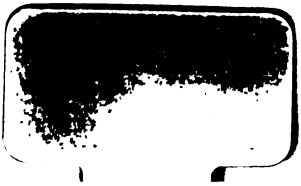
FAIRY GIFTS

OR A

WALLET OF WONDERS



THE FAIRY RUBINETTA.

FAIRY GIFTS;

OR,

A WALLET OF WONDERS.

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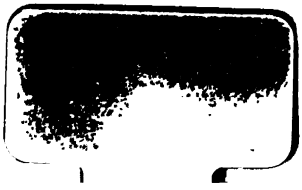
FAIRY GIFTS.

I.

THE RED FOREST.

IT was morning in the Red Forest. The sun was just beginning to glint across the mists, and tip the leaves of the trees with blood-red; for as every tree in the Forest was a copper beech, turned them that colour as soon as it touched

e had been cottages about, the housewife



tell me about it—there, leave your bird with my cat and dog, they'll get on right well.'

'Ay, ay, I'll warrant you they will, especially if your cat takes a more than common fancy to my bird,' muttered the Wizard, who appeared to be something sharp in his temper. By this time, however, the Fairy Rubinetta had relieved him of the wallet he carried on his back, and had placed a bowl of smoking hot hasty pudding before him, in consequence of which agreeable proceedings he became much mollified.

'Great doings for you, Mistress Rubinetta,' said the Wizard Katchookatchkan between the mouthfuls of hasty pudding. 'I am glad to see you are getting tired of your dignity in this out-o'-the-way place.'

'Tired, Sir Katchookatchkan,' said the Fairy briskly; 'and pray who told you that?'

'Why, weren't you glad to see me? and didn't you say you wanted excitement? and don't I remember the time when you were fit to snap the head off any one who came near you? Don't tell me!'

'Well,' admitted the Fairy, 'one *does* like a little excitement now and then.'

'Ay, ay,' chuckled the Wizard, 'you may say that,

Mistress Rubinetta, without any fear of not being believed; *one* does—a *woman* does, no doubt.'

'I think,' said the Fairy Rubinetta with dignity, 'you forget, Sir Katchookatchkan, that you are speaking to a fairy.'

'Not a bit of it,' answered the undaunted Katchookatchkan, pushing his bowl aside and drawing his wallet towards him. '*I* forget—I wonder when I ever forgot anything.'

'What's in there?' inquired the Fairy, probably thinking that she would have the worst of it if she continued the argument.

'Ay, there it is, you see,' said the Wizard, peeping into his wallet and peeping out again. 'You might also say, Mistress Rubinetta, without any fear of not being believed, that a woman is sometimes a little curious. But now to business.'

And the Fairy Rubinetta, probably with a shadowy recollection of how business is transacted among people who are not fairies, placed on the table an inkstand without any ink, and a pen without any nib, and looked solemn.

'And now,' said the Wizard triumphantly, 'since we have decided, Mistress Rubinetta, that you are getting

tired of your solitude, probably you will not object to giving it up for a little while and becoming a Queen's messenger.'

'By my red mittens!' ejaculated the Fairy Rubinetta in horrified amazement, 'what's this you say, friend Katchookatchkan?'

'Because,' continued the Wizard, 'the Queen is sending some fairy gifts to human beings, and wants you to take them.'

'Then she *may* want,' said the Fairy firmly.

'So, so,' said the Wizard, leaning back in his chair.

But knowing that silence is the best way of managing a refractory woman, he said no more. As he expected, the Fairy Rubinetta soon came down off her high horse and began to reason with him.

'Why,' she said, stretching out her hand and speaking with great pathos, 'does the Queen take me away from my peaceful and happy home, and from the loved companions of my solitude, and bid me go amongst human beings, racked as they are with storms, and devoured with carking cares? Why—I say—'

'Is it of me you are asking all those questions?' interrupted the Wizard. 'How should I know the Queen's reasons for doing things; isn't she a woman?'

'And let me tell you, Sir Katchookatchkan,' said the Fairy with great sharpness, and with such a sudden change from her former tone that the Wizard was quite startled, 'that you have a very disrespectful way of speaking of her Majesty, to say nothing of the manner in which you speak to myself.'

'Whew!' said the Wizard, 'I wonder which is the most respectful, to speak the truth about the Queen, or to disobey her?'

'I disobey her!' exclaimed the Fairy.

'Well, you said she *might* want, or want must be her master, or something of the sort.'

The Fairy Rubinetta immediately burst into tears, and requested the Wizard to trample upon her without loss of time. He had already trampled on the tenderest portion of her feelings, and might as well do the same good office for the tenderest part of her body. The Wizard, however, did nothing of the sort, but strolled about the room, peeping into all the Fairy's pet corners, and exhorting her to cry as much as she liked, tears did nobody any harm.

'What's in here?' exclaimed the Fairy savagely, making up for her wrongs by turning the whole contents of the Wizard's wallet out on the table. They were a

very odd collection, but as we shall hear plenty about them hereafter, I will not describe them more particularly now. The Wizard, however, came back to the table, and proceeded to describe their various uses and properties, and to tell little anecdotes about them with so much affability, that the Fairy was quite melted, and tearfully professed herself willing to sacrifice anything in the cause of the dear Queen, provided her friend the Wizard would retract what he had said about her being tired of her solitude, which the Wizard very politely did, and peace was restored.

'And now,' said the Wizard when this matter was settled, 'I have so much to do, that I must not stay one moment longer. Good day to you, Mistress Rubinetta; it is to be hoped your cat has not been breakfasting on my bird all this time.'

'And I,' said the Fairy Rubinetta, looking very radiant considering her recent sacrifice, 'have all my housekeeping to see to, and no end of preparations to make, so farewell my dear friend Katchookatchkan.'

And the Wizard, shouldering his wallet and taking a long staff in his hand, on the top of which perched the jet black bird (which had not been eaten, though the blue cat looked as if she had been making up her mind

about it, but had not come to a decision in time), trudged off into the middle of the copper beeches.

After that, the Fairy Rubinetta set about her preparations, which lasted till sunset was dyeing the Red Forest with the deepest of crimson. Then she came out of her cottage with her red mittens on, looked all round her muttering the words of a charm, which was to keep the Red Forest invisible till she came back to it, kissed the blue cat and the yellow dog with great fervour, and exhorting them to take care of themselves and the house, mounted her golden broomstick and rode off at full speed.

Now, my young friends, all this is only the introduction to my real story, which is the history of the Fairy Gifts which Mistress Rubinetta brought to certain little maidens of the Fairy Queen's acquaintance. It was told me—this introduction, I mean—by a certain little Fairy who comes to see me every 29th of February, and that's how I came to know so much about it.

We have not, however, seen the last of the Fairy Rubinetta yet, though for the present we will leave her to ride through the air as fast as she can on her broomstick.

II.

THE GOLD-EYED NEEDLE.

THERE was once a certain little village in a certain little corner of the world, which was especially dear to the heart of the Fairy Queen. I do not know exactly why, except that it was a cosy little village, extremely retired, for there were no means of getting at it, and no means of getting away from it, so that the villagers were born, lived, and died in it, not only without thinking of anything different, but without even dreaming that there *was* anything different. Now this was just the place, as you must

see at once, for fairies; and, in fact, to the outside world, Cornertown, which was the name of our little village, had quite an uncanny reputation, which would have greatly shocked the inhabitants had they known it; but not having anything to do with the outside world, they did not know that fairies had gone out of fashion, and took them quite as a matter of course, while in all other matters they were extremely well-behaved, went out to tea with the utmost gentility, and were devoted to all the proprieties of life.

Cornertown was not a particularly pretty place, at least it was only surrounded by the 'meadows, groves, and streams' which are but the 'common sights' of this work-a-day world of ours. The sunshine and the spring flowers were no brighter here than elsewhere, the birds nested and sang, and the children grew and laughed, and sent their shrill voices through the summer evening air to the listening mothers at home, in just the same manner that is common to every Cornertown in the world. There were nothing but common little cottages, too, with quite common sort of folks in them, who were devoted to keeping house (ay, and husband and children too, in very good order!), and suchlike common occupations. There *had*

once been a poet in Cornertown, who had written a poem about one of the cottages, and called the curl of blue smoke from its chimney 'the incense from the household altar of the hearth,' which sentiment had been immensely admired by the Cornertonians, though not very clearly understood. In fact, the people of Cornertown were a simple-minded and simple-hearted race of beings, which was the reason the Queen of the Fairies had always loved them,—fairies being an essentially old-fashioned set of people.

It was at this place that the Fairy Rubinetta arrived one night on her broomstick. She had made herself invisible, and was determined to remain so till she could find out about all the inhabitants, and determine who was to become the fortunate possessor of the first of her fairy gifts. Accordingly, when all the village was asleep, she took a ride through the town on her broomstick, and came down every chimney in order to find out what was going on in the houses. Every one was in bed, but that did not hinder her purpose; quite the contrary, indeed, for when one is asleep one is always truthful, and the Fairy Rubinetta wanted to find out people's thoughts. So in every bedchamber where any one lay dreaming, she placed herself close

to their ears and listened, in order to find out their dreams. In some cases she whispered to them herself, and according as the sleepers took the dreams thus imparted to them, she was able to judge of the state of their thoughts and feelings. Now, I am sorry to say, the Fairy Rubinetta did not look quite amiable while this was going forward. In fact, the more she found out, the crosser she became; and when all the houses but one had been entered, she looked, to use the expressive words of the Wizard Katchookatchkan, 'fit to snap the head off any one who came near her.'

'Now,' she exclaimed, stamping her foot on the floor, 'I call this simply atrocious! What can the Queen have been thinking of, to let her dominions go to rack and ruin in this way? But it's all that old Katchookatchkan's doing. I'll burn my red mittens if it isn't! Well, at all events, I'm the right woman in the right place *here*, and no mistake.' And she rode on her golden steed down the chimney of the last cottage in the row, and alighted on the floor with a plump, enough to awaken any one who was not sleeping with a clear conscience and an innocent heart. But this was Susie's bedroom, and she possessed both, bless her!

The Fairy Rubinetta was half mollified as she looked

round the room, and before even glancing at the sleeper, proceeded to examine every article of furniture. This did not take her long, for there were but few things to examine. There was a little chest of drawers, on which stood a tiny mirror, a still tinier pin-cushion, with 'Susie' arranged in pins, and a hymn-book. Inside the drawers, which the Fairy had the curiosity to open, lay a few (very few) neatly folded articles of clothing, very clean, but, alas! sadly darned and patched, at which, however, the Fairy nodded and smiled approvingly. There was a white dimity curtain to the bed too, which had also its share of patches, at which the Fairy's face became positively radiant. Lastly, she looked at the sleeper. As we have said, Susie had a clear conscience and an innocent heart; but though she slept soundly she did not look happy. There were traces of tears on her cheeks, and two large crystal drops were just forcing their way from under the closed lids. The Fairy Rubinetta seated herself close to Susie's left ear, and listened for a long time. Sometimes she smiled and sometimes she frowned, but evidently not at the dreamer, for her hand lay tenderly on her forehead, and sometimes smoothed it, as if to smooth out one or two lines

which had come across it in the night. At last she bent down and whispered something into Susie's ear. Then the tears vanished, dried up in the light of a sunny smile which had come on the fair round face, evidently more accustomed to smiles than tears. Susie stirred and murmured in her sleep, and the Fairy Rubinetta got up looking much more amiable than she had done before, and mounting her broomstick, disappeared up the chimney.

By this time it was morning; and an early sunbeam coming in through Susie's blind, was so taken with the sight of her closed eyes, that it shone on them with all its might and main, in order to coax them open. And sunbeams being bold little fellows, and not to be daunted, it succeeded, and Susie sprang out of bed with a joyous bound, and ran to open the window.

'Oh, what a lovely morning!' she exclaimed; 'how glad mother will be to see it! I wonder what made me so unhappy last night, I feel quite different this morning; and I had such a happy dream, only I quite forget it now—I am so sorry.'

And Susie proceeded to dress herself as quickly as she could, thinking of her dream all the time. After she was dressed, she had to go and make the fire in the

kitchen, and set on the kettle to boil. Then she had to set her room in order, and to dress her mother, who was ailing. When this was done, it was time to get the breakfast ready; and very daintily did Susie make it for her mother, and great pride did she take in her housewifery. After the breakfast things were washed up and cleared away, Susie and her mother sat down to their day's work, which was the making of coarse garments for the field-labourers. All this time Susie chattered away merrily, about the fine morning, the bird on the window sill, the cows going to pasture, and all sorts of simple talk of this description, which sounded in the mother's ears every day like the songs of angels.

'And oh, mother,' said Susie, 'I had such a funny dream last night. I only remember a little bit of it, but I dreamt that I got the prize after all, and it was given me by a funny little old woman in a red cloak, and what do you think it was? A long darning needle!' and Susie laughed merrily. But a cloud came over the mother's face.

'Why aren't you going to school this morning, Susie?'

'Why, mother,' said Susie gently, 'do you think I'd leave you to do all this work by yourself—and you with such a headache too? What are you thinking of,

mother? It's not pretty of you to say that, and me so useful.'

The mother sighed and said half to herself:

'It breaks my heart—and you so fond of your book too.'

'Now, mother,' said Susie, 'what are you thinking of? Don't you know that I can read and write, and say the multiplication table, and heaps of towns and rivers and verses of poetry off by heart, and make a shirt, and cook the dinner, and sweep a room, and how much more ought I to know?'

'But the prize, Susie, the prize!'

Susie looked sober, and stitched away vigorously.

'Well, mother, I suppose my dream was right, and my prize is to be a needle and thread;' and she held up her needle with a merry laugh, which brought a smile to the sick woman's face.

'There, that's right!' exclaimed Susie energetically. 'And now, mother, we'll get on with our work, and leave schools and prizes to take care of themselves.'

The mother was cheered and comforted, but she little guessed of the tears which Susie had shed in secret about this same prize. And it was all the fault of that wicked Wizard Katchookatchkan. Some time

before, he had made a descent on innocent old-fashioned little Cornertown, and set all the mothers and school teachers by the ears. It was on this wise. Cornertown had a school which taught all the young ideas how to shoot, till they were fourteen, at which age it considered their education complete, and shot them out again, to make room for a new supply. And not a moment too soon, for there was plenty of work at home for the girls to do,—no end of making and mending, washing, sweeping, cleaning, and cooking, all which occupations the simple-minded mothers of Cornertown considered the sole duty of woman. But, alas! in an evil day, a dapper little man dressed in black, who delivered lectures so eloquent that nobody could make out what he meant, had appeared in Cornertown and taught them their duty after a different fashion. And this was Katchookatchkan in disguise; and from the day he made his appearance with a bundle of lectures under his arm, to the day he carried them and himself away again, all peace had been at an end for the unlucky inhabitants of Cornertown. For he had told them that their female education was shamefully neglected; that their daughters' minds had to be educated into harmony with all things; that they were some day to be mothers

of great men, and therefore they were at once to stop cooking dinners and making baby-clothes, and learn the first principles of geometry: at which unknown word a dreadful sensation had run through the ranks of Cornertown housewives, who sat listening to him, and one sensitive little mother had burst into tears, and declared to her next-door neighbour, that she had always thought she was not fit for the sphere she moved in, and that she would at once take her baby (aged four months) away from Cornertown into a mountainous country, in order to educate its mind into harmony with all things by showing it the beautiful scenery. Fortunately for Cornertown, however, the Wizard, growing tired of this piece of mischief as he had done of a great many others, soon took himself off, and had such a fit of laughing at the effects he left behind him, that he made himself ill for a week. And now you see what a state of things the Fairy Rubinetta found in Cornertown; no wonder for her to look cross. Everybody's head was full of female education and geometry, combined with rights, the latter being of a somewhat uncertain and vague description. The school teachers having been left to blunder on by themselves, had set on foot a most alarming scheme of education, and had

announced that a prize of five pounds was to be awarded to whatever 'young maid' (Cornertown was primitive still, you see) should write the best essay on Female Education and the First Principles of Geometry. Of course there were a good many candidates, and amongst them Susie, who, though she knew nothing of the principles of geometry, first or last, knew very well that five pounds added to the sum her mother had already laid by, would be enough to buy a cow—the grand object of Susie's ambition. This was the light in which the matter presented itself to Susie's practical little mind. But, alas! what time had Susie for studying geometry, when her mother's daily bread depended on her own ten fingers? There was Barbara (the younger sister of the mother who was going to take her baby into a mountainous country), *she* might do very well, for nobody had ever yet been able to make her do anything useful, so perhaps that was good training for female education; but as for Susie, who was wanted every minute of the day, it never occurred to her to think that it might be too difficult for her. Not a bit of it. Female education and the first principles of geometry had need to be tougher things than Susie took them to be, if the high ambition of buying a cow,

and the strong motive of a child's love, were not able to overcome them. And yet—and yet—the time was slipping on, there was more work to do than ever, and the night on which the Fairy Rubinetta had paid her a visit, Susie had cried herself to sleep.

In the meantime, that much-aggrieved dame went to the middle of a thick wood outside Cornertown, and, stamping her foot three times on the ground, muttered a charm so powerful that a shiver ran through every tree in the wood, though there was not a breath of wind. Immediately there came a whirr of wings, and the jet black bird with the snowy crest perched on the Fairy's shoulder. At the same time the Wizard Katchookatchkan emerged from behind a tree.

'Well, Mistress Rubinetta,' cried he, 'what's the matter now? Couldn't you leave me a minute's peace? I thought you had your work cut out for you here.'

'You may well say that,' answered the Fairy grimly; 'are you not ashamed of yourself, poisoning the minds of the Fairy Queen's favourite people in this atrocious manner?'

'Poisoning, Mistress Rubinetta! Now, I call that a good joke! Why, woman, you've been shut up so

long that you don't know what's going on in the world. It's prejudice, rank prejudice, I tell you. Why, the march of intellect'—

'The march of intellect won't cook the dinner,' observed the Fairy scornfully.

'Well, no,' said the Wizard, 'not perhaps directly, but indirectly it will, for my system teaches you the first principles of'—

'Rubbish!' shouted the Fairy Rubinetta in a towering rage. 'I've a very good mind to teach you the first principles of a good kicking, Sir Katchookatchkan.'

'Well, well,' said the Wizard, 'don't excite yourself, Mistress Rubinetta. If I have taught the people wrong, it's your business to teach them right again; no one can say that *that's* not a fair division of labour. And now, if that's all you've got to say to me, I may as well be off;' and the Wizard and his jet black bird promptly disappeared.

That evening, when Susie came back from driving some of the neighbours' cows home from pasture, she found a very funny little old woman, a stranger in Cornertown, sitting in the chimney-corner with her mother. She was dressed entirely in red, with long red mittens on her arms, and such an odd way of

nodding her head and mincing with her feet, that Susie found it hard not to laugh.

'And so, my young maid,' said the visitor, in a very shrill voice, 'I hear you can do fine sewing. A very useful accomplishment for a young maid, very useful indeed;' and the little old woman nodded at least nine times.

'Now, my young maid,' she continued, 'what do you say to this?' and she unfolded a beautifully fine garment, which looked as if it had been sewn with gold, and was so ethereal in its texture that Susie and her mother were quite dazzled.

'Now, my young maid,' said the little old woman, 'I want nine more garments worked exactly like this, as soon as ever you can, and I will pay you well for them.'

'But I could not do anything half so beautiful as this,' said Susie.

The little old woman smiled, nodded, minced, and bridled in a highly significant manner.

'Never you mind, my young maid. I never give people work that they can't do; but you must promise me one thing, not to work with any but this needle;' and she held out a long needle with a gold eye.

'And now, my young maid,' said the little old woman, sidling towards the door, 'I will leave you to do your work, but don't forget that you have a powerful friend in red mittens.' With which parting sentiment the powerful friend in red mittens suddenly vanished, but whether through the door or the keyhole, Susie and her mother were too much bewildered to be able to determine. Susie was the first to recover herself.

'See, mother,' she cried, with a merry laugh, 'here's my prize—a long needle after all!'

'Who can she be, Susie?' said the mother.

'A very old-fashioned dame, who thinks a great deal more of her own needles than of any one else's,' said Susie gaily. 'Never mind, mother, if she pays us well, I'm sure I'm very willing to use the old body's needles.'

And Susie proceeded to make her mother's tea. But after tea Susie and her mother were more amazed than ever. No sooner did the gold-eyed needle begin to work, than the seams flew with the rapidity of lightning, and every stitch shone like burnished gold. No matter what coarse common stuff or thread might be used, the result was the same. Susie and her mother knew not what to think, but they were too innocent to be alarmed,

t the clock struck, and the first candidate forward and proceeded to read her essay aloud. ned to be Barbara, and as she had three essays, them finished, and each more amazingly intel- han the last, the operation promised to be a e. In the middle of the most eloquent passage econd, Susie, however, fell fast asleep, and only in time to add her meed of applause to the g up of the fortieth and last essay, which the ve young mother declared, wiping her eyes, to been quite touching.

d now came the important business of deciding to m the prize was to be awarded. After about an r and a half of hard talking, five of the judges re- d in high dudgeon (one in tears), and left the sixth decide the matter alone. There is no saying how ng this might have taken—indeed, I doubt whether it ould have been settled to this day—had not a little old man in a red cloak and long red mittens quietly alked up to the table and announced herself as perfect female education in all its branches, and te competent to judge of the intellectual young Cornertown maidens. Every one amazed and secretly too much relieved to

dispute the matter, and the little old woman proceeded to business.

The first thing she did was to take up the bundle of essays, turn them rapidly round in her fingers, blow upon them, and lo and behold!—they all flew out of the window in the shape of a bundle of feathers; nay, I am not sure that a further transformation did not take place, for after they had flown a little way, a mysterious sound was heard, so much like the 'ga, ga, ga' of a gander, that I prefer not to dwell upon such a degrading circumstance.

The second thing this dreadful old woman did, was to tap three times upon the table, and—heigh, presto! —a pile of gossamer garments sewn with gold, and of such ethereal texture that every one was quite dazzled, appeared in their place.

The third thing she did was still more awful. She stamped three times on the ground, and muttered the words of a charm so powerful that it nearly blew the roof off the house. Immediately there came a whirr of wings, and the jet black bird with the snowy crest lit on her shoulder. At the same time his master walked coolly down the chimney.

But before any of the horrified Cornertonians had

time even to draw breath, the room was suddenly filled with a rosy vapour, which gradually condensed into a floating cloud, and on it appeared, fair and fragile, graceful and lovely, beaming and brilliant, the illustrious patroness of Cornertown, the Fairy Queen herself.

With a gracious smile her Majesty sprang off her cloud and alighted gracefully on the table. Then turning to the Fairy Rubinetta, she thus addressed her:

'I am glad to see, most illustrious Fairy, that you have done your duty, and fought bravely on our behalf. I am glad to find that you have found some one worthy of the first of our Fairy gifts; and I am *very* glad, most illustrious Fairy, and you people of Cornertown, to know that the forty essays on Female Education and the First Principles of Geometry have been resolved (since you like philosophy) into their component parts—namely, trifles light as air!'

Here the Queen paused as if for applause, which the people of Cornertown were too much discomfited to give. Then, assuming a severe aspect, she thus continued:

'People of Cornertown, I am grieved to find that you are no longer the simple-minded, simple-hearted race which was once so dear to my heart. Where are the

household virtues—the thrift, the deftness, the neatness, the industry, which were once the ornaments of your young maidens? Where is the love of home—the care for home which was once the dower of your young wives? Where is the faith in a housewife's sphere—lowly and lofty—which was once the sole science of your mothers? Gone — swallowed up in the first principles of'— Here the Queen's eloquence was itself swallowed up in an emphatic and sympathetic 'pah!' from the Fairy Rubinetta.

'Oh, my dear people of Cornertown,' resumed the Queen, 'come back to your first faith. Leave all these matters to the outside world, where possibly they may have some business; and do you bring all your virtues, all your powers, all your intellects, and offer them up on the household altar of the hearth.'

With which unparalleled burst of eloquence the Queen concluded her speech, and the Cornertown public (including the Wizard Katchookatchkan) immediately went temporarily mad, threw up its cap, and declared that it had always thought so, it had always said so, and, what's more, had always *done* so.

In the meantime the Fairy Queen bestowed the prize on Susie in consideration of her proficiency in fine

sewing, and the Fairy Rubinetta presented her with the gold-eyed needle, to keep for ever and aye.

And the needle was named by Susie, Industria, and was the means of procuring untold riches to herself and her mother, and to her children and grandchildren after her.

And, wonderful to relate, the gold-eyed needle sometimes (not often) makes its appearance among the maidens of the present day; and whenever it does, it is a sure and certain guarantee of honour, riches, and prosperity to its owner.

III.

THE CHARMED RUBY.

MERRY Molly had never been seen to cry since she was a baby in arms, and not then, it is confidently asserted by those who know her. I think Cornertown would have considered itself in a bad way if Molly had ever done anything else than go singing down the street with a voice like a skylark, or else laughing at everything that most people grumble about; and Molly's laugh was really like a burst of music, so no wonder she was the idol of Cornertown. But everything goes by contraries in this world, especially in places patron-

ized by the Fairies; and Molly's mother not only cried a good deal, but scolded a good deal too, at all times and seasons, except when Molly's father was at home, who scolded a good deal more. But, bless you!—Molly never cared for that, but went on skipping about and singing just as merrily as ever, quite a treasure in the house, as you, in common with every other sensible person, will observe; but no—people never know when they are well off, and Molly's mother not only failed to appreciate her daughter's cheerfulness, but took it as a personal insult directed against herself.

'All very well for a heartless creature like you, Molly, with no sense of all I have gone through and given up for your sake, when I might have been rich and happy for life.'

Molly knew very well what her mother had given up, or rather what had given up her mother; she had heard it often enough, and had formed her own opinion on the matter long ago. This was how it was: Molly's mother had had two great misfortunes in her life. One was, that she had been very beautiful, and the other that she had been, in consequence, adopted by her Fairy Godmother, who had given up Fairydom and settled down as an old woman with a long nose. Now, Molly was

not in the least like her mother, being not at all beautiful, in fact rather plain, as I have noticed cheerful people often are. Neither had she ever seen a Fairy, nor did she want to see one, nor, as her mother took pains to impress upon her, was she at all likely to see one, not being beautiful. But she had heard a good deal about one, which made up for it.

The Fairy Godmother had evidently been of a very discontented turn of mind, Molly thought, for the whole substance of her discourse with her godchild seemed to have been endless lamentations for the beauties and glories of Fairyland, which she had left behind her for ever. Molly had a shrewd suspicion that she had not left Fairyland of her own accord, else why should she not have gone back there? So her beautiful godchild had grown up with a great contempt for everything human, and a great veneration for everything super-human, in which catalogue she counted herself and her charms.

When the Fairy Godmother's time came to die,—or rather to dissolve into vapour and disappear, which is the Fairies' mode of dying,—she called her godchild to her side and proceeded to impart to her a very solemn secret.

'My dearest godchild,' she said, 'if you wish to be always rich, beautiful, fortunate, and happy, you must without fail become possessor of the Charmed Ruby.'

'Oh,' cried Molly's mother, clapping her hands, 'do give it me, dear Godmother!'

'Godchild,' answered the Fairy more solemnly than ever, 'it is not mine to give, I wish it were; you must get it for yourself.'

'And where, dear pretty Godmother, is it to be found?' asked Molly's mother, who, in common with most other ladies, was extremely desirous of being made beautiful for ever.

'I am not pretty,' said the Fairy with some sharpness, 'I am old and ugly; nor do I think you have the slightest chance of getting the Ruby, if you do not accustom yourself to speak the truth.'

Molly's mother pouted, but she was rather afraid of the old Fairy, so that was all she dared do.

'The Charmed Ruby,' said the Fairy, 'is, where everything else is that is worth having, in Fairyland. It is guarded by two Clocks.'

'Clocks!' echoed Molly's mother, much amazed.

'Yes,' answered the Fairy, 'Clocks—they *were* once Watches, but it is so many hundred years since any one

has got the Ruby, that they have grown into Clocks. They tick without ceasing, but they don't show the time of day; they show some other curious things which I am not at liberty to mention. They are perpetually walking round and round the Fairy Queen's crystal foot-stool, under which the Charmed Ruby lies in a hen's egg. Now, my dear godchild, your only chance of happiness and good fortune is by getting this Ruby; but to do this you will have to go through a good deal.'

Molly's mother declared there was nothing she was not able to go through, should it even be a stone wall; at which the Fairy Godmother smiled grimly, and proceeded:

'You will have to travel in a perfectly straight line from this towards the setting sun. By turning neither to the right hand nor the left, you come to it at last. When you are pretty near, you must wait till the moment when you can look at it without winking, and when it presents itself to you in the shape of a large round mirror. You must then go up and touch it with whatever weapon you have in your hand at the time. It will immediately shiver into a thousand pieces.'

'Oh! oh!' exclaimed Molly's mother, 'won't it kill me?'

'And you will find yourself,' resumed the Fairy majestically, 'in Fairyland, and will obtain the Ruby or not, according as the Clocks approve or disapprove of you.'

'Then I may not get it, after all,' said Molly's mother sulkily.

'That,' said the Fairy, 'is according as you conduct yourself. You may stop as long and as often as you like on your way, provided you keep a straight line, and never swerve either to the right hand or the left. You will meet with a good many adventures and misadventures on your way, no doubt; but if you keep a true brave heart to the last, all will be well. And now, my dear godchild, I feel I am getting very thin—and I must say farewell.'

The Fairy Godmother was indeed getting very thin, so thin that her godchild could scarcely see her, so thin that in five minutes she had dissolved into a vapour and disappeared.

Molly was somewhat at fault as to the remainder of her mother's narrative. She had certainly set out in order to procure the Ruby; but, according to her own

account, she had met with so many malicious persons on the way, one and all bent on frustrating her intention, that she had never succeeded in getting it. Molly knew *that* to her cost. For her mother being neither fortunate, happy, nor rich, had fretted all her beauty away, and spent her time bewailing her sad fate, and attributing it entirely to the deliberate malice of her Fairy Godmother. In the meantime, merry Molly went on her way rejoicing, and cast Fairies and Rubies to the winds.

But, you see, things always happen to people who don't want them; and though Molly would never have dreamt of getting the Charmed Ruby for herself, it so turned out that she had to go and hunt for it after all. For Molly's mother came to such a climax of fretting and wounded feelings, that she took to her bed and declared that she would certainly die unless she could get the Ruby. Now Molly was very fond of her mother, and very unwilling to let her die for want of a bit of red stone, which was Molly's irreverent way of looking at it; so, after thinking over the matter for a little while, she came to the conclusion that she herself was the proper person to go. Molly was very prompt in all her proceedings; so one evening, after driving

in her cow from pasture, she got a large piece of brown bread, kissed her mother, telling her not to expect her till she saw her, and went singing down the street with her face towards the dying glory in the west.

The first person she met was a crying child, to whom she gave her piece of brown bread.

'There now,' said Molly cheerfully, 'I have nothing at all; well, so much the better, I can walk all the faster,'—and she trudged on till she left the town far behind her, and came to a dark forest, where she lay down under a tree and fell fast asleep.

She was awoke by a touch on her shoulder, but on opening her eyes could not at first see anything. At last she became aware (for seeing is hardly the word) of a little man standing in the middle of a moonbeam, which lay on the path before her. It was only by holding her head in a particular position that she could see him at all, for he was not only very attenuated, but was perfectly transparent, and looked, so Molly thought, as if he were made of skim milk.

'Well?' said Molly.

'Well?' said the little man made of skim milk.

'I beg your pardon,' said Molly, 'but it's rather hard

CHARMED RUBY.

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at first to speak to a person one doesn't quite see. I hope you won't be offended if I ask who you are?'

'Not at all,' said the little man politely; 'perhaps you may have heard of the great Wizard Katchoo-katchkan?'

'No,' said Molly.

'It doesn't matter at all,' said the little man, 'I am his son Fantantariboo, of Moonystruck Hall, hard by. It was told me by my daughter Vagariana, who is a prophetess in these parts, that if I went into the Forest to-night at midnight, and stood in the middle of a moon-beam, I should find a guest, whom I was to invite to Moonystruck Hall, which I accordingly do, and very cordially I am sure;' and the little man waved his hand in the most engaging manner possible. Molly looked up, and certainly did see a magnificent castle right in the path before her. It seemed to partake somewhat of the character of its master, for it was per-perfectly transparent, and Molly could see long vistas of parks and gardens at its other side. Its walls were built of some bluish-white material, which shone at times with great brilliancy, and at other times seemed to melt away and almost entirely disappear. Altogether its appearance was bewildering in the extreme. Molly

thought a minute, it was in a straight line on her way, at least it was but a few feet on one side, and that would not matter. So Molly got up and graciously accepted the invitation to penetrate the mysteries of Moonystruck Hall.

'Pray, allow me,' said the little man, beckoning to her to stand beside him. Molly did so, and the moonbeam immediately flickered up from the ground and bore them straight through one of the windows in Moonystruck Hall. The contrast between the interior of the castle and the outside world almost took away Molly's breath. She had left a dark wood, whose masses of foliage were but dimly lit up by a stray moonbeam, and she found a burst of sunshine, a perfume of flowers, songs of birds, and the most ravishing scenery that the world has ever beheld. The whole castle consisted of one vast hall, with numberless windows on each side. Through one, you looked upon lordly parks and pleasure-grounds all a-blaze with blossoms; through another, on grim craggy mountains crowned with snow and begirt with purple heather; through another, an exquisite rural scenery, deep, quiet valleys and country lanes; through another, on grand tropical forests, with its chatter of monkeys and strange

bright-coloured birds. Through another might be seen groups of lovely children at play; through another, marble statuary and all the wonders of art. In fact, there was no end to these wonderful windows; you might walk for miles and miles along this vast hall, and never come to the end. There was nothing extraordinary in the hall itself, it looked bare and comfortless enough, if you turned your gaze inward,—all its glory and brightness lay outside the windows. What struck Molly particularly, was that it no longer looked transparent and unsubstantial; it appeared to be built of blocks of solid marble, and Fantantariboo had completely lost his 'skim-milky' appearance. It was only in the murky atmosphere of the outside world that he and his mansion took such a shadowy appearance. There were vast numbers of persons in Moonystruck Hall, but Molly never saw them either speak to or look at each other. Each haunted his favourite window, and took no more notice of the rest than if they had been so many phantoms.

Fantantariboo had two daughters, whom he hastened to introduce to Molly. Vagariana, the prophetess, was, as Molly thought, very pretty but extremely flighty, and was dressed in a robe, every inch of which was

of a different colour. She was very attenuated, like her father, and looked not unlike a walking rainbow. Reverina, the second daughter, was dressed entirely in soft grey, and was very fair and gentle-looking, but though she had very pretty blue eyes, Molly soon discovered that she was quite blind. A magnificent banquet was spread in honour of the new arrival, to which Molly did ample justice, curious and unsubstantial as were the viands. She was then conducted by Vagariana to the Chamber of Dreams, a recess under one of the windows.

'I have a number of little attendant sprites,' said Vagariana, 'who shall visit you to-night. They will keep flapping their rainbow-coloured wings over your head, and you shall see how light and refreshing your slumbers will be.'

So Molly went to sleep, and the nature of her visions may be inferred from the nature of the spot in which they came to her.

The next day Molly spent in wandering from one window to another in a perfect ecstasy of wonder and admiration. There were no clocks, indeed there was no time at all in Moonystruck Hall, so it might have been one day or it might have been a hundred, before

Molly finally settled on one window. It represented a quiet, lonely valley spangled with daisies and perfumed with hawthorn bushes. The songs of birds filled the air all day long, and a deep peace and tranquillity brooded over the scene. A little cottage nestled among the trees, and it was on this little solitary house that all Molly's interest was centred. She watched the children playing round the door, growing up, marrying (there was no time, you know, in Moonystruck Hall), and still dwelling in this little ivied cottage where neither care nor discontent could ever come. It was always summer too, and round about, on placid lakes and in balmy woods, the sun never ceased to shine. It was a very homely scene, but, you see, Molly having been brought up in Cornertown, was but a homely maiden herself. Thus the hours in Moonystruck Hall flitted by, and the Charmed Ruby faded from Molly's mind.

But one day Fantantariboo went on a journey, and according to the invariable custom of Bluebeards in all ages and generations, told Molly that she was free to roam over the Hall and look through any window she pleased, but that she was on no account to open a certain little wooden door beneath one of the windows.

So Molly immediately made up her mind to open that little wooden door without loss of time. It was very long before she could discover it at all, and still longer before she found out that her little finger would serve instead of a key. When opened, however, such a blaze of light struck on Molly's astonished eyes, that for some time she could not see a thing. When her eyes grew accustomed to the light, she found that the door opened into a small space which looked as if she could easily stretch her arm across it. At the farther end was a crystal canopy shaped like a footstool; under it, on a crimson velvet cushion, lay a broken hen's egg, and inside it a magnificent Ruby, flaming with red light. Molly gave a loud cry, the memory of her expedition and of her mother rushed back to her mind, and she stretched out her hand to take the Ruby. But it was just a finger's-length out of her reach, and all her efforts were vain. Molly sat down on the floor and began to cry heartily, while the wooden door which she had let out of her hand shut to with such a bang that Molly could never afterwards find out where it opened. In the meantime, however, Vagariana came to her, and soon lured her back to her window.

When Fantantariboo came back to Moonystruck

Hall, Molly very boldly asked for the Charmed Ruby. He was very angry to find that his injunction had been disobeyed, and declared that what she had seen had been but a phantom; but seeing that Molly was firm, he promised that she should have it. In order to fulfil this promise, he led poor Molly a pretty dance through all the windows of the hall. There seemed no end to the vistas of woods, gardens, and valleys through which she found herself condemned to wander; while as for the Charmed Ruby, it was always just a stone's throw in front of her—now behind a tree, now in a valley, now on a hillside. Molly was thoroughly disgusted, and longed for nothing so much as to get out of Moonystruck Hall, but that was not so easily managed. There was one window in the hall which Molly noticed that the Enchanter Fantantariboo (for as such she considered him) never bade her look out of. It was only a skylight, he said, and there was nothing interesting to be seen from it. But one day Molly, in melancholy mood, chanced to wander in that direction, and seeing Reverina looking with her sightless eyes out of this window, Molly went up to her and looked out too. It was the only window out of which there was some chance of seeing what really lay outside.

Instead of valleys or woods, she saw far away in the distance the setting sun sinking into the west, but so far away that it looked like a mere star, and Molly felt as if she were in another world. Between her and the road which led straight to the west, and which now lay steeped in its glorious rays, stretched a dark and thorny waste. Thus far had Molly's 'few feet' led her out of her way. Poor Molly was in despair; it was impossible to get through the window, for the material of which it was composed, though perfectly clear and transparent, was quite impenetrable, and the Enchanter alone knew the secret of its opening. But after long and careful search, Molly discovered an old rotten hasp, and above it in tiny letters of tarnished gold, 'The way out.' She uttered a cry of joy, and was about to raise the hasp, when Reverina said very softly, 'Not now—wait.' Fantantariboo was close behind, so Molly retired to her own window, and soon fell fast asleep.

As I have said, there was no time in Moonystruck Hall, but the people generally slept all at once, so when Molly awoke she was not surprised to find no one awake but herself and Reverina. The Enchanter's daughter seized Molly and led her swiftly towards the window, which was already open.

'Go, go,' she whispered, 'go quickly before I tempt you to delay, and the opportunity be lost. You are too young to waste your life in this dreadful place. You would speedily become as I am, blind, then deaf, then dumb, and finally you would be frozen to death or blasted by lightning, and so, miserably perish. This is the fate that sooner or later overtakes all who linger here too long. Take these spectacles with you; they are of little use here, but will serve you well where you are going.'

Molly took the spectacles which Reverina offered her, and sprang from the window. No sooner had she touched the ground than with a tremendous clap of thunder, and the sudden rush of a whirlwind, Moony-struck Hall and all it contained was whisked away to the other end of the world. Nothing remained but the cool morning breeze and the thorny waste through which Molly had to travel before she could reach the straight road which led towards the west.

As we have seen, however, Molly was not one to make mountains out of molehills, so she set out without further ado, singing merrily all the time. It was hard work, for the thorns and thistles hurt her feet, and the place was full of serpents and noxious creatures

which kept her in terror of her life; but Molly had an idea that she was under the protection of some powerful Fairy, which kept her up wonderfully, for she would certainly have been starved to death if she had not found a large piece of brown bread beside her every morning. It looked exactly like the piece she had given to the crying child in Cornertown, and Molly naturally concluded that it was a Fairy gift, and rejoiced accordingly. She had now been travelling in the straight road for a good many days without any adventure, and began to conclude that she would reach the Setting Sun in safety, when one morning, on awaking from her night's sleep, she found an ugly old woman standing before her. She was dressed entirely in brown, and had a dull, peevish, discontented-looking face.

'How did you come into my wood?' said this amiable apparition in slow, measured accents, which produced an irresistible inclination in Molly to yawn.

'I don't know, I am sure,' answered Molly; 'I did not know it was yours, but I will leave it again if you wish.'

'Not so fast,' said the old woman, with a grim smile. 'People who come into my wood don't find it so easy to get out again. You must grind in my mill.'

Molly began to shiver, for the old woman looked quite wicked. She got up and tried to run away, but her feet felt as if leaden weights were attached to them, and she could not stir a step.

'Ha, ha!' said the old woman, in the same slow, heavy tones, 'it is no use, my pretty maid; I have laid my spells on you, and you must work my will,—follow me.'

The way the old woman led her was straight towards the west, which comforted Molly not a little. They penetrated deep into the wood which Molly had entered unwittingly the night before. It grew darker and darker at every step, and more difficult to get through. Drops of moisture fell at regular intervals from the topmost boughs of the trees, and soaked into the ground, which felt like a quaking bog. The dripping sound they made was the only sound that could be heard as it seemed for miles round; not a solitary bird twittered on a branch, not a solitary ray of sunlight glanced across the dense, dead brown foliage of the trees.

At last the old woman stopped before a tumble-down hut, thatched with dead leaves, and standing, or rather tottering, on the edge of a stagnant pond.

'This is my home,' said she; 'is it not a fair

abode? they call it Weariful Waste. I am the Fairy Morna, and men say that I am a witch, but that is not the case. I am a Fairy. Now, I am going in to get a sleep, and you must grind in my mill.'

'But there is nothing to grind,' said Molly, looking into the mill, which was like a barrel organ, and had a handle which creaked something in the tone of the Fairy Morna's voice.

'No matter,' said the old woman, 'you must grind it all the same; and mind, I have laid my spells on you, and you will not be able to stop unless I give you leave.'

And so Molly found it. She remained the unwilling guest of the Fairy Morna for what seemed at least a year. As in Moonystruck Hall, there was no time in Weariful Waste, so Molly could not tell how long it was, more especially as she never once caught sight of the sun.

Molly had several other duties to perform besides grinding; she had to cook the dinner, sweep the hut, and make the bed for the Fairy Morna; to bring water from the stagnant pond; to spin with a distaff and spindle, which apparently possessed the peculiar property

of never allowing the work to get done; and to grind, grind, grind till she wondered the mill did not wear out, especially as there never was anything in it. The air of the wood grew every day more leaden and oppressive to Molly's senses. There was not a sign of life in it, not so much as a fly or a dandelion leaf. Molly at last grew thin and pale, and a dimness came over her eyes, which made her fear that the same fate which overtook the inhabitants of Moonystruck Hall was also reserved for those of Weariful Waste, and that she would end in becoming blind, deaf, dumb, and crippled.

In this dilemma she one day bethought her of the spectacles Reverina had given her, and which she had never looked at since. She put them on. What a change! The dead brown of the foliage changed to vivid rose colour as if bathed in light from the west; the stagnant pond shone like liquid gems; and a faint breeze rustled through the wood, and seemed to quicken everything into life. All was light and motion. When the Fairy Morna hobbled out of her hut, and Molly hastily took off the spectacles and everything was as before, it was quite clear that the rose-coloured spectacles were made of the same material as the windows of Moonystruck Hall, and Molly was very glad to

find it so. She wore them now at every opportunity, and it is quite astonishing how many discoveries she made with them. First, it was a tiny rill which flowed down a rock into the stagnant pond; quite a thread of water, but it was clear, and sweet, and sparkling, and gave a wonderful relish to Molly's daily meal of brown bread. Then it was the fact that the under side of all the brown leaves in the wood was gold colour. This Molly would never have found out by herself, but no sooner were the magic spectacles brought into play than a breeze came through the lifeless wood, and turning up the leaves irradiated their gold with its own rose-colour, and so made them appear as if bathed in perpetual sunlight.

Delighted as Molly was with this discovery, the next was still more wonderful. She found out one day, whilst at her grinding, that there was actually a bird in the wood! Not that she ever could see it, even with the spectacles on, but she heard it, and that was enough. It made even the grinding pleasant, for that was the time it always chose to sing its sweetest song. It was only a common thrush after all; but is not the 'mavis' a fit bird for Fairyland? The lark, it is true, sings sweetly and soars high, but the mavis that sits on a

homely bush beside our cottage window, and sings in rainy weather and on dark days, that is the Fairy bird for me. And so Molly thought. In fact, she began to find Weariful Waste quite beautiful; and one day when the bird had ceased, she took up the strain, and in the gladness of her heart began to sing so gaily and hopefully that the leaves of the trees took to rustling immediately.

Out came the Fairy Morna in dire wrath and dismay.

'Who's making that noise in my wood?' croaked she; and Molly stood confessed with her spectacles on.

'Wretched child,' said the old Fairy, shaking her crutch at her, 'will nothing make you either blind, deaf, dumb, or crippled?'

'No,' said Molly boldly, 'not while I have my spectacles.'

'I knew it,' cried the Fairy; 'you have been in Moonystruck Hall, and have got out safe, so you are no fit guest for me. Here, take this and begone.'

With these words she flung the distaff she held in her hand at Molly, and, hobbling in again, banged the door behind her. Molly stooped to pick up the distaff, but no sooner had she touched it than Weariful Waste disappeared in a twinkling, and she found herself lying

at the foot of a tree on the straight road to the west, with her piece of brown bread beside her.

Molly had now got over the longest and most difficult part of her journey; there remained but the Sunward Hills to climb, and those lay straight before her. It was behind these that the sun sank; and so close were they, that the radiance never left them day or night, and Molly could see every foot of the way. So she set forward with renewed hope.

Very few people seemed to live among the Sunward Hills, and those who did had bright, peaceful faces, which did Molly's heart good to look upon. And, indeed, it was no wonder, it must be a pleasant thing to live so close to the sun. Molly's invisible mavis accompanied her on her way, and every evening sang on the bushes beside her; but she had no longer any use for her spectacles, for nothing could well make things look brighter than they did, to Molly's own unaided eyes.

And now Molly had reached the very end of the world. She had climbed to the top of the highest mountain, where the atmosphere was as clear and pure as a diamond; where everything was as still as if no footfall had ever broken its silence, and where a wide blue lake lay sleeping in the sunshine. She sat down

on the edge of the lake, to wait till the sun which was still high above her head should assume the appearance of a huge mirror ready to dip beneath the waves. Molly did not know with what weapon she would be able to open the crystal gates, but determined to try the efficacy of both distaff and spectacles. The lake had been very still all day, but as the time drew near it began to ebb and flow, and rise into a thousand ripples, which shone like molten gold. Molly covered her eyes with her hands, for the brilliance of the approaching sun was more than she could bear. But presently she felt her seat moving, as if the waves were floating her off; and looking up, she saw the round, bright orb like a gigantic wall of crystal rising right before her. She sprang up and across the lake, which hardened into solid gold as her feet touched it, and touched the crystal wall with both distaff and spectacles. In a twinkling the sun flew open, and a crowd of graceful forms drew Molly in, and with a joyous burst of song welcomed her to Fairyland.

It would take me a year at least to tell you all the wonders which Molly saw in Fairyland with one glance of her eye. Moonystruck Hall was nothing to it, and Molly agreed heartily with her mother's Fairy God-

mother, who had declared that nothing worth having was to be found out of it. In due course she was conducted into the presence of the Fairy Queen, who was seated on a silver mushroom,—a throne which all her Court considered very elegant. Her feet rested on a crystal footstool, beneath which, in a hen's egg, lay *the* Charmed Ruby. But *what* a ruby! it was like a miniature sun, no wonder Fairyland was so bright. Round the Queen's throne patrolled two tall and solemn Clocks, whose faces showed all the adventures which every one had ever gone through to get the Ruby. It was with no small astonishment that Molly saw one of the hundred hands of these Clocks pointing to all that she herself had gone through, and ticking solemnly as it had ticked for thousands of years.

After a little fairy music had been performed by an invisible band, and the maidens of the Court had danced with the tips of their toes upon nothing, for Molly's gratification, a banquet was served in her honour, at which was displayed a vast amount of airy magnificence, and still more airy cookery. After that the Queen requested to know what had brought Molly to Fairyland. Instructed by the Master of the Ceremonies, Molly bent on one knee and related her adventures,

every one of which was ticked off as it occurred by the Clocks. After she had finished, a breathless silence prevailed throughout the Court, and Molly anxiously awaited the Queen's decision.

'What o'clock is it?' inquired the Fairy Queen, with the most gracious of smiles.

Molly was considerably amazed at this abrupt speech, especially as she did not know how to read the time off the face of such strange Clocks as these.

'Look,' said the Queen, 'at the largest golden hand of each Clock, and tell me where it points.'

'It points,' said Molly, 'to the Ruby.'

'Well for you,' answered the Queen, with another gracious smile, 'that they do not point backwards; the Clocks approve of you. Take, then, the Charmed Ruby, and be happy all your life.' So saying, the Fairy Queen placed the Charmed Ruby in Molly's hand; but, for all that, there still remained, to Molly's great wonder, a Ruby in the hen's egg. Molly tried to thank the Queen, but a blast of silver bugles from a band of Fairies drowned her voice. The Queen smiled and nodded, and saying a few magic words, waved her wand three times across Molly's eyes. Each time a brilliant flash of light issued from the wand, and Molly closed

her eyes, dazzled by the brilliance. When she opened them again, the Charmed Ruby was still in her hand, but she herself was standing at her cottage door in Cornertown.

Molly's mother did not long enjoy the Charmed Ruby; indeed, I doubt very much whether it ever could have had any efficacy with her, but after she died it remained in Molly's family for generations, and I dare-say is there still. At all events, this much I can vouch for, that whenever a merry Molly goes singing about the world, there is certain to be a Charmed Ruby in her possession, also a pair of rose-coloured spectacles, and not unfrequently a distaff as well.

So there's a riddle for you.

IV.

THE INEXHAUSTIBLE PURSE.

IT lay at the bottom of a ditch, and a common-looking little brown thing it was. Nancy stood at the top, and a common-looking little brown thing *she* was. For her frock was brown, and so was her hair; and both were very shiny, the one with age and the other with smoothness. Her eyes were brown, and as for her face and hands—well, they were *clean*, and likewise brown! You never would have thought, to look at her, that such a big soul dwelt in such a tiny body, but it was so all the same.

The purse did not look inviting, for it was by no means smart; but Nancy did not mind that, not being smart herself. She was thinking that it would do nicely to hold her pennies; and as her pennies were very like angels in their visits, there was no danger of wearing it out too soon. So Nancy picked up the purse and carried it home.

She had no sooner got home than she found that, being Saturday night, there were all the children to wash; and as Nancy was blessed with seven brothers and one little sister, you may easily imagine that she did not get much time to examine her purse before going to bed. Then when bed-time came her mother was cross, as she always was on Saturday night, from having so many children to wash; so she gave Nancy no candle to go to bed by, which was generally her way of showing her crossness. So Nancy popped her purse into a little treasure-box that she had, and which contained, besides the purse, one brass button, and went to bed in the dark. Nancy's parents were very poor, the poorest people in Cornertown, but they were very hardworking, and taught their children to be so too. So Nancy never had much time for play, and certainly none for idling.

One day her mother said to her, 'Now you are grown a big girl, and it is quite time for you to be earning some money for yourself; we must look out for a situation for you.'

Nancy was overjoyed. 'Oh yes, mother!' cried she, clapping her hands; 'and then father can buy a pig.'

'A pig!' echoed the mother, 'look to clothing yourself and putting bread into your mouth first, child, and then it will be time to begin thinking about pigs.'

But Nancy had an idea that she was going to get rich as fast as ever she could; and as she had often heard her father wish for a pig, she had made up her mind to buy one, and so she haunted all the pig-styes for miles round, and soon grew very learned on the subject.

In the meantime a situation had been found for her with an old woman who had lately come to live in Cornertown. No one knew anything about this old woman, and so, of course, every one told the most startling stories about her. They said she was a witch, and she really did look something like one. She was always in a red cloak and long red mittens, and she spent most of her time in the woods, hunting for herbs, with which she cured the most complicated diseases. I

am afraid, though, she did not find much gratitude in Cornertown; one man especially was so proud of having a disease that no doctor could cure, and that none of his neighbours had ever heard of, that when the old woman cured him with some of her herbs, he flew into a violent passion, and forbade her ever to darken his doors again. Nancy, however, did not much care whether her new mistress was a witch or not; she promised to give her good wages, and she had a pig, which was an immense recommendation in Nancy's eyes.

'Now, my young maid,' said the Witch, as soon as Nancy made her appearance, 'I mean to give you plenty to eat, and good wages,—more than most young maids like you get,—and in return for this you must have no eyes, no ears, no nose, and no tongue. Do you understand me, my young maid?'

Nancy didn't, but she curtsied.

'Very well, then,' said the Witch, 'take your basket and come with me into the woods.'

So Nancy followed her new mistress, and found that her most arduous duty consisted in holding the basket for the Witch to put in the herbs and plants she gathered. In the evening, the Witch went through

sundry incantations with bottles, and candles, and red-hot coals, which frightened Nancy nearly out of her wits; but she wisely sat still, and did not appear to observe anything.

In the meantime the prospects of the pig were getting quite brilliant. Nancy's parents were so overjoyed at the good wages their daughter received, that they gave her every week a penny out of them for herself. Nancy now had six, and began to think herself quite a miser to lay by so much money.

'Now, my young maid,' said the old woman, 'you will have to go on a journey for me,—all my young maids do,—and if you conduct yourself well, you shall be rewarded.'

Nancy inwardly quaked, but professed herself willing to go to the end of the world for her mistress.

'It's not quite so far as that,' said the old dame, 'but nearer it than you think—much nearer. The Red Forest is at the end of the world, but I only want you to go as far as the Blue Woods.'

'And where, please,' said Nancy, 'are the Blue Woods?'

'Never you mind,' said her mistress, 'they're as the crow flies, and it flies every Saturday at two o'clock

in the morning, so you have nothing to do but follow it. But now listen: as soon as you get to the Blue Woods, you're to go and stand in the very middle, which you will know to be the middle by a large blue tulip growing there; you are then to look inside the tulip, and you will find a four-leaved shamrock, which you are to divide and throw the leaves to the four quarters whence come the four winds; at each leaf you are to say one line of the four that I shall teach you, and then throw yourself down on your face and wait for whatever happens.'

By this time Nancy was not only inwardly but outwardly quaking, and very vehemently indeed; having, however, quite lost the power of speech, she gazed into the Witch's face with a stony horror, which her mistress took for extreme submission, and proceeded accordingly.

'Now mind you must learn this charm off by heart; but after you have once learnt it, you must never repeat it again till you come to the Blue Woods.'

And with slow and sublime utterance the Witch repeated the following mysterious and terrible words:

'Fan Tan, Katch Kan, Hodge Podge, Ho!
Fudge Pudge, Hish Hash, Donkey, go;
Take three grains of a Merry Andrew's brains,
And boil them down in a Guinea Pig's toe.'

Nancy's teeth chattered to such a degree that she could scarcely repeat the words; but having once done so, they became so firmly fixed in her mind, that there was no need to repeat them a second time.

'And now, my young maid,' said the Witch, 'you need take nothing with you except a little brown purse, which you keep in a box at home, and which you found at the bottom of a ditch. Take that and all that's in it.'

Nancy curtsied and withdrew in a state of extreme bewilderment.

When Saturday came, Nancy opened her door at two o'clock in the morning, and found outside a jet black bird with a crest of snowy feathers, which, as soon as she appeared, spread its wings and soared away with such rapidity, that Nancy had some difficulty in keeping it in sight. Fortunately there was a bright moon and plenty of light, which served to show Nancy not only the bird, but a variety of other curious things, which probably are only seen at night, and by some one who has a witch's spell in his head. There was no end to the little creatures that Nancy saw all wide awake and chattering. The birds were busy telling each other their dreams; and it was very funny to hear them talking about their nightmares of departed worms, and the

visions of approaching flies that had visited their slumbers. Bright-coloured little fishes peeped up out of every brook, and Nancy even fancied she caught sight of an elf or two asleep; but if so, it jumped back immediately into the water, or into a flowercup, and so might have been only a raindrop or a moonbeam after all. Presently, however, Nancy met with an adventure herself. This was in the shape of a large blue cat, which was sitting by the roadside, with a smart embroidered handkerchief up to its face, weeping most bitterly.

'Dear Pussy,' said Nancy, 'why do you weep so bitterly?'

'Alas,' said the afflicted Puss, 'I was going with my mistress's eggs to market, and I dropped them, and they all broke into *smithereens;* and they were worth a silver penny—what shall I do?'

'Dear Pussy,' said Nancy, 'I haven't a silver penny, but perhaps a copper one will do instead; if so, take it and welcome.'

The blue cat got up and made a profound curtsey, then it rubbed its head politely against Nancy's hand, and taking the penny in its mouth, waved its tail and disappeared into a wood. Nancy walked on, greatly

INEXHAUSTIBLE PURSE.

pleased, and not even regretting her precious pig money. She had not gone far before she met a huge yellow dog, with but one ear, which ear was however very erect. It was holding its head up and howling most miserably.

'Dear Doggy,' said Nancy, 'don't howl so, I beseech you; but tell me, what can I do for you?'

'Ochone, ochone,' howled the dog (he must have been of Irish extraction), 'what will my mistress say? She gave me a basket of butter to take to market, and it all fell into the river and melted away,—and it was worth a penny with a hole in it.'

'Dear Doggy,' said Nancy, 'I haven't got a penny with a hole in it, but here is one without one, if that will do.'

The dog rose on his hind legs and made a bow, then licked Nancy's hand with much elegance, and went off with the penny.

Nancy jogged on contentedly for a little while, until she came to a tiny little old woman who was sitting on a bank sobbing and wringing her hands at a great rate.

'Dear old woman,' said Nancy, 'pray tell me what is your trouble?'

'Oh, deary me,' said the old woman, 'I was going to market with a jug of milk on my head, when the jug broke, and all the milk ran down my back; oh, deary, deary me, and it was worth a penny with a queen's head on it!'

'Dear old woman,' said Nancy, 'I haven't got a penny with a queen's head on it, but here is one with a king's; pray take it, and buy some more milk.'

The old woman got up and took the penny with a shower of thanks and blessings which she screamed after Nancy till she was out of sight.

'Now,' said Nancy, 'I have but three pennies remaining, and if I don't take care I shall have no pig.'

It was still in the night, as you may perceive from so many wonderful things happening, but it was certainly the longest night Nancy had ever known.

'I don't think I shall give away any more pennies,' said Nancy.

At this moment she met a little child crying.

'Dear little child,' said Nancy, 'why do you cry?'

'Oh!' sobbed the little child, 'I am so hungry, and I have lost my big brown cake in the wood.'

'Don't cry,' said Nancy, 'here is a penny to buy another.'

The little child took the penny and was gone like a flash. Nancy thought it must have melted away like the yellow dog's butter. Presently a lame old man came hobbling up, shivering from head to foot.

'Why do you shiver, old man?' asked Nancy.

'Ah, me!' said the old man, 'it's cold, cold for my old bones, and a thief has run off with my cloak. Ah, me, but it's cold—cold'—

'Don't shiver,' said Nancy, 'here are two pennies, it's all I have, perhaps that will buy a cloak.'

The old man took the pennies; but at that moment the sun, which had been peeping up for a little while, bounced up in a great hurry, and Nancy not only lost sight of the old man, but found herself standing in the very middle of the Blue Woods, without at all knowing how she had got there. She felt a little heavy-hearted at the loss of her pennies, I must confess, but after all it could not be helped, and the next thing was to find the blue tulip. This was easily done, the blue tulip being decidedly the most conspicuous object in the landscape, and she picked the four-leaved shamrock from the centre, and proceeded to repeat the charm in much fear and trembling:

'Fan Tan, Katch Kan, Hodge Podge, Ho!
Fudge Pudge, Hish Hash, Donkey, go;
Take three grains of a Merry Andrew's brains,
And boil them down in a Guinea Pig's toe.'

At each line she flung a leaf in a different direction, and no sooner was the last line out of her mouth than a furious wind came from every quarter, and meeting in the centre, caused such a violent whirlwind, that it would have certainly thrown her down to the ground if she had not been already there. This lasted for exactly four minutes, then the jet black bird came and fluttered round her head, and a voice said:

'Get up, child. If you want me, that's not the way to have me.'

Nancy got up in a great fright, and saw what looked to her a terrible apparition, but who was no other than our old friend the Wizard Katchookatchkan.

'Well, child,' said this personage, seating himself on the stump of a tree, the top of which had just been carried off by the whirlwind, 'what are you doing here?'

'I don't know, please, sir,' said Nancy.

'Humph!' said the Wizard; 'who sent you? Perhaps you know that.'

'Please, sir, my mistress,' said Nancy.

'Humph! I might have known it,' muttered the Wizard. 'Now, child, what did you find in the blue tulip—tell me that?'

'Please, sir, a four-leaved shamrock,' said Nancy, 'which I threw away, as my mistress bade me.'

'Hum!' said the Wizard; 'and don't you know, child, that whoever finds the four-leaved shamrock finds untold wealth?'

'No, sir, please,' said Nancy, who probably thought that the four-leaved shamrock had caused her to *lose* untold wealth.

'Hum!' said the Wizard; 'what have you done with all the money in your brown purse?'

'Please, sir, I gave it away,' said Nancy.

'Gave it away!' shouted the Wizard.

'Yes, sir—please—I couldn't help it,' pleaded poor Nancy.

The Wizard struck his staff on the ground with such violence, that sparks flew from the end of it.

'Now, by my bird and staff,' quoth he, 'I've been up and down the world a thousand years, and never yet met with any one who wasn't able to help giving his money away. You must be a genius,—one never knows

where to have *them*, — and I begin to see why your mistress allowed you to find the four-leaved shamrock, the first time any one has found it for many a long year; people *do* say, there is no such thing—ha, ha!' —and the Wizard chuckled grimly, to Nancy's great consternation.

'Now stop a bit,' said he. So saying he struck his staff on the ground, and immediately the blue cat, the yellow dog, the little old woman, the child, and the old man came trooping into the Blue Woods.

'Are these the creatures you gave your money to?' said the Wizard, looking at them with much disgust. But before Nancy could speak, the objects of her bounty rushed to her, uttering cries of joy and thankfulness, while the blue cat and yellow dog, in the exuberance of their gratitude, joined hands—paws, I mean—and danced a Scotch reel, which, as it requires a good deal of howling, suited them to a T. Nancy was so much overcome at the sight, that she sat down on the ground and added her voice to the chorus of cries going on around her.

'Now by my bird and staff,' shouted the old Wizard in a perfect frenzy of rage, 'have done, will you, for a pack of fools; a body can't hear himself think with the

row you are kicking up,—hold your tongues, or I shall take off every one of your heads.'

Immediately there was a dead silence; but when Nancy looked up, lo and behold! there was nobody there but the Wizard Katchookatchkan and her mistress with the red mittens.

'Well, Mistress Rubinetta,' said the Wizard, 'it's something new for some one to come and hunt for the four-leaved shamrock, and begin by giving all his money away.'

'Just so,' said the Fairy Rubinetta, 'and let me tell you, Sir Katchookatchkan, that no one *shall*, by *my* good leave, find the four-leaved shamrock unless he is willing to do that, or something like it.'

'Humph,' said the Wizard; 'I know you teach a new system at Cornertown.'

'Now, my young maid,' said the Fairy Rubinetta, turning to Nancy, 'you must know that I am a Fairy, and that it was I who appeared to you in different shapes, and to whom you gave your money. I am much pleased with you—take this as a reward;' and she held out a penny. Nancy thanked her mistress, and put it into her purse.

'Now take it out again,' said the Fairy.

Nancy took out of her purse, not one penny, but three.

'Humph,' muttered the Wizard, 'a body wouldn't take long to get rich at that rate.'

'Now, my young maid,' said the Fairy Rubinetta, 'you see the value of your little brown purse: for every penny that you put into it, two more will come out of it; but you must not forget that you must keep putting pennies into it, for it is not good to get rich without working for it. And you must also know, that if ever you refuse to give to those who need, for every penny you put into it, two more will disappear out of it. For only those who have inexhaustible hearts deserve inexhaustible purses.'

Nancy was overwhelmed with gratitude, and, as you may imagine, speedily grew so rich that she was able to build a large house for herself and her parents, and to keep not one pig, but a hundred, finally marrying a king's son, who had been a swineherd in his youth, and was therefore able to sympathize with Nancy's peculiar tastes. And history further goes on to state, that all the country round had cause to bless Nancy's rich purse and richer heart; and that she never lost two pennies by refusing to give one.

As for the four-leaved shamrock, there probably is one in the Blue Woods at this moment; for though many people want to get rich, very few take the right way about it. They will not believe, you see, that a blessing rests on every penny given to those in greater need than themselves; and until they do, I am afraid more pennies will disappear out of their purses than they ever put into them. Supposing you try the experiment.

CRYSTAL HEART.

V.

THE CRYSTAL HEART.

JUST out of Cornertown, where a stile leads across a grass meadow, and a clear, rapid brook gurgles and whispers all the summer's day, stood a cottage that nobody ever went near. And yet it was such a cosy spot, warm and soft as a bird's nest.

But the Cornertonians said it was haunted; and so it was, but by nothing half so harmless as a ghost. A ghost, dear children, never speaks unless it is spoken to, and not always then; and many were those who would have been deeply thankful if the ghost which haunted this cottage had always acted

on the same excellent principle. For the owner of it was a shrew—a scolding wife and a cruel stepmother. She had a husband who was, properly speaking, the master of the place, but he had long ago given up his rights; if he had ever attempted to speak he could not have been heard, poor man—so he never did. He had one daughter by his first wife, and she was so good and so patient, so sweet and so pretty, that every one loved her, and she was always called little Mother Meg. But of course the stepmother hated her all the more, especially as her own daughter, though she was very handsome, was a perfect little fury, and never went by any other name than Wicked Wanda. Now Wicked Wanda's godmother was a witch, one of your regular old-fashioned witches, who nourish venomous serpents in their bosoms, and can brew potions that would kill any one even to look at, or make people love you whether they like it or not, and all sorts of other comfortable things. She lived, too, in the very middle of a dreary black marsh, of which the air was so noxious that no one who had not sucked the blood of a new-born baby could live in it for a minute, and so she was well secured against morning calls. But when she had been at Wicked Wanda's christening she had given her a charm which would enable her to come

and see her whenever she liked, and Wicked Wanda had now determined to make use of it. The fact was, that as Wicked Wanda grew up, she became more and more jealous of little Mother Meg, and was ready to tear out her eyes whenever any one liked or admired her. She had long made poor Meg's life miserable: she had hidden away all her best clothes, wrung the necks of her pet birds, trampled down her favourite flowers, besides getting her mother to impose on her such long and severe tasks, that poor Meg had no time for her only pleasure, which was to wander during the long summer evenings on the banks of the river, and play with and tell stories to any of the little Cornertown children who were not afraid to venture so far. But all Wicked Wanda's efforts were vain; little Mother Meg was so patient and sweet, so anxious to please her stepmother and make her half-sister love her, that they only hated her the more because they could not make her as wicked as themselves. At last, when Wicked Wanda heard a rumour that the richest farmer in Cornertown had fallen in love with Meg, and wanted to marry her, matters came to a climax. Wicked Wanda grew so furious that she behaved like a maniac, and every one was afraid to come near her. She stamped and raved,

and kicked and screamed, and bit and scratched, and finally, when every one in the house was skulking in the darkest corner they could find, she fell into a fit of the sulks, and locking her door, announced her intention of starving herself to death.

It was now the stepmother's turn to take up the matter.

'My dear, sweet little dove of a daughter,' said she, cautiously approaching the door and holding the handle tight lest her dear little dove of a daughter should suddenly dart out and pull her hair, 'pray do not afflict yourself so terribly, but come out and tell your own mother what ails you.'

'Get along with you,' said the dove.

'My dear little angel,' said the mother, 'what do you wish me to do for you?—say but the word, and it shall be done.'

'Kill Meg,' replied the angel promptly.

'My own darling,' said the mother, 'it would give me the greatest pleasure to fulfil such a natural and laudable desire, but you know that Meg is protected by a powerful Fairy, and I dare not do anything against her life.'

'Then never say you love me!' shouted Wicked

Wanda, and the crash of a table and a few articles of crockery immediately followed.

'Angel of a daughter of mine!' said the mother, 'would it not be best to go and consult your godmother in the Black Marshes?'

'Get along with you,' replied Wicked Wanda; but this was only to gain time. In reality she thought it a good suggestion, only she was not willing to say so, as it did not come from herself. The mother looked round with a congratulatory air, and applying her ear to the keyhole, remained silent for a few minutes.

'Now then,' cried Wicked Wanda, in a voice like a small hurricane, 'what do you go running off for, you useless old frump?'

'My angel,' replied the mother, 'you told me to get along.'

'Well, and why didn't you, then?' cried her dutiful daughter, opening the door. 'I am going to my godmother,' said she; 'but don't fancy it's at your bidding —I thought of it myself long ago.'

'I have no doubt you did, my little poppet,' said her mother submissively.

And so this worthy scion of a noble race took her charm, which was the toe-nail of a murderer, blessed

by the Witch, and a bottle of new milk as a present for her godmother, and set out on her journey to the Black Marshes. After a great many days of toilsome travelling, which by no means improved the temper of Wicked Wanda, she at last arrived at her godmother's abode. The Witch knew she was coming, and had adorned herself with a crown of scorpions, which shone like jewels, and a chain and bracelets of amber-coloured serpents; her eyes were red and sunken, her hair bristled like a porcupine, and her nose and chin were so close together that she could only mumble and hiss—in fact, she looked extremely bewitching. She embraced her goddaughter warmly, complimented her on her improved beauty, and then begged to know what she could do for her.

'For I do not suppose, my dear godchild,' said she, with a hideous grin, 'that you would come to see me unless you wanted something.'

'No; you are about right there,' replied Wicked Wanda, who was not much more ceremonious with her godmother than with her mother. 'It is not likely I would choose to come to such a detestable place otherwise; nor do I find you so pretty to look at either.'

'Say you so, my pretty dear?' said the Witch with another grin; 'then take heed you do not become like me some fine day.'

'A likely story,' said Wicked Wanda, tossing her head.

'You want me,' said the Witch abruptly, 'to take some one out of your way.'

'Yes,' replied Wicked Wanda; 'and not only that, but as this is my birthday I want you to give me something which will make every one love and admire me or die.'

'A pretty little piece of work,' said the Witch; 'but I think it can be done with one drawback.'

'And what's that?' asked Wicked Wanda eagerly.

'Why, there's your half-sister; I am afraid I cannot kill her, she is protected by a powerful Fairy.'

'No matter!' exclaimed Wicked Wanda impatiently, 'let the worm live, if only I be irresistible.'

'Ay! but that is not all. You must know that this is your sister's birthday as well as yours; and I am bound by a powerful oath, for every gift which I give you to give her one as well, which *might* neutralize its effect.'

At these words Wicked Wanda was transported with

rage; she sprang up from her seat, stamped and raved, tore her hair, and probably would have torn her godmother's too, if the Witch had not pointed a serpent at her with an air of authority.

'Stop!' said she, 'I did not say that it *would* neutralize its effect.'

Wicked Wanda was quieted, and the Witch continued:

'I happen to have by me a few worthless gifts, one of which I will send your sister. For you, however, I have something more powerful, but it remains to be seen whether you are brave enough to accept it. Here it is,'—and she held up a small, brilliantly green serpent, with yellow eyes and a red forked tongue. If you carry this in your bosom, you will become so beautiful that no one will be able to resist you, and any one who dares to try will perish at once, withered up by a glance from your eyes.'

Wicked Wanda's eyes sparkled with joy.

'But won't it sting?' she asked doubtfully.

'Sting!' muttered the Witch; 'ay, it will sting your very heart;' then she continued in a louder tone, 'you will not feel it, or at least not after a little. But what is a little pain compared to'—

'Oh, dear godmother!' exclaimed Wicked Wanda,

clasping her hands. 'Give it me now at once—I cannot wait.'

The Witch sprinkled a few drops from a caldron, that was always simmering on her fire, on the serpent's head, muttered a few words over it, kissed it fervently, and placed it in her godchild's bosom. The serpent uncoiled itself, hissed, and darted its forked tongue at her white skin.

'Ah!' exclaimed Wicked Wanda, shrinking a little, 'it is only a prick—if that's all, I can bear it.'

'Ay, bear it,' muttered the Witch, 'you'd better,—and now, take this to your sister and begone.'

She held out, as she spoke, a piece of bright crystal, shaped like a heart.

'What are its properties?' asked Wicked Wanda, examining it curiously as it lay on the palm of her hand. But the Witch had returned to her occupation of stirring the caldron on the fire, and gave no sign of having heard her. So Wicked Wanda, seeing that nothing further was to be got out of the Witch, had nothing for it but to take the crystal heart and trudge home.

As soon as the stepmother and little Mother Meg saw Wicked Wanda again, they uttered cries of

astonishment and admiration; for she had grown so dazzlingly beautiful that nothing like her beauty was to be seen anywhere, and all Cornertown was soon at her feet. Wicked Wanda was full of malicious triumph, for one of the first victories was the rich young farmer who had been courting Meg, but who had no sooner seen Wicked Wanda than he vowed and declared no one but her should be his wife. So poor Meg had to give him up without a word. But she bore no malice against her half-sister; on the contrary, she loved her for her beauty, and asked for nothing better than to spend all the day making her clothes, and half the night combing out her long beautiful raven locks. But when the evening before the wedding came, poor Meg, who had been more than usually ill-treated by her stepmother and sister, wandered out to the river-side, and feeling very miserable, sat down amongst the rushes and wept bitterly. She was roused by a step beside her, and looking up, saw a funny little old woman in a red cloak and long red mittens.

'My young maid,' said the old woman, 'why do you weep so bitterly?'

Meg was so frightened that she could not say a word.

'Do not be afraid of me,' said the old woman; 'I am

the Fairy Rubinetta, and have been your friend for a long time, though you have never seen me before, so tell me your grief without fear.'.

Thus encouraged, Meg poured out the whole history of her woes.

'And do you not hate them very much, and wish to punish them?' asked the Fairy; 'because if you wish, I can do them a good deal of harm!'

'No, madam,' replied Meg, 'I only want them to be made good, and to love me more.'

The Fairy shook her head. 'That, I am afraid, is beyond my power,' said she; 'and, indeed, it is not much I can do for you until the spell is worked out. If, however, you really do not wish them harm, and would rather wait for them to get better, there is one thing you can do towards it. Do you wear the crystal heart I sent you?'

'They made me do so,' said Meg; 'but I thought it was the Witch's gift, and that frightened me very much.'

'No such thing,' said the old Fairy, 'it is my gift, and if you wear it always it will ensure you happiness and love, though a good deal of pain as well. It exhales, as you perceive, a delicious perfume which will be only the sweeter when you are unhappy. It opens

with a spring, but you may not open it now; in time to come, when every one loves you and thinks you have reached perfection, you may do so, and find out what it is which has been so sweet. And now, farewell,'—and the Fairy Rubinetta vanished, and little Mother Meg went home much comforted.

The next day Wicked Wanda was married, and went off triumphantly with her young farmer, leaving Meg to the tender mercies of her mother, who was quite delighted to get rid of her daughter and have the field all to herself.

And now poor Meg had a fine time of it, but she was just as good and as patient as ever. In about a year, however, the stepmother fell ill, and became so violent that she made herself worse and worse. No one would stay near her except Meg,—her husband had long since run away. But Meg kept faithful, and patiently nursed her stepmother, till she grew so bad that it was very plain she could not live another night. Then Meg felt very lonely and desolate in the little cottage, which no one came near, and sat beside her stepmother watching her asleep, and dreading lest every breath should be her last. At last the stepmother opened her eyes and called to Meg to come near her. Meg obeyed in

fear and trembling, for she had often done so before, and nearly had her eyes scratched out for her pains.

'Meg,' said her stepmother very solemnly, 'I have had a frightful dream. I dreamt that the Witch came and told me that she had given a venomous serpent to my daughter, and bade her carry it in her bosom, and that it would cause every one to worship her, or else die. But it will end in stinging her to death. And then the Witch shook her staff at me, and grinned horribly in my very face. And this I dreamt three times, so I know it must be true. And now I feel that I am dying fast; but before I die, you must promise me one thing. Keep watch for Wicked Wanda. I feel that you alone can save her, that you alone will remain faithful to her, that you alone will pity and forgive her. I feel that some day at sunset she will come back to you wretched and forsaken; *promise* me to keep a home for her,'—and the dying woman caught hold of Meg's arm and held it as if in a vice; but before Meg could stammer out the words of promise, the hold relaxed, and her cruel stepmother fell back on the pillow dead.

The little cottage by the river-side now became as happy as before it was miserable; for though little

Mother Meg lived there alone, it became the daily resort of children, young lovers, brides and bridegrooms, and all sorts of happy people. Meg had a large heart for all, but still kept a corner, not only in her heart but in her home, for Wicked Wanda. The room in the gable which looked towards the sunset was always ready for her, and in summer the lattice was open all day, and the room filled with the scent of jessamine and sweetbriar, and the sounds of running waters and humming bees. Every evening, when the happy guests had left Meg's home for the day, and gone back towards Cornertown with many a backward look and waving hand, and the sound of their merry voices had died away in the distance, Meg went and stood at the open window of the room in the gable, waiting and watching for Wicked Wanda. She must surely come at last, thought little Mother Meg, for beautiful as she was, no one could long continue loving her—that is, no one who did not wear the crystal heart on his bosom; and so, when all she cared for had died, she must surely come back to little Mother Meg. But the serpent in Wicked Wanda's bosom was more powerful than Meg thought, and so the days went on, and she never came.

In the meantime, the fame of Meg's beauty and

sweetness had spread so far, that a certain king's son, whose wanderings had led him in that direction, heard of her and went to see her. He rode up to the cottage door one fine day on a milk-white steed, with harness of gold; but no sooner had he caught sight of Meg, than he fell off his horse in a fainting fit. Meg took him in and nursed him, but he was so deeply in love, that he grew worse and worse, and probably would have died if Meg had not discovered his secret. She thought in her innocence that it was a great pity so handsome a young prince should be allowed to die for love of her; so, as he was too weak to say a word, she went and put her hand in his, and told him she was ready to follow him all over the world. At which the king's son was so transported with joy, that he immediately sprang out of bed, flung all his medicines out of the window, and never took another drop as long as he lived.

So now little Mother Meg had become a princess and lived in a large and splendid palace, but she was just as patient and humble as in the old days. The king's son worshipped her—she showed him the crystal heart, and he was always urging her to open it, that he might see what it was that had made his bride so

irresistible, but Meg never would, for she did not think herself perfect enough, and besides, as long as Wicked Wanda did not love her, she would not open it. There was a large and splendid suite of apartments in the west wing of the palace reserved for Wicked Wanda, and every evening Meg went there, and sat hand in hand with her husband, the fragrance of the crystal heart meanwhile filling the apartment like the breath of flowers, and together they talked of all they would do to kill the venomous serpent and bring Wicked Wanda to her right mind. But the years went on, and she never came.

Little Mother Meg bore her husband two beautiful boys, who became the strongest, handsomest, and most daring youths in the world. They, like every one else in the kingdom, worshipped their mother, and at every birthday and anniversary of the wedding day joined their father in imploring Meg to open the crystal heart, declaring that no one in the world could possibly be more perfect or more beloved than she was, and that there might be some still more wonderful Fairy gift inside; but she continued humble and patient, and stedfastly refused to do so. The fame of the crystal heart and its wearer spread far and wide, for its sweet

influence had cured many a heart sick and sore, and healed many a family breach. Numbers flocked to the palace to present petitions and beg for gifts, and none were sent away unsatisfied. Numbers more came to shower blessings on the head of little Mother Meg, as she was still called; and the palace was as populous with grateful and happy visitors as a small city. At last, when many years had gone by, and Meg had ceased to hope for Wicked Wanda's return, she consented that the crystal heart should be opened on the next anniversary of the wedding day. Great preparations were accordingly set on foot, and numbers were invited from far and near to be present at the ceremony. But as the time drew near, little Mother Meg grew very sad, and spent nearly all her time in the west wing of the palace, still waiting and watching for one who never came. And what, in the meantime, had become of Wicked Wanda?

It is needless to say that the young farmer speedily discovered the true nature of his bride, and bitterly repented having preferred her to her sister. But his repentance, as is usual in such cases, came too late; for no sooner had he ceased to love her than he met the doom which the Witch had predicted, and perished

miserably. Wicked Wanda then travelled all over the world, and everywhere her marvellous beauty attracted all eyes. Numbers flocked to her, numbers worshipped her, and numbers died, having discovered her true nature, and ceased to love her. At last she married a rich and powerful lord, himself protected by a spell from the baleful influence of the serpent in his wife's bosom. But the life they led was a fit punishment for all Wicked Wanda's crimes. Their castle resounded with blows and cries from morning till night; not a soul would stay near them, and Wicked Wanda had to sweep the house and cook the dinner as best she could.

In course of time she gave birth to a beautiful boy, whom both parents loved with such jealous fervour, that he became only a new source of enmity between them. Wicked Wanda especially, who had never loved anybody in her life before, worshipped him, and for a few years he returned her affection. But, alas! as time went on, and he became a youth, he learnt to know his mother, and slowly but surely his love for her died from his heart. He struggled long to retain it, and felt himself grow weaker and weaker day by day; but at last, when he had seen Wicked Wanda showering blows on a defenceless child, shake a dying woman in

her bed, and ruthlessly imprison a poor old man, keeping him without food till he died, the last spark of tenderness faded from his heart; and one evening, when his mother had called him to her side, he looked into her face with a wild and mournful gaze, and, sinking down at her feet, died without a groan.

Wicked Wanda shrieked and cried, and tore her hair and beat her breast; but it was no use, it could not bring him back to life again. The father was mad with rage and fury, accused Wicked Wanda of being her son's murderer, which was true enough, and finally thrust her out of the castle with blows and curses, and forbade her ever to come near him again.

Wicked Wanda in despair did not know where to turn. Every one shunned her and fled at her approach; all her beauty had gone, and the serpent gnawed at her very heart. In this miserable plight she laid herself down one evening by the roadside, and resolved to die there.

'It is no use my living any longer,' said she, 'for I only kill all I love, and there is nothing left to live for; even my beauty has left me, I am too hideous to exist.'

'Ha, ha!' said a hissing voice beside her, 'where is the scornful beauty who thought herself too good to

breathe the same air as her godmother, the Witch?—she never dreamt of becoming like her, ha, ha, ha!'

Wicked Wanda started up,—her godmother stood beside her, her features distorted into a hideous grimace.

'Wretch!' cried Wicked Wanda, 'it is to you I owe all my misery! How dare you come near me?'

'Pretty bird,' said the Witch, 'how can *you* talk of misery,—*you*, the most beautiful of women, the lightning of whose eyes can blast the most daring churl who refuses to acknowledge your charms? Look into this mirror, and behold your beauty,'—and the Witch held out a mirror, into which Wicked Wanda gazed with a shudder as she recognised the fearful likeness between them.

'Leave me to die,' said she, sinking back and hiding her face in her hands.

'Nay,' said the Witch, bending over her and hissing into her ear, 'surely you need not die; go to your sister—beautiful, beloved, and rich, see what the insignificant crystal heart has done for *her*, and what your gift of irresistible beauty has done for *you*; perhaps she will pity you—you, the beautiful Wicked Wanda.'

'I *will* go to her,' cried Wicked Wanda, springing up;

'she at least will help me, and forgive me, and love me—she always did; and if this serpent, which has become such a part of myself that I cannot pluck it from my bosom, should sting me to death, I can but die at her feet.'

So saying, Wicked Wanda tore herself from the Witch's grasp, and fled away with such swiftness that she was speedily lost to view, and her godmother was left to gesticulate and call after her in vain.

After many days of toilsome travelling, during which the fame of little Mother Meg and the crystal heart led her in the right direction, Wicked Wanda arrived one evening, just as the sun was setting, at a magnificent palace, entirely built of crystal. This, to her astonishment, she found was the abode of the once despised Meg. For the last time the serpent stung her fiercely, envy and jealousy filled her heart, and she was about to turn and fly, when a mild old man with a mournful countenance came towards her.

'What do you here, poor wayfarer?' said he.

'I seek one whom they call little Mother Meg,' said Wicked Wanda; 'is she here?'

'She is here,' said the old man; 'what or who are you?'

'They call me Wicked Wanda.'

The old man seized her hands, and held her tight.

'Are you,' said he, 'the sister whom she has waited and watched for these twenty years and more?'

'I am that miserable wretch,' answered Wicked Wanda.

'Then,' said the old man, who was no other than the king's son, 'this is the day that the crystal heart is to be opened, and you shall be a welcome guest,—come and look upon her face.'

He led her through the palace, where a deep silence reigned, into a quiet chamber in the west wing. The window was open, and looked towards the sunset. A rich, subdued glow filled the room, and the far-off song of a thrush thrilled through the summer air. On a couch near the window lay little Mother Meg, the crystal heart on her bosom, and her two stalwart sons kneeling beside her. She looked as if she were asleep, and dreaming pleasant dreams, and never had her face looked half so fair and sweet as now; but she did not awake and look up with a smile as Wicked Wanda drew near—for little Mