, however hidden behind tree, or stone, or shrub. And he told her of all the best places for flowers near by, and where grew the largest primroses and the sweetest violets, in a way that astonished her.

"You're such a little boy," she said; "how do you know so much about flowers?"

"I've had no one else to play with," he said innocently. "And then, you know, the fairies are so fond of them."

When Griselda thought it was time to go home, she led little Phil down the wood-path, and through the door in the wall opening on to the lane.

"Now you can find your way home without scrambling through any more bushes, can't you, Master Phil?" she said.

"Yes, thank you, and I'll come again to that place to-morrow afternoon, shall I?" asked Phil. "I'll know when—after I've had my dinner and raced three times round the big field, then it'll be time. That's how it was to-day."

"I should think it would do if you walked three times—or twice if you like—round the field. It isn't a good thing to race just when you've had your dinner," observed Griselda sagely. "And you mustn't try to come if it isn't fine, for my aunts won't let me go out if it rains even the tiniest bit. And of course you must ask your nurse's leave."

"Very well," said little Phil as he trotted off. "I'll try to remember all those things. I'm so glad you'll play with me again; and if you see the cuckoo, please thank him."

IX UP AND DOWN THE CHIMNEY

"Helper. Well, but if it was all dream, it would be the same as if it was all real, would it not?

Keeper. Yes, I see. I mean, Sir, I do not see."—A Liliput Revel.

N

ot having "just had her dinner," and feeling very much inclined for her tea, Griselda ran home at a great rate.

She felt, too, in such good spirits; it had been so delightful to have a companion in her play.

"What a good thing it was I didn't make Phil run away before I found out what a nice little boy he was," she said to herself. "I must look out my old reading books to-night. I shall so like teaching him, poor little boy, and the cuckoo will be pleased at my doing something useful, I'm sure."

Tea was quite ready, in fact waiting for her, when she came in. This was a meal she always had by herself, brought up on a tray to Dorcas's little sitting-room, where Dorcas waited upon her. And sometimes when Griselda was in a particularly good humour she would beg Dorcas to sit down and have a cup of tea with her—a liberty the old servant was far too dignified and respectful to have thought of taking, unless

specially requested to do so.

This evening, as you know, Griselda was in a very particularly good humour, and besides this, so very full of her adventures, that she would have been glad of an even less sympathising listener than Dorcas was likely to be.

"Sit down, Dorcas, and have some more tea, do," she said coaxingly. "It looks ever so much more comfortable, and I'm sure you could eat a little more if you tried, whether you've had your tea in the kitchen or not. I'm fearfully hungry, I can tell you. You'll have to cut a whole lot more bread and butter and not 'ladies' slices' either."

"How your tongue does go, to be sure, Miss Griselda," said Dorcas, smiling, as she seated herself on the chair Griselda had drawn in for her.

"And why shouldn't it?" said Griselda saucily. "It doesn't do it any harm. But oh, Dorcas, I've had such fun this afternoon—really, you couldn't guess what I've been doing."

"Very likely not, missie," said Dorcas.

"But you might try to guess. Oh no, I don't think you need—guessing takes such a time, and I want to tell you. Just fancy, Dorcas, I've been playing with a little boy in the wood."

"Playing with a little boy, Miss Griselda!" exclaimed Dorcas, aghast.

"Yes, and he's coming again to-morrow, and the day after, and every day, I dare say," said Griselda. "He is such a nice little boy."

"But, missie," began Dorcas.

"Well? What's the matter? You needn't look like that—as if I had done something naughty," said Griselda sharply.

"But you'll tell your aunt, missie?"

"Of course," said Griselda, looking up fearlessly into Dorcas's face with her bright

grey eyes. "Of course; why shouldn't I? I must ask her to give the little boy leave to come into our grounds; and I told the little boy to be sure to tell his nurse, who takes care of him, about his playing with me."

"His nurse," repeated Dorcas, in a tone of some relief. "Then he must be quite a little boy, perhaps Miss Grizzel would not object so much in that case."

"Why should she object at all? She might know I wouldn't want to play with a naughty rude boy," said Griselda.

"She thinks all boys rude and naughty, I'm afraid, missie," said Dorcas. "All, that is to say, excepting your dear papa. But then, of course, she had the bringing up of him in her own way from the beginning."

"Well, I'll ask her, any way," said Griselda, "and if she says I'm not to play with him, I shall think—I know what I shall think of Aunt Grizzel, whether I say it or not."

And the old look of rebellion and discontent settled down again on her rosy face.

"Be careful, missie, now do, there's a dear good girl," said Dorcas anxiously, an hour later, when Griselda, dressed as usual in her little white muslin frock, was ready to join her aunts at dessert.

But Griselda would not condescend to make any reply.

"Aunt Grizzel," she said suddenly, when she had eaten an orange and three biscuits and drunk half a glass of home-made elder-berry wine, "Aunt Grizzel, when I was out in the garden to-day—down the wood-path, I mean—I met a little boy, and he played with me, and I want to know if he may come every day to play with me."

Griselda knew she was not making her request in a very amiable or becoming manner; she knew, indeed, that she was making it in such a way as was almost certain to lead to its being refused; and yet, though she was really so very, very anxious to get leave to play with little Phil, she took a sort of spiteful pleasure in injuring her own cause.

How foolish ill-temper makes us! Griselda had allowed herself to get so angry at the thought of being thwarted that had her aunt looked up quietly and said at once, "Oh yes, you may have the little boy to play with you whenever you like," she would really, in a strange distorted sort of way, have been disappointed.

But, of course, Miss Grizzel made no such reply. Nothing less than a miracle could have made her answer Griselda otherwise than as she did. Like Dorcas, for an instant, she was utterly "flabbergasted," if you know what that means. For she was really quite an old lady, you know, and sensible as she was, things upset her much more easily than when she was younger.

Naughty Griselda saw her uneasiness, and enjoyed it.

"Playing with a boy!" exclaimed Miss Grizzel. "A boy in my grounds, and you, my niece, to have played with him!"

"Yes," said Griselda coolly, "and I want to play with him again."

"Griselda," said her aunt, "I am too astonished to say more at present. Go to bed."

"Why should I go to bed? It is not my bedtime," cried Griselda, blazing up. "What have I done to be sent to bed as if I were in disgrace?"

"Go to bed," repeated Miss Grizzel. "I will speak to you to-morrow."

"You are very unfair and unjust," said Griselda, starting up from her chair. "That's all the good of being honest and telling everything. I might have played with the little boy every day for a month and you would never have known, if I hadn't told you."

She banged across the room as she spoke, and out at the door, slamming it behind her rudely. Then upstairs like a whirlwind; but when she got to her own room, she sat down on the floor and burst into tears, and when Dorcas came up, nearly half an hour later, she was still in the same place, crouched up in a little heap, sobbing bitterly.

"Oh, missie, missie," said Dorcas, "it's just what I was afraid of!"

As Griselda rushed out of the room Miss Grizzel leant back in her chair and sighed deeply.

"Already," she said faintly. "She was never so violent before. Can one afternoon's companionship with rudeness have already contaminated her? Already, Tabitha—can it be so?"

"Already," said Miss Tabitha, softly shaking her head, which somehow made her look wonderfully like an old cat, for she felt cold of an evening and usually wore a very fine woolly shawl of a delicate grey shade, and the borders of her cap and the ruffles round her throat and wrists were all of fluffy, downy white—"already," she said.

"Yet," said Miss Grizzel, recovering herself a little, "it is true what the child said. She might have deceived us. Have I been hard upon her, Sister Tabitha?"

"Hard upon her! Sister Grizzel," said Miss Tabitha with more energy than usual; "no, certainly not. For once, Sister Grizzel, I disagree with you. Hard upon her! Certainly not."

But Miss Grizzel did not feel happy.

When she went up to her own room at night she was surprised to find Dorcas waiting for her, instead of the younger maid.

"I thought you would not mind having me, instead of Martha, to-night, ma'am," she said, "for I did so want to speak to you about Miss Griselda. The poor, dear young lady has gone to bed so very unhappy."

"But do you know what she has done, Dorcas?" said Miss Grizzel. "Admitted a boy, a rude, common, impertinent boy, into my precincts, and played with him—with a boy, Dorcas."

"Yes, ma'am," said Dorcas. "I know all about it, ma'am. Miss Griselda has told me

all. But if you would allow me to give an opinion, it isn't quite so bad. He's quite a little boy, ma'am—between five and six—only just about the age Miss Griselda's dear papa was when he first came to us, and, by all I can hear, quite a little gentleman."

"A little gentleman," repeated Miss Grizzel, "and not six years old! That is less objectionable than I expected. What is his name, as you know so much, Dorcas?"

"Master Phil," replied Dorcas. "That is what he told Miss Griselda, and she never thought to ask him more. But I'll tell you how we could get to hear more about him, I think, ma'am. From what Miss Griselda says, I believe he is staying at Mr. Crouch's farm, and that, you know, ma'am, belongs to my Lady Lavander, though it is a good way from Merrybrow Hall. My lady is pretty sure to know about the child, for she knows all that goes on among her tenants, and I remember hearing that a little gentleman and his nurse had come to Mr. Crouch's to lodge for six months."

Miss Grizzel listened attentively.

"Thank you, Dorcas," she said, when the old servant had left off speaking. "You have behaved with your usual discretion. I shall drive over to Merrybrow to-morrow, and make inquiry. And you may tell Miss Griselda in the morning what I purpose doing; but tell her also that, as a punishment for her rudeness and ill-temper, she must have breakfast in her own room to-morrow, and not see me till I send for her. Had she restrained her temper and explained the matter, all this distress might have been saved."

Dorcas did not wait till "to-morrow morning"; she could not bear to think of Griselda's unhappiness. From her mistress's room she went straight to the little girl's, going in very softly, so as not to disturb her should she be sleeping.

"Are you awake, missie?" she said gently.

Griselda started up.

"Yes," she exclaimed. "Is it you, cuckoo? I'm quite awake."

"Bless the child," said Dorcas to herself, "how her head does run on Miss Sybilla's cuckoo. It's really wonderful. There's more in such things than some people think."

But aloud she only replied—

"It's Dorcas, missie. No fairy, only old Dorcas come to comfort you a bit. Listen, missie. Your auntie is going over to Merrybrow Hall to-morrow to inquire about this little Master Phil from my Lady Lavander, for we think it's at one of her ladyship's farms that he and his nurse are staying, and if she hears that he's a nice-mannered little gentleman, and comes of good parents—why, missie, there's no saying but that you'll get leave to play with him as much as you like."

"But not to-morrow, Dorcas," said Griselda. "Aunt Grizzel never goes to Merrybrow till the afternoon. She won't be back in time for me to play with Phil to-morrow."

"No, but next day, perhaps," said Dorcas.

"Oh, but that won't do," said Griselda, beginning to cry again. "Poor little Phil will be coming up to the wood-path to-morrow, and if he doesn't find me, he'll be so unhappy—perhaps he'll never come again if I don't meet him to-morrow."

Dorcas saw that the little girl was worn out and excited, and not yet inclined to take a reasonable view of things.

"Go to sleep, missie," she said kindly, "and don't think anything more about it till to-morrow. It'll be all right, you'll see."

Her patience touched Griselda.

"You are very kind, Dorcas," she said. "I don't mean to be cross to you; but I can't bear to think of poor little Phil. Perhaps he'll sit down on my mossy stone and cry. Poor little Phil!"

But notwithstanding her distress, when Dorcas had left her she did feel her heart a little lighter, and somehow or other before long she fell asleep.

When she awoke it seemed to be suddenly, and she had the feeling that something

had disturbed her. She lay for a minute or two perfectly still—listening. Yes; there it was—the soft, faint rustle in the air that she knew so well. It seemed as if something was moving away from her.

"Cuckoo," she said gently, "is that you?"

A moment's pause, then came the answer—the pretty greeting she expected.

"Cuckoo, cuckoo," soft and musical. Then the cuckoo spoke.

"Well, Griselda" he said, "and how are you? It's a good while since we have had any fun together."

"That's not my fault," said Griselda sharply. She was not yet feeling quite as amiable as might have been desired, you see. "That's certainly not my fault," she repeated.

"I never said it was," replied the cuckoo. "Why will you jump at conclusions so? It's a very bad habit, for very often you jump over them, you see, and go too far. One should always walk up to conclusions, very slowly and evenly, right foot first, then left, one with another—that's the way to get where you want to go, and feel sure of your ground. Do you see?"

"I don't know whether I do or not, and I'm not going to speak to you if you go on at me like that. You might see I don't want to be lectured when I am so unhappy."

"What are you unhappy about?"

"About Phil, of course. I won't tell you, for I believe you know," said Griselda. "Wasn't it you that sent him to play with me? I was so pleased, and I thought it was very kind of you; but it's all spoilt now."

"But I heard Dorcas saying that your aunt is going over to consult my Lady Lavander about it," said the cuckoo. "It'll be all right; you needn't be in such low spirits about nothing."

"Were you in the room then?" said Griselda. "How funny you are, cuckoo. But it isn't all right. Don't you see, poor little Phil will be coming up the wood-path

to-morrow afternoon to meet me, and I won't be there! I can't bear to think of it."

"Is that all?" said the cuckoo. "It really is extraordinary how some people make troubles out of nothing! We can easily tell Phil not to come till the day after. Come along."

"Come along," repeated Griselda; "what do you mean?"

"Oh, I forgot," said the cuckoo. "You don't understand. Put out your hand. There, do you feel me?"

"Yes," said Griselda, stroking gently the soft feathers which seemed to be close under her hand. "Yes, I feel you."

"Well, then," said the cuckoo, "put your arms round my neck, and hold me firm. I'll lift you up."

"How can you talk such nonsense, cuckoo?" said Griselda. "Why, one of my little fingers would clasp your neck. How can I put my arms round it?"

"Try," said the cuckoo.

Somehow Griselda had to try.

She held out her arms in the cuckoo's direction, as if she expected his neck to be about the size of a Shetland pony's, or a large Newfoundland dog's; and, to her astonishment, so it was! A nice, comfortable, feathery neck it felt—so soft that she could not help laying her head down upon it, and nestling in the downy cushion.

"That's right," said the cuckoo.

Then he seemed to give a little spring, and Griselda felt herself altogether lifted on to his back. She lay there as comfortably as possible—it felt so firm as well as soft. Up he flew a little way—then stopped short.

"Are you all right?" he inquired. "You're not afraid of falling off?"

"Oh no," said Griselda; "not a bit."

"You needn't be," said the cuckoo, "for you couldn't if you tried. I'm going on, then."

"Where to?" said Griselda.

"Up the chimney first," said the cuckoo.

"But there'll never be room," said Griselda. "I might perhaps crawl up like a sweep, hands and knees, you know, like going up a ladder. But stretched out like this—it's just as if I were lying on a sofa—I couldn't go up the chimney."

"Couldn't you?" said the cuckoo. "We'll see. I intend to go, any way, and to take you with me. Shut your eyes—one, two, three—here goes—we'll be up the chimney before you know."

It was quite true. Griselda shut her eyes tight. She felt nothing but a pleasant sort of rush. Then she heard the cuckoo's voice, saying—

"Well, wasn't that well done? Open your eyes and look about you."

Griselda did so. Where were they?

They were floating about above the top of the house, which Griselda saw down below them, looking dark and vast. She felt confused and bewildered.

"Cuckoo," she said, "I don't understand. Is it I that have grown little, or you that have grown big?"

"Whichever you please," said the cuckoo. "You have forgotten. I told you long ago it is all a matter of fancy."

"Yes, if everything grew little together," persisted Griselda; "but it isn't everything. It's just you or me, or both of us. No, it can't be both of us. And I don't think it can be me, for if any of me had grown little all would, and my eyes haven't grown little, for everything looks as big as usual, only you a great deal bigger. My eyes can't have grown bigger without the rest of me, surely, for the moon looks just the same. And I must have grown little, or else we couldn't have got up the chimney. Oh, cuckoo, you have put all my thinking into such a muddle!"

"Never mind," said the cuckoo. "It'll show you how little consequence big and little

are of. Make yourself comfortable all the same. Are you all right? Shut your eyes if you like. I'm going pretty fast."

"Where to?" said Griselda.

"To Phil, of course," said the cuckoo. "What a bad memory you have! Are you comfortable?"

"Very, thank you," replied Griselda, giving the cuckoo's neck an affectionate hug as she spoke.

"That'll do, thank you. Don't throttle me, if it's quite the same to you," said the cuckoo. "Here goes—one, two, three," and off he flew again.

Griselda shut her eyes and lay still. It was delicious—the gliding, yet darting motion, like nothing she had ever felt before. It did not make her the least giddy, either; but a slightly sleepy feeling came over her. She felt no inclination to open her eyes; and, indeed, at the rate they were going, she could have distinguished very little had she done so.

Suddenly the feeling in the air about her changed. For an instant it felt more rushy than before, and there was a queer, dull sound in her ears. Then she felt that the cuckoo had stopped.

"Where are we?" she asked.

"We've just come down a chimney again," said the cuckoo. "Open your eyes and clamber down off my back, but don't speak loud, or you'll waken him, and that wouldn't do. There you are—the moonlight's coming in nicely at the window—you can see your way."

Griselda found herself in a little bed-room, quite a tiny one, and by the look of the simple furniture and the latticed window, she saw that she was not in a grand house. But everything looked very neat and nice, and on a little bed in one corner lay a lovely sleeping child. It was Phil! He looked so pretty asleep—his shaggy curls all

tumbling about, his rosy mouth half open as if smiling, one little hand tossed over his head, the other tight clasping a little basket which he had insisted on taking to bed with him, meaning as soon as he was dressed the next morning to run out and fill it with flowers for the little girl he had made friends with.

Griselda stepped up to the side of the bed on tiptoe. The cuckoo had disappeared, but Griselda heard his voice. It seemed to come from a little way up the chimney.

"Don't wake him," said the cuckoo, "but whisper what you want to say into his ear, as soon as I have called him. He'll understand; he's accustomed to my ways."

Then came the old note, soft and musical as ever—

"Cuckoo, cuckoo, cuckoo. Listen, Phil," said the cuckoo, and without opening his eyes a change passed over the little boy's face. Griselda could see that he was listening to hear her message.

"He thinks he's dreaming, I suppose," she said to herself with a smile. Then she whispered softly—

"Phil, dear, don't come to play with me to-morrow, for I can't come. But come the day after. I'll be at the wood-path then."

"Welly well," murmured Phil. Then he put out his two arms towards Griselda, all without opening his eyes, and she, bending down, kissed him softly.

"Phil's so sleepy," he whispered, like a baby almost. Then he turned over and went to sleep more soundly than before.

"That'll do," said the cuckoo. "Come along, Griselda."

Griselda obediently made her way to the place whence the cuckoo's voice seemed to come.

"Shut your eyes and put your arms round my neck again," said the cuckoo.

She did not hesitate this time. It all happened just as before. There came the same sort of rushy sound; then the cuckoo stopped, and Griselda opened her eyes.

They were up in the air again—a good way up, too, for some grand old elms that stood beside the farmhouse were gently waving their topmost branches a yard or two from where the cuckoo was poising himself and Griselda.

"Where shall we go to now?" he said. "Or would you rather go home? Are you tired?"

"Tired!" exclaimed Griselda. "I should rather think not. How could I be tired, cuckoo?"

"Very well, don't excite yourself about nothing, whatever you do," said the cuckoo. "Say where you'd like to go."

"How can I?" said Griselda. "You know far more nice places than I do."

"You don't care to go back to the mandarins, or the butterflies, I suppose?" asked the cuckoo.

"No, thank you," said Griselda; "I'd like something new. And I'm not sure that I care for seeing any more countries of that kind, unless you could take me to the real fairyland."

"I can't do that, you know," said the cuckoo.

Just then a faint "soughing" sound among the branches suggested another idea to Griselda.

"Cuckoo," she exclaimed, "take me to the sea. It's such a time since I saw the sea. I can fancy I hear it; do take me to see it."

X THE OTHER SIDE OF THE MOON

"That after supper time has come, And silver dews the meadow steep, And all is silent in the home, And even nurses are asleep, That be it late, or be it soon, Upon this lovely night in June They both will step into the moon."

V

ery well," said the cuckoo. "You would like to look about you a little on the way, perhaps, Griselda, as we shall not be going down chimneys, or anything of that kind just at present."

"Yes," said Griselda. "I think I should. I'm rather tired of shutting my eyes, and I'm getting quite accustomed to flying about with you, cuckoo."

"Turn on your side, then," said the cuckoo, "and you won't have to twist your neck to see over my shoulder. Are you comfortable now? And, by-the-by, as you may be cold, just feel under my left wing. You'll find the feather mantle there, that you had on once before. Wrap it round you. I tucked it in at the last moment, thinking you might want it."

"Oh, you dear, kind cuckoo!" cried Griselda. "Yes, I've found it. I'll tuck it all round me like a rug—that's it. I am so warm now, cuckoo."

"Here goes, then," said the cuckoo, and off they set. Had ever a little girl such a flight before? Floating, darting, gliding, sailing—no words can describe it. Griselda lay still in delight, gazing all about her.

"How lovely the stars are, cuckoo!" she said. "Is it true they're all great, big suns? I'd rather they weren't. I like to think of them as nice, funny little things."

"They're not all suns," said the cuckoo. "Not all those you're looking at now."

"I like the twinkling ones best," said Griselda. "They look so good-natured. Are they all twirling about always, cuckoo? Mr. Kneebreeches has just begun to teach me astronomy, and he says they are; but I'm not at all sure that he knows much about it."

"He's quite right all the same," replied the cuckoo.

"Oh dear me! How tired they must be, then!" said Griselda. "Do they never rest just for a minute?"

"Never."

"Why not?"

"Obeying orders," replied the cuckoo.

Griselda gave a little wriggle.

"What's the use of it?" she said. "It would be just as nice if they stood still now and then."

"Would it?" said the cuckoo. "I know somebody who would soon find fault if they did. What would you say to no summer; no day, or no night, whichever it happened not to be, you see; nothing growing, and nothing to eat before long? That's what it would be if they stood still, you see, because——"

"Thank you, cuckoo," interrupted Griselda. "It's very nice to hear you—I mean, very dreadful to think of, but I don't want you to explain. I'll ask Mr. Kneebreeches when I'm at my lessons. You might tell me one thing, however. What's at the other side of the moon?"

"There's a variety of opinions," said the cuckoo.

"What are they? Tell me the funniest."

"Some say all the unfinished work of the world is kept there," said the cuckoo.

"That's not funny," said Griselda. "What a messy place it must be! Why, even my unfinished work makes quite a heap. I don't like that opinion at all, cuckoo. Tell me another."

"I have heard," said the cuckoo, "that among the places there you would find the country of the little black dogs. You know what sort of creatures those are?"

"Yes, I suppose so," said Griselda, rather reluctantly.

"There are a good many of them in this world, as of course you know," continued the cuckoo. "But up there, they are much worse than here. When a child has made a great pet of one down here, I've heard tell the fairies take him up there when his parents and nurses think he's sleeping quietly in his bed, and make him work hard all night, with his own particular little black dog on his back. And it's so dreadfully

heavy—for every time he takes it on his back down here it grows a pound heavier up there—that by morning the child is quite worn out. I dare say you've noticed how haggered and miserable some ill-tempered children get to look—now you'll know the reason."

"Thank you, cuckoo," said Griselda again; "but I can't say I like this opinion about the other side of the moon any better than the first. If you please, I would rather not talk about it any more."

"Oh, but it's not so bad an idea after all," said the cuckoo. "Lots of children, they say, get quite cured in the country of the little black dogs. It's this way—for every time a child refuses to take the dog on his back down here it grows a pound lighter up there, so at last any sensible child learns how much better it is to have nothing to say to it at all, and gets out of the way of it, you see. Of course, there are children whom nothing would cure, I suppose. What becomes of them I really can't say. Very likely they get crushed into pancakes by the weight of the dogs at last, and then nothing more is ever heard of them."

"Horrid!" said Griselda, with a shudder. "Don't let's talk about it any more, cuckoo; tell me your own opinion about what there really is on the other side of the moon."

The cuckoo was silent for a moment. Then suddenly he stopped short in the middle of his flight.

"Would you like to see for yourself, Griselda?" he said. "There would be about time to do it," he added to himself, "and it would fulfil her other wish, too."

"See the moon for myself, do you mean?" cried Griselda, clasping her hands. "I should rather think I would. Will you really take me there, cuckoo?"

"To the other side," said the cuckoo. "I couldn't take you to this side."

"Why not? Not that I'd care to go to this side as much as to the other; for, of course, we can see this side from here. But I'd like to know why you couldn't take me there."

"For reasons," said the cuckoo drily. "I'll give you one if you like. If I took you to this side of the moon you wouldn't be yourself when you got there."

"Who would I be, then?"

"Griselda," said the cuckoo, "I told you once that there are a great many things you don't know. Now, I'll tell you something more. There are a great many things you're not intended to know."

"Very well," said Griselda. "But do tell me when you're going on again, and where you are going to take me to. There's no harm my asking that?"

"No," said the cuckoo. "I'm going on immediately, and I'm going to take you where you wanted to go to, only you must shut your eyes again, and lie perfectly still without talking, for I must put on steam—a good deal of steam—and I can't talk to you. Are you all right?"

"All right," said Griselda.

She had hardly said the words when she seemed to fall asleep. The rushing sound in the air all round her increased so greatly that she was conscious of nothing else. For a moment or two she tried to remember where she was, and where she was going, but it was useless. She forgot everything, and knew nothing more of what was passing till—till she heard the cuckoo again.

"Cuckoo, cuckoo; wake up, Griselda," he said.

Griselda sat up.

Where was she?

Not certainly where she had been when she went to sleep. Not on the cuckoo's back, for there he was standing beside her, as tiny as usual. Either he had grown little again, or she had grown big—which, she supposed, it did not much matter. Only it was very queer!

"Where am I, cuckoo?" she said.

"Where you wished to be," he replied. "Look about you and see."

Griselda looked about her. What did she see? Something that I can only give you a faint idea of, children; something so strange and unlike what she had ever seen before, that only in a dream could you see it as Griselda saw it. And yet why it seemed to her so strange and unnatural I cannot well explain; if I could, my words would be as good as pictures, which I know they are not.

After all, it was only the sea she saw; but such a great, strange, silent sea, for there were no waves. Griselda was seated on the shore, close beside the water's edge, but it did not come lapping up to her feet in the pretty, coaxing way that our sea does when it is in a good humour. There were here and there faint ripples on the surface, caused by the slight breezes which now and then came softly round Griselda's face, but that was all. King Canute might have sat "from then till now" by this still, lifeless ocean without the chance of reading his silly attendants a lesson—if, indeed, there ever were such silly people, which I very much doubt.

Griselda gazed with all her eyes. Then she suddenly gave a little shiver.

"What's the matter?" said the cuckoo. "You have the mantle on—you're not cold?"

"No," said Griselda, "I'm not cold; but somehow, cuckoo, I feel a little frightened. The sea is so strange, and so dreadfully big; and the light is so queer, too. What is the light, cuckoo? It isn't moonlight, is it?"

"Not exactly," said the cuckoo. "You can't both have your cake and eat it, Griselda. Look up at the sky. There's no moon there, is there?"

"No," said Griselda; "but what lots of stars, cuckoo. The light comes from them, I suppose? And where's the sun, cuckoo? Will it be rising soon? It isn't always like this up here, is it?"

"Bless you, no," said the cuckoo. "There's sun enough, and rather too much, sometimes. How would you like a day a fortnight long, and nights to match? If it had been daytime here just now, I couldn't have brought you. It's just about the very

middle of the night now, and in about a week of your days the sun will begin to rise, because, you see——"

"Oh, dear cuckoo, please don't explain!" cried Griselda. "I'll promise to ask Mr. Kneebreeches, I will indeed. In fact, he was telling me something just like it to-day or yesterday—which should I say?—at my astronomy lesson. And that makes it so strange that you should have brought me up here to-night to see for myself, doesn't it, cuckoo?"

"An odd coincidence," said the cuckoo.

"What would Mr. Kneebreeches think if I told him where I had been?" continued Griselda. "Only, you see, cuckoo, I never tell anybody about what I see when I am with you."

"No," replied the cuckoo; "better not. ('Not that you could if you tried,' he added to himself.) You're not frightened now, Griselda, are you?"

"No, I don't think I am," she replied. "But, cuckoo, isn't this sea awfully big?"

"Pretty well," said the cuckoo. "Just half, or nearly half, the size of the moon; and, no doubt, Mr. Kneebreeches has told you that the moon's diameter and circumference are respec——"

"Oh don't, cuckoo!" interrupted Griselda, beseechingly. "I want to enjoy myself, and not to have lessons. Tell me something funny, cuckoo. Are there any mermaids in the moon-sea?"

"Not exactly," said the cuckoo.

"What a stupid way to answer," said Griselda. "There's no sense in that; there either must be or must not be. There couldn't be half mermaids,"

"I don't know about that," replied the cuckoo. "They might have been here once and have left their tails behind them, like Bopeep's sheep, you know; and some day they might be coming to find them again, you know. That would do for 'not exactly,'

wouldn't it?"

"Cuckoo, you're laughing at me," said Griselda. "Tell me, are there any mermaids, or fairies, or water-sprites, or any of those sort of creatures here?"

"I must still say 'not exactly,'" said the cuckoo. "There are beings here, or rather there have been, and there may be again; but you, Griselda, can know no more than this."

His tone was rather solemn, and again Griselda felt a little "eerie."

"It's a dreadfully long way from home, any way," she said. "I feel as if, when I go back, I shall perhaps find I have been away fifty years or so, like the little boy in the fairy story. Cuckoo, I think I would like to go home. Mayn't I get on your back again?"

"Presently," said the cuckoo. "Don't be uneasy, Griselda. Perhaps I'll take you home by a short cut."

"Was ever any child here before?" asked Griselda, after a little pause.

"Yes," said the cuckoo.

"And did they get safe home again?"

"Quite," said the cuckoo. "It's so silly of you, Griselda, to have all these ideas still about far and near, and big and little, and long and short, after all I've taught you and all you've seen."

"I'm very sorry," said Griselda humbly; "but you see, cuckoo, I can't help it. I suppose I'm made so."

"Perhaps," said the cuckoo, meditatively.

He was silent for a minute. Then he spoke again. "Look over there, Griselda," he said. "There's the short cut."

Griselda looked. Far, far over the sea, in the silent distance, she saw a tiny speck of light. It was very tiny; but yet the strange thing was that, far away as it appeared, and

minute as it was, it seemed to throw off a thread of light to Griselda's very feet—right across the great sheet of faintly gleaming water. And as Griselda looked, the thread seemed to widen and grow, becoming at the same time brighter and clearer, till at last it lay before her like a path of glowing light.

"Am I to walk along there?" she said softly to the cuckoo.

"No," he replied; "wait."

Griselda waited, looking still, and presently in the middle of the shining streak she saw something slowly moving—something from which the light came, for the nearer it got to her the shorter grew the glowing path, and behind the moving object the sea looked no brighter than before it had appeared.

At last—at last, it came quite near—near enough for Griselda to distinguish clearly what it was.

It was a little boat—the prettiest, the loveliest little boat that ever was seen; and it was rowed by a little figure that at first sight Griselda felt certain was a fairy. For it was a child with bright hair and silvery wings, which with every movement sparkled and shone like a thousand diamonds.

Griselda sprang up and clapped her hands with delight. At the sound, the child in the boat turned and looked at her. For one instant she could not remember where she had seen him before; then she exclaimed, joyfully—

"It is Phil! Oh, cuckoo, it is Phil. Have you turned into a fairy, Phil?"

IT WAS ROWED BY A LITTLE FIGURE it was rowed by a little figure

But, alas, as she spoke the light faded away, the boy's figure disappeared, the sea and the shore and the sky were all as they had been before, lighted only by the faint, strange gleaming of the stars. Only the boat remained. Griselda saw it close to her, in the shallow water, a few feet from where she stood.

"Cuckoo," she exclaimed in a tone of reproach and disappointment, "where is Phil

gone? Why did you send him away?"

"I didn't send him away," said the cuckoo. "You don't understand. Never mind, but get into the boat. It'll be all right, you'll see."

"But are we to go away and leave Phil here, all alone at the other side of the moon?" said Griselda, feeling ready to cry.

"Oh, you silly girl!" said the cuckoo. "Phil's all right, and in some ways he has a great deal more sense than you, I can tell you. Get into the boat and make yourself comfortable; lie down at the bottom and cover yourself up with the mantle. You needn't be afraid of wetting your feet a little, moon water never gives cold. There, now."

Griselda did as she was told. She was beginning to feel rather tired, and it certainly was very comfortable at the bottom of the boat, with the nice warm feather-mantle well tucked round her.

"Who will row?" she said sleepily. "You can't, cuckoo, with your tiny little claws, you could never hold the oars, I'm——"

"Hush!" said the cuckoo; and whether he rowed or not Griselda never knew.

Off they glided somehow, but it seemed to Griselda that somebody rowed, for she heard the soft dip, dip of the oars as they went along, so regularly that she couldn't help beginning to count in time—one, two, three, four—on, on—she thought she had got nearly to a hundred, when——

XI "CUCKOO, CUCKOO, GOOD-BYE!"

"Children, try to be good! That is the end of all teaching; Easily understood, And very easy in preaching. And if you find it hard, Your efforts you need but double; Nothing deserves reward Unless it has given us trouble."

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hen she forgot everything, and fell fast, fast asleep, to wake, of course, in her own little bed as usual!

"One of your tricks again, Mr. Cuckoo," she said to herself with a smile. "However, I don't mind. It was a short cut home, and it was very comfortable in the boat, and I certainly saw a great deal last night, and I'm very much obliged to you—particularly for making it all right with Phil about not coming to play with me to-day. Ah! that reminds me, I'm in disgrace. I wonder if Aunt Grizzel will really make me stay in my room all day. How tired I shall be, and what will Mr. Kneebreeches think! But it serves me right. I was very cross and rude."

There came a tap at the door. It was Dorcas with the hot water.

"Good morning, missie," she said gently, not feeling, to tell the truth, very sure as to what sort of a humour "missie" was likely to be found in this morning. "I hope you've slept well."

"Exceedingly well, thank you, Dorcas. I've had a delightful night," replied Griselda amiably, smiling to herself at the thought of what Dorcas would say if she knew where she had been, and what she had been doing since last she saw her.

"That's good news," said Dorcas in a tone of relief; "and I've good news for you, too, missie. At least, I hope you'll think it so. Your aunt has ordered the carriage for quite early this morning—so you see she really wants to please you, missie, about playing with little Master Phil; and if to-morrow's a fine day, we'll be sure to find some way of letting him know to come."

"Thank you, Dorcas. I hope it will be all right, and that Lady Lavander won't say anything against it. I dare say she won't. I feel ever so much happier this morning, Dorcas; and I'm very sorry I was so rude to Aunt Grizzel, for of course I know I should obey her."

"That's right, missie," said Dorcas approvingly.

"It seems to me, Dorcas," said Griselda dreamily, when, a few minutes later, she was

standing by the window while the old servant brushed out her thick, wavy hair, "it seems to me, Dorcas, that it's all 'obeying orders' together. There's the sun now, just getting up, and the moon just going to bed—they are always obeying, aren't they? I wonder why it should be so hard for people—for children, at least."

"To be sure, missie, you do put it a way of your own," replied Dorcas, somewhat mystified; "but I see how you mean, I think, and it's quite true. And it is a hard lesson to learn."

"I want to learn it well, Dorcas," said Griselda, resolutely. "So will you please tell Aunt Grizzel that I'm very sorry about last night, and I'll do just as she likes about staying in my room or anything. But, if she would let me, I'd far rather go down and do my lessons as usual for Mr. Kneebreeches. I won't ask to go out in the garden; but I would like to please Aunt Grizzel by doing my lessons very well."

Dorcas was both delighted and astonished. Never had she known her little "missie" so altogether submissive and reasonable.

"I only hope the child's not going to be ill," she said to herself. But she proved a skilful ambassadress, notwithstanding her misgivings; and Griselda's imprisonment confined her only to the bounds of the house and terrace walk, instead of within the four walls of her own little room, as she had feared.

Lessons were very well done that day, and Mr. Kneebreeches' report was all that could be wished.

"I am particularly gratified," he remarked to Miss Grizzel, "by the intelligence and interest Miss Griselda displays with regard to the study of astronomy, which I have recently begun to give her some elementary instruction in. And, indeed, I have no fault to find with the way in which any of the young lady's tasks are performed."

"I am extremely glad to hear it," replied Miss Grizzel graciously, and the kiss with which she answered Griselda's request for forgiveness was a very hearty one.

And it was "all right" about Phil.

Lady Lavander knew all about him; his father and mother were friends of hers, for whom she had a great regard, and for some time she had been intending to ask the little boy to spend the day at Merrybrow Hall, to be introduced to her god-daughter Griselda. So, of course, as Lady Lavander knew all about him, there could be no objection to his playing in Miss Grizzel's garden!

And "to-morrow" turned out a fine day. So altogether you can imagine that Griselda felt very happy and light-hearted as she ran down the wood-path to meet her little friend, whose rosy face soon appeared among the bushes.

"What did you do yesterday, Phil?" asked Griselda. "Were you sorry not to come to play with me?"

"No," said Phil mysteriously, "I didn't mind. I was looking for the way to fairyland to show you, and I do believe I've found it. Oh, it is such a pretty way."

Griselda smiled.

"I'm afraid the way to fairyland isn't so easily found," she said. "But I'd like to hear about where you went. Was it far?"

"A good way," said Phil. "Won't you come with me? It's in the wood. I can show you quite well, and we can be back by tea-time."

"Very well," said Griselda; and off they set.

Whether it was the way to fairyland or not, it was not to be wondered at that little Phil thought so. He led Griselda right across the wood to a part where she had never been before. It was pretty rough work part of the way. The children had to fight with brambles and bushes, and here and there to creep through on hands and knees, and Griselda had to remind Phil several times of her promise to his nurse that his clothes should not be the worse for his playing with her, to prevent his scrambling through "anyhow" and leaving bits of his knickerbockers behind him.

But when at last they reached Phil's favourite spot all their troubles were forgotten.

Oh, how pretty it was! It was a sort of tiny glade in the very middle of the wood—a little green nest enclosed all round by trees, and right through it the merry brook came rippling along as if rejoicing at getting out into the sunlight again for a while. And all the choicest and sweetest of the early summer flowers seemed to be collected here in greater variety and profusion than in any other part of the wood.

"Isn't it nice?" said Phil, as he nestled down beside Griselda on the soft, mossy grass. "It must have been a fairies' garden some time, I'm sure, and I shouldn't wonder if one of the doors into fairyland is hidden somewhere here, if only we could find it."

"If only!" said Griselda. "I don't think we shall find it, Phil; but, any way, this is a lovely place you've found, and I'd like to come here very often."

Then at Phil's suggestion they set to work to make themselves a house in the centre of this fairies' garden, as he called it. They managed it very much to their own satisfaction, by dragging some logs of wood and big stones from among the brushwood hard by, and filling the holes up with bracken and furze.

"And if the fairies do come here," said Phil, "they'll be very pleased to find a house all ready, won't they?"

Then they had to gather flowers to ornament the house inside, and dry leaves and twigs all ready for a fire in one corner. Altogether it was quite a business, I can assure you, and when it was finished they were very hot and very tired and rather dirty. Suddenly a thought struck Griselda.

"Phil," she said, "it must be getting late."

"Past tea-time?" he said coolly.

"I dare say it is. Look how low down the sun has got. Come, Phil, we must be quick. Where is the place we came out of the wood at?"

"Here," said Phil, diving at a little opening among the bushes.

Griselda followed him. He had been a good guide hitherto, and she certainly could

not have found her way alone. They scrambled on for some way, then the bushes suddenly seemed to grow less thick, and in a minute they came out upon a little path.

"Phil," said Griselda, "this isn't the way we came."

"Isn't it?" said Phil, looking about him. "Then we must have comed the wrong way."

"I'm afraid so," said Griselda, "and it seems to be so late already. I'm so sorry, for Aunt Grizzel will be vexed, and I did so want to please her. Will your nurse be vexed, Phil?"

"I don't care if she are," replied Phil valiantly.

"You shouldn't say that, Phil. You know we shouldn't have stayed so long playing."

"Nebber mind," said Phil. "If it was mother I would mind. Mother's so good, you don't know. And she never 'colds me, except when I am naughty—so I do mind."

"She wouldn't like you to be out so late, I'm sure," said Griselda in distress, "and it's most my fault, for I'm the biggest. Now, which way shall we go?"

They had followed the little path till it came to a point where two roads, rough cart-ruts only, met; or, rather, where the path ran across the road. Right, or left, or straight on, which should it be? Griselda stood still in perplexity. Already it was growing dusk; already the moon's soft light was beginning faintly to glimmer through the branches. Griselda looked up to the sky.

"To think," she said to herself—"to think that I should not know my way in a little bit of a wood like this—I that was up at the other side of the moon last night."

The remembrance put another thought into her mind.

"Cuckoo, cuckoo," she said softly, "couldn't you help us?"

Then she stood still and listened, holding Phil's cold little hands in her own.

She was not disappointed. Presently, in the distance, came the well-known cry, "cuckoo, cuckoo," so soft and far away, but yet so clear.

Phil clapped his hands.

"He's calling us," he cried joyfully. "He's going to show us the way. That's how he calls me always. Good cuckoo, we're coming;" and, pulling Griselda along, he darted down the road to the right—the direction from whence came the cry.

They had some way to go, for they had wandered far in a wrong direction, but the cuckoo never failed them. Whenever they were at a loss—whenever the path turned or divided, they heard his clear, sweet call; and, without the least misgiving, they followed it, till at last it brought them out upon the high-road, a stone's throw from Farmer Crouch's gate.

"I know the way now, good cuckoo," exclaimed Phil. "I can go home alone now, if your aunt will be vexed with you."

"No," said Griselda, "I must take you quite all the way home, Phil dear. I promised to take care of you, and if nurse scolds any one it must be me, not you."

There was a little bustle about the door of the farm-house as the children wearily came up to it. Two or three men were standing together receiving directions from Mr. Crouch himself, and Phil's nurse was talking eagerly. Suddenly she caught sight of the truants.

"Here he is, Mr. Crouch!" she exclaimed. "No need now to send to look for him. Oh, Master Phil, how could you stay out so late? And to-night of all nights, just when your——I forgot, I mustn't say. Come in to the parlour at once—and this little girl, who is she?"

"She isn't a little girl, she's a young lady," said Master Phil, putting on his lordly air, "and she's to come into the parlour and have some supper with me, and then some one must take her home to her auntie's house—that's what I say."

More to please Phil than from any wish for "supper," for she was really in a fidget to get home, Griselda let the little boy lead her into the parlour. But she was for a moment perfectly startled by the cry that broke from him when he opened the door and looked into the room. A lady was standing there, gazing out of the window,

though in the quickly growing darkness she could hardly have distinguished the little figure she was watching for so anxiously.

The noise of the door opening made her look round.

"Phil," she cried, "my own little Phil; where have you been to? You didn't know I was waiting here for you, did you?"

"Mother, mother!" shouted Phil, darting into his mother's arms.

But Griselda drew back into the shadow of the doorway, and tears filled her eyes as for a minute or two she listened to the cooings and caressings of the mother and son.

Only for a minute, however. Then Phil called to her.

"Mother, mother," he cried again, "you must kiss Griselda, too! She's the little girl that is so kind, and plays with me; and she has no mother," he added in a lower tone.

The lady put her arm round Griselda, and kissed her, too. She did not seem surprised.

"I think I know about Griselda," she said very kindly, looking into her face with her gentle eyes, blue and clear like Phil's.

And then Griselda found courage to say how uneasy she was about the anxiety her aunts would be feeling, and a messenger was sent off at once to tell of her being safe at the farm.

But Griselda herself the kind lady would not let go till she had had some nice supper with Phil, and was both warmed and rested.

"And what were you about, children, to lose your way?" she asked presently.

"I took Griselda to see a place that I thought was the way to fairyland, and then we stayed to build a house for the fairies, in case they come, and then we came out at the wrong side, and it got dark," explained Phil.

"And was it the way to fairyland?" asked his mother, smiling.

Griselda shook her head as she replied—

"Phil doesn't understand yet," she said gently. "He isn't old enough. The way to the true fairyland is hard to find, and we must each find it for ourselves, mustn't we?"

She looked up in the lady's face as she spoke, and saw that she understood.

"Yes, dear child," she answered softly, and perhaps a very little sadly. "But Phil and you may help each other, and I perhaps may help you both."

Griselda slid her hand into the lady's. "You're not going to take Phil away, are you?" she whispered.

"No, I have come to stay here," she answered; "and Phil's father is coming too, soon. We are going to live at the White House—the house on the other side of the wood, on the way to Merrybrow. Are you glad, children?"

Griselda had a curious dream that night—merely a dream, nothing else. She dreamt that the cuckoo came once more; this time, he told her, to say "good-bye."

"For you will not need me now," he said. "I leave you in good hands, Griselda. You have friends now who will understand you—friends who will help you both to work and to play. Better friends than the mandarins, or the butterflies, or even than your faithful old cuckoo."

And when Griselda tried to speak to him, to thank him for his goodness, to beg him still sometimes to come to see her, he gently fluttered away. "Cuckoo, cuckoo, cuckoo," he warbled; but somehow the last "cuckoo" sounded like "good-bye."

In the morning, when Griselda awoke, her pillow was wet with tears. Thus many stories end. She was happy, very happy in the thought of her kind new friends; but there were tears for the one she felt she had said farewell to, even though he was only a cuckoo in a clock.

THE CASTLE IN THE LOUGH

THE CASTLE IN THE LOUGH

A LEGEND OF DONEGAL

F

ather," little Dermot would say, "tell me something more about the castle in the lough."

Dermot M'Swyne was a little lad, with blue soft eyes and bright fair hair. He was the only son of Brian, the chief of the M'Swynes, and people used sometimes to say scornfully that he was a poor puny son to come of such a father, for he was not big and burly, as a M'Swyne ought to be, but slim and fair, and like a girl. However, Brian M'Swyne loved his fair-haired boy, and would have given up most other pleasures in the world for the pleasure of having the little fellow by his side and listening to his prattling voice. He was like his mother, those said who remembered the blue-eyed stranger whom Brian M'Swyne had brought home ten years before as his wife to Doe Castle, in Donegal, and who had pined there for a few years and then died; and perhaps it was for her sake that the child was so dear to the rough old chief. He was never tired of having the little lad beside him, and many a time he would carry him about and cradle him in his arms, and pass his big fingers through the boy's golden curls, and let the little hands play with his beard.

Sitting together in the firelight on winter nights, while the peat fire was burning on the floor, and the wind, sweeping across Lough Eske, went wailing round the castle walls and sighing in the leafless trees, the boy would often get his father to tell him stories of the country-side. There were many strange legends treasured up in the memories of all old inhabitants of the place, wild stories of enchantments, or of fairies or banshees; and little Dermot would never tire of listening to these tales. Sometimes, when he had heard some only half-finished story, he would go dreaming on and on to himself about it, till he had woven an ending, or a dozen endings, to it in his own brain.

But of all the tales to which he used to listen there was one that perhaps, more than any other, he liked to hear—the story of the enchanted castle swallowed up by Lough Belshade. There, down beneath the waters of the dark lough, into which he had looked so often, was the castle standing still, its gates and towers and walls all perfect, just as it had stood upon the earth, the very fires still alight that had been burning on its hearths, and—more wonderful than all—the people who had been sunk in it, though fixed and motionless in their enchanted sleep, alive too. It was a wonder of wonders; the child was never tired of thinking of it, and dreaming of the time in which the enchantment should be broken, and of the person who should break it; for, strangest of all, the story said that they must sleep until a M'Swyne should come and wake them. But what M'Swyne would do it? And how was it to be done? "Father," little Dermot would say, "tell me something more about the enchanted castle in the lough."

The legend was thus: On the shores of the desolate lough there had once stood a great castle, where lived a beautiful maiden called Eileen. Her father was the chieftain of a clan, and she was his only child. Many young lovers sought her, but she cared for none of them. At last there came to the castle a noble-looking knight. He had traveled from a far country, he said, and he began soon to tell wonderful stories to Eileen of the beauty and the richness of that land of his; how the skies there were always blue, and the sun always shone, and lords and ladies lived, not in rough stone-hewn castles like these, but in palaces all bright with marbles and precious stones; and how their lives were all a long delight, with music and dancing and all pleasant things.

Eileen listened while he told these tales to her, till she began to long to see his country; and her heart yearned for something brighter and better than the sombre life she led by the shores of the dark lough; and so when, after a time, the knight one day told her that he loved her, she gave him her promise to go to his home with him and marry him.

She was very contented for a little while after she had promised to be the knight's wife, and spent nearly all her time in talking to her lover and in picturing to herself the new and beautiful things that she was going to see. She was very happy, on the whole; though now and then, to tell the truth, as time went on, she began to be a little puzzled and surprised by certain things that the knight did, and certain odd habits that he had; for, in fact, he had some very odd habits, indeed, and, charming and handsome as he was, conducted himself occasionally in really quite a singular way.

For instance, it was a curious fact that he never could bear the sight of a dog; and if ever one came near him (and as there were a good many dogs about the castle, it was quite impossible to keep them from coming near him now and then) he would set his teeth, and rise slowly from his seat, and begin to make a low hissing noise, craning his neck forward, and swelling and rounding his back in such an extraordinary way that the first time Eileen saw him doing it she thought he was going to have a fit, and was quite alarmed.

"Oh, dear, I—I'm afraid you're ill!" she exclaimed, getting upon her feet and feeling very uneasy.

"No, no, it's only—it's only—the dog," gasped the knight, gripping his seat with both hands, as if it needed the greatest effort to keep himself still. "Hiss—s—s—s! I've such a terrible dislike to dogs. It's—it's in my family," said the poor young man; and he could not recover his composure at all till the little animal that had disturbed him was carried away.

Then he had such a strange fashion of amusing himself in his own room where he slept. It was a spacious room, hung all round with arras; and often, after the household had gone to bed, those who slept nearest to the knight were awakened out of their sleep by the noise he made in running up and down, and here and there; scudding about over the floor, and even—as far as could be guessed by the

sounds—clambering up the walls, just as though, instead of being a gracious high-bred young gentleman, he had been the veriest tomboy.

"I fear, Sir Knight, you do not always rest easily in your apartment," Eileen's old father said to him one morning after he had been making even more disturbance of this sort than usual. "We have rough ways here in the North, and perhaps the arrangement of your sleeping quarters is not exactly to your liking?"

But the knight, when he began to say this, interrupted him hastily, and declared that he had never slept more comfortably in any room in his life, or more peacefully, he said; he was seldom conscious of even so much as awakening once. Of course, when he said this, Eileen and her father could only open their eyes, and come to the conclusion that the poor young knight was a somnambulist, and afflicted with the habit of running and leaping in his sleep.

Again, too, out-of-doors, it was very odd how it affected him to hear the birds sing. Whenever they began their songs, all sorts of nervous twitchings would come over him, and he would lick his lips and make convulsive movements with his hands; and his attention would become so distracted that he would quite lose the thread of his discourse if he were talking, or the thread of Eileen's, if she were talking to him. "It is because I enjoy hearing them so much," he said once; and of course when he said so Eileen could only believe him; yet she could not help wishing he would show his pleasure in some other way than this curious one of setting his teeth and rolling his eyes, and looking much more as if he wanted to eat the birds than to listen to them.

Still, in spite of these and a good many other peculiarities, the young knight was very charming, and Eileen was very fond of him. They used to spend the happiest days together, wandering about the wild and beautiful country, often sitting for hours on the rocky shores of the dark lough, looking into the deep still water at their feet. It was a wild, romantic, lonely place, shut out from the sunlight by great granite cliffs that threw their dark weird shadows over it.

"Do you know there is a prophecy that our castle shall stand one day here in the middle of the lough?" Eileen said, laughing, once. "I don't know how it is to be done, but we are to be planted somehow in the middle of the water. That is what the people say. I shouldn't like to live here then. How gloomy it would be to have those great shadows always over us!" and the girl shivered a little, and stole her hand into her lover's, and they began to talk about the far different place where she should live; his beautiful palace, far away in the sunny country beyond the sea. She was never weary of hearing about the new place and new life that she was going to, and all the beauty and happiness that were going to be hers.

So time went on, until at last the day before the marriage-day came. Eileen had been showing her lover all her ornaments; she had a great number of very precious ones, and, to please him and amuse herself, she had been putting them all on, loading herself with armlets, and bracelets, and heavy chains of gold, such as the old Irish princesses used to wear, till she looked as gorgeous as a princess herself.

It was a sunny summer day, and she sat thinking to herself, "My married life will begin so soon now—the new, beautiful, strange life—and I will wear these ornaments in the midst of it; but where everything else is so lovely, will he think me then as lovely as he does now?"

Presently she glanced up, with a little shyness and a little vanity, just to see if he was looking at and thinking of her; but as she lifted up her head, instead of finding that his eyes were resting on her, she found——

Well, she found that the knight was certainly not thinking of her one bit. He was sitting staring fixedly at one corner of the apartment, with his lips working in the oddest fashion; twitching this way and that, and parting and showing his teeth, while he was clawing with his hands the chair on which he sat.

"Dear me!" said Eileen rather sharply and pettishly, "what is the matter with you?"

Eileen spoke pretty crossly; for as she had on various previous occasions seen the

knight conduct himself in this sort of way, her feeling was less of alarm at the sight of him than simply of annoyance that at this moment, when she herself had been thinking of him so tenderly, he could be giving his attention to any other thing. "What is the matter with you?" she said; and she raised herself in her chair and turned round her head to see if she could perceive anything worth looking at in that corner into which the knight was staring almost as if the eyes would leap out of his head.

"Why, there's nothing there but a mouse!" she said contemptuously, when she had looked and listened for a moment, and heard only a little faint scratching behind the tapestry.

"No, no, I believe not; oh, no, nothing but a mouse," replied the knight hurriedly; but still he did not take his eyes from the spot, and he moved from side to side in his chair, and twitched his head from right to left, and looked altogether as if he hardly knew what he was about.

"And I am sure a mouse is a most harmless thing," said Eileen.

"Harmless? Oh! delicious!" replied the knight, with so much unction that Eileen, in her turn, opened her eyes and stared. "Delicious! quite delicious!" murmured the knight again.

But after a moment or two more, all at once he seemed to recollect himself, and made a great effort, and withdrew his eyes from the corner where the mouse was still making a little feeble scratching.

"I mean a—a most interesting animal," he said. "I have always felt with regard to mice——"

But just at this instant the mouse poked out his little head from beneath the tapestry, and the knight leaped to his feet as if he was shot.

"Hiss—s—s! skier—r—r! hiss—s—s—s!" he cried; and—could Eileen believe her eyes?—for one instant she saw the knight flash past her, and then there was nothing

living in the room besides her but a great black cat clinging by his claws half-way up the arras, and a little brown mouse between his teeth.

Of course the only thing that Eileen could do was to faint, and so she fainted, and it was six hours before she came to herself again. In the mean time nobody in the world knew what had happened; and when she opened her eyes and began to cry out about a terrible black cat, they all thought she had gone out of her mind.

"My dear child, I assure you there is no such thing in the house as a black cat," her father said uneasily to her, trying to soothe her in the best way he could.

"Oh, yes, he turned into a black cat," cried Eileen.

"Who turned into a black cat?" asked her father.

"The knight did," sobbed Eileen.

And then the poor old father went out of the room, thinking that his daughter was going mad.

"She is quite beside herself; she says that you are not a man, but a cat," he said sorrowfully to the young knight, whom he met standing outside his daughter's room. "What in the world could have put such thoughts into her head? Not a thing will she talk about but black cats."

"Let me see her; I will bring her to her right mind," said the knight.

"I doubt it very much," replied the chief; but as he did not know what else to do, he let him go into the room, and the knight went in softly and closed the door, and went up to the couch on which Eileen lay. She lay with her eyes closed, and with all her gold chains still upon her neck and arms; and the knight, because he trod softly, had come quite up to her side before she knew that he was there. But the moment she opened her eyes and saw him, she gave such a scream that it quite made him leap; and if he had not bolted the door every creature in the castle would have rushed into the room at the sound of it. Fortunately for him, however, he had bolted the door;

and as it was a very stout door, made of strong oak, Eileen might have screamed for an hour before anybody could have burst it open. As soon, therefore, as the knight had recovered from the start she gave him, he quietly took a chair and sat down by her side.

"Eileen," he said, beginning to speak at once—for probably he felt that the matter he had come to mention was rather a painful and a delicate one, and the more quickly he could get over what he had to say the better—"Eileen, you have unhappily to-day seen me under—ahem!—under an unaccustomed shape——"

He had only got so far as this, when Eileen gave another shriek and covered her face with her hands.

"I say," repeated the knight, in a tone of some annoyance, and raising his voice, for Eileen was making such a noise that it was really necessary to speak pretty loudly—"I say you have unfortunately seen me to-day under a shape that you were not prepared for; but I have come, my love, to assure you that the—transformation—was purely accidental—a mere blunder of a moment—an occurrence that shall never be repeated in your sight. Look up to me again, Eileen, and do not let this eve of our marriage-day——"

But what the knight had got to say about the eve of their marriage-day Eileen never heard, for as soon as he had reached these words she gave another shriek so loud that he jumped upon his seat.

"Do you think that I will ever marry a black cat?" cried Eileen, fixing her eyes with a look of horror on his face.

"Eileen, take care!" exclaimed the knight sternly. "Take care how you anger me, or it will be the worse for you."

"The worse for me! Do you think I am afraid of you?" said Eileen with her eyes all flashing, for she had a high enough spirit, and was not going to allow herself to be forced to marry a black cat, let the knight say what he would. She rose from her

couch and would have sprung to the ground, if all at once the knight had not bent forward and taken her by her hand.

"Eileen," said the knight, holding her fast and looking into her face, "Eileen, will you be my wife?"

"I would sooner die!" cried Eileen.

"Eileen," cried the knight passionately, "I love you! Do not break your promise to me. Forget what you have seen. I am a powerful magician. I will make you happy. I will give you all you want. Be my wife."

"Never!" cried Eileen.

"Then you have sealed your fate!" exclaimed the knight fiercely; and suddenly he rose and extended his arms, and said some strange words that Eileen did not understand; and all at once it appeared to her as if some thick white pall were spreading over her, and her eyelids began to close, and involuntarily she sank back.

Once more, but as if in a dream, she heard the knight's voice.

"If you do not become my wife," he said, "you shall never be the wife of any living man. The black cat can hold his own. Sleep here till another lover comes to woo you."

A mocking laugh rang through the room—and then Eileen heard no more. It seemed to her that her life was passing away. A strange feeling came to her, as if she were sinking through the air; there was a sound in her ears of rushing water; and then all recollection and all consciousness ceased.

Some travelers passing that evening by the lough gazed at the spot on which the castle had stood, and rubbed their eyes in wild surprise, for there was no castle there, but only a bare tract of desolate, waste ground. The prophecy had been fulfilled; the castle had been lifted up from its foundation and sunk in the waters of the lough.

This was the story that Dermot used to listen to as he sat in his father's hall on winter

nights—a wild old story, very strange, and sweet too, as well as strange. For they were living still, the legend always said—the chief and his household, and beautiful Eileen; not dead at all, but only sleeping an enchanted sleep, till some one of the M'Swynes should come and kill the black cat who guarded them, and set them free. Under those dark, deep waters, asleep for three hundred years, lay Eileen, with all her massive ornaments on her neck and arms, and red-gold Irish hair. How often did the boy think of her, and picture to himself the motionless face, with its closed, waiting eyes, and yearn to see it. Asleep there for three hundred years! His heart used to burn at the imagination. In all these centuries had no M'Swyne been found bold enough to find the black cat and kill him? Could it be so hard a thing to kill a black cat? the little fellow thought.

"I'd kill him myself if only I had the chance," he said one day; and when he said that his father laughed.

"Ay, my lad, you might kill him if you had the chance—but how would you get the chance?" he asked him. "Do you think the magician would be fool enough to leave his watch over the lough and put himself in your way? Kill him? Yes, we could any of us kill him if we could catch him; but three hundred years have passed away and nobody has ever caught him yet."

"Well, I may do it some day, when I am grown a man," Dermot said.

So he went on dreaming over the old legend, and weaving out of his own brain an ending to it. What if it should be, indeed, his lot to awake Eileen from her enchanted sleep? He used to wander often by the shores of the dark little lough and gaze into the shadowy waters. Many a time, too, he would sail across them, leaning down over his boat's side, to try in vain to catch some glimpse of the buried castle's walls or towers. Once or twice—it might have been mere fancy—it seemed to him as if he saw some dark thing below the surface, and he would cry aloud, "The cat! I see the black cat!" But they only laughed at him when he returned home and said this. "It

was only a big fish at the bottom of the water, my boy," his father would reply.

When he was a boy he talked of this story often and was never weary of asking questions concerning it; but presently, as he grew older, he grew more reserved and shy, and when he spoke about Eileen the color used to come into his cheek. "Why, boy, are you falling in love with her?" his father said to him one day. "Are there not unbewitched maidens enough to please you on the face of the earth, but you must take a fancy to a bewitched one lying asleep at the bottom of the lough?" and he laughed aloud at him. After that day Dermot never spoke of Eileen in his father's hearing. But although he ceased to speak of her, yet only the more did he think and dream about her; and the older he grew, the less did he seem to care for any of those unbewitched maidens of whom his father had talked; and the only maiden of whom he thought with love and longing was this one who lay asleep in the enchanted castle in the lough.

So the years passed on, and in time Dermot's father died, and the young man became chieftain of his clan. He was straight and tall, with blue, clear eyes, and a frank, fair face. Some of the M'Swynes, who were a rough, burly race, looked scornfully on him and said that he was fitter to make love to ladies than to head men on a battle-field; but they wronged him when they said that, for no braver soldier than Dermot had ever led their clan. He was both brave and gentle too, and courteous, and tender, and kind; and as for being only fit to make love to ladies—why, making love to ladies was almost the only thing he never did.

"Are you not going to bring home a wife to the old house, my son?" said his foster-mother, an old woman who had lived with him all her life. "Before I die I'd love to dandle a child of yours upon my knee."

But Dermot only shook his head. "My wife, I fear, will be hard to win. I may have to wait for her all my days." And then, after a little while, when the old woman still went on talking to him, "How can I marry when my love has been asleep these three

hundred years?"

This was the first time that he had spoken about Eileen for many a day, and the old nurse had thought, like everybody else, that he had forgotten that old legend and all the foolish fancies of his youth.

She was sitting at her spinning-wheel, but she dropped the thread and folded her hands sadly on her knees.

"My son, why think on her that's as good as dead? Even if you could win her, would you take a bewitched maiden to be your wife?"

It was a summer's day, and Dermot stood looking far away through the sunshine toward where, though he could not see it, the enchanted castle lay. He had stood in that same place a thousand times, looking toward it, dreaming over the old tale.

For several minutes he made no answer to what the old woman had said; then all at once he turned round to her.

"Nurse," he said passionately, "I have adored her for twenty years. Ever since I first stood at your knees, and you told me of her, she has been the one love of my heart. Unless I can marry her, I will never marry any woman in this world." He came to the old woman's side, and though he was a full-grown man, he put his arms about her neck. "Nurse, you have a keen woman's wit; cannot you help me with it?" he said. "I have wandered round the lough by day and night and challenged the magician to come and try his power against me, but he does not hear me, or he will not come. How can I reach him through those dark, cruel waters and force him to come out of them and fight with me?"

"Foolish lad!" the old woman said. She was a wise old woman, but she believed as much as everybody else did in the legend of the castle in the lough. "What has he to gain that he need come up and fight with you? Do you think the black cat's such a fool as to heed your ranting and your challenging?"

"But what else can I do?"

The old woman took her thread into her hands again, and sat spinning for two or three minutes without answering a word. She was a sensible old woman, and it seemed to her a sad pity that a fine young man like her foster-son should waste his life in pining for the love of a maiden who had lain asleep and enchanted for three hundred years. Yet the nurse loved him so dearly that she could not bear to cross him in anything, or to refuse to do anything that he asked. So she sat spinning and thinking for a little while, and then said:

"It was a mouse that made him show himself in his own shape first, and it's few mice he can be catching, I guess, down in the bottom of the lough. I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll give you half a dozen mice in a bag tomorrow, and you can let them loose when you get to the water side, and see if that will bring him up."

Well, Dermot did not think very much of this plan; but still, as he had asked the old woman to help him, he felt that he could not avoid taking her advice, and so the next morning his nurse gave him a bag with half a dozen mice in it, and he carried it with him to the lough. But, alas! as soon as ever he had opened the bag, all the six mice rushed away like lightning and were out of sight in a moment.

"That chance is soon ended," Dermot said mournfully to himself; so he took back the empty bag to his nurse, and told her what had happened.

"You goose, why didn't you let them out one by one?" inquired she. "Sure they would run when you opened the bag. You should have made play with them."

"To be sure, so I should; but I never thought of that. I'll do better next time."

So next day the woman brought him the bag again, filled this time with fat rats, and he took it to the lough, and laid it down at the water side, and opened the mouth of it just wide enough for one of the rats to put out his nose; and then he sat and watched, and watched, letting the rats run away one by one; but though he sat watching for the whole day, not a sign did he ever see of the black cat. At last he came disconsolately home again with the empty bag on his shoulder.

"Never mind, my son, we'll try something else to-morrow," said nurse cheerfully. So next morning she brought him a fishing-rod, and a large piece of toasted cheese. "Take this to the lough and bait your hook with it," she said, "and see if the black cat won't come up and take a bite. All cats like cheese."

Dermot went immediately to the lough, baited his hook, and threw the line out into the water. After a few minutes his heart gave a great jump, for he felt a sudden pull at the line. He drew it in softly and cautiously; but when he got it to the water's edge there was nothing on his hook but a large flat fish—and the toasted cheese had all broken away and was gone.

"What a foolish old woman, to give me toasted cheese to put into water!" he said to himself; then he heaved a sigh, threw the fish into his bag, and once more went sadly away.

"I dare say the villain of a cat has breakfasted nicely off the toasted cheese without the trouble of coming for it," he said bitterly, when he got home.

"Never mind; we'll maybe have better luck to-morrow," replied the nurse. "I dreamed a dream, and in the dream I thought of something else to do."

So early next morning she brought a fat black pig.

"What in the world am I to do with this?" said Dermot sharply.

"Ah, now, be easy, my dear," said the old woman coaxingly. "Just take it down to the lough and roast it there, and sure when the cat smells the fine smell of it he'll come up for a taste."

Now Dermot was getting rather tired of doing all these odd things; and though he had readily gone to the lough with the mice and the rats and the toasted cheese, yet he did not at all relish the notion of carrying a live pig across the country with him for two or three miles. However, he was very good-natured, and so, although he did not himself think that any good would come of it, after a little while he let his nurse persuade him to take the pig. The old woman tied a string about its leg, and he took

it to the lough, and as soon as he got there he collected some sticks and peat together and, building up a good big pile, set light to it. Then he killed the pig with his hunting-knife and hung it up before the fire to roast. Presently a most savory smell began to fill the air.

Dermot withdrew a little way, sat down behind a jutting piece of rock, and watched, his eyes never leaving the smooth surface of the lough; but minute after minute passed and not the slightest movement stirred it. From time to time he made up his fire afresh, and turned his pig from side to side. The whole air around grew full of the smell of roasting meat, so savory that, being hungry, it made Dermot's own mouth water; but still—there lay the lough, quiet and smooth, and undisturbed as glass, with only the dark shadows of the silent rocks lying across it.

At last the pig was cooked and ready, and Dermot rose and drew it from the fire.

"I may as well make my own dinner off it," he thought sorrowfully to himself, "for nobody else will come to have a share of it." So he took his knife and cut himself a juicy slice, and sat down again, concealing himself behind the rock, with his bow and arrow by his side, and had just lifted the first morsel to his lips, when—

Down fell the untasted meat upon the ground, and his heart leaped to his lips, for surely something at last was stirring the waters! The oily surface had broken into circles; there was a movement, a little splash, a sudden vision of something black. A moment or two he sat breathlessly gazing; and then—was he asleep, or was he waking, and really saw it?—he saw above the water a black cat's head. Black head, black paws put out to swim, black back, black tail.

Dermot took his bow up in his hand, and tried to fit an arrow to it; but his hand shook, and for a few moments he could not draw. Slowly the creature swam to the water's edge, and, reaching it, planted its feet upon the earth, and looked warily, with green, watchful eye, all round; then, shaking itself—and the water seemed to glide off its black fur as off a duck's back—it licked its lips, and, giving one great sweep

into the air, it bounded forward to where the roasted pig was smoking on the ground. For a moment Dermot saw it, with its tail high in the air and its tongue stretched out to lick the crackling; and then, sharp and sure, whiz! went an arrow from his bow; and the next moment, stretched flat upon the ground, after one great dismal howl, lay the man-cat, or cat-man, with an arrow in his heart.

Dermot sprang to his feet, and, rushing to the creature's side, caught him by the throat; but he was dead already; only the great, wide-opened, green, fierce eyes seemed to shoot out an almost human look of hatred and despair, before they closed forever. The young chieftain took up the beast, looked at it, and with all his might flung it from him into the lough; then turning round, he stretched his arms out passionately.

"Eileen! Eileen!" he cried aloud; and as though that word had broken the spell, all at once—oh, wonderful sight!—the enchanted castle began to rise. Higher it rose and higher; one little turret first; then pinnacles and tower and roof; then strong stone walls; until, complete, it stood upon the surface of the lough like a strange floating ship. And then slowly and gently it drifted to the shore and, rising at the water's edge, glided a little through the air, and sank at last upon the earth, fixing itself firmly down once more where it had stood of old, as if its foundations never had been stirred through the whole of those three hundred years.

With his heart beating fast, Dermot stood gazing as if he could never cease to gaze. It was a lovely summer day, and all the landscape round him was bathed in sunlight. The radiance shone all over the gray castle walls and made each leaf on every tree a golden glory. It shone on bright flowers blooming in the castle garden; it shone on human figures that began to live and move. Breathless and motionless, Dermot watched them. He was not close to them, but near enough to see them in their strange quaint dresses, passing to and fro, like figures that had started from some painted picture of a by-gone age. The place grew full of them. They poured out from

the castle gates; they gathered into groups; they spread themselves abroad; they streamed out from the castle right and left. Did they know that they had been asleep? Apparently not, for each man went on with his natural occupation, as if he had but paused over it a minute to take breath. A hum of voices filled the air; Dermot heard strange accents, almost like those of an unknown tongue, mingled with the sound of laughter. Three hundred years had passed away, and yet they did not seem to know it; busily they went about their sports or labors—as calmly and unconsciously as if they never had been interrupted for an hour.

And, in the midst of all, where was Eileen? The young chieftain stood looking at the strange scene before him, with his heart beating high and fast. He had killed the cat, he had broken the enchantment, he had awakened the castle from its sleep, but what was to come next? Did the prophecy, which said that a M'Swyne should do this, say also that, for doing it, he should be given a reward?

Nay, it said nothing more. The rest was all a blank. But was there, then, to be no reward for him? Dermot stood suddenly erect and crushed down a certain faintness that had been rising in his heart. The prophecy, indeed, said nothing, but he would carve out the rest of his destiny for himself.

And so he carved it out. He went straight through the unknown people to the castle garden and found—was it what he sought? He found a lady gathering flowers—a lady in a rich dress, with golden armlets, bracelets, and head-ornaments—such as are now only discovered in tombs. But she was not dead; she was alive and young. For she turned round, and, after his life's patient waiting, Dermot saw Eileen's face.

And then—what more? Well, need I tell the rest? What ending could the story have but one? Of course he made her love him, and they married, and lived, and died. That was the whole. They were probably happy—I do not know. You may see the little lough still in that wild country of Donegal, and the deep dark waters that hid the enchanted castle beneath them for so many years. As for the castle itself—that, I

think, has crumbled away; and the whole story is only a story legend—one of the pretty, foolish legends of the old times.

the end

Transcriber's Note:

Variations in spelling and hyphenation, as well as unusual words, have been retained as they appear in the original publication.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE CUCKOO CLOCK ***

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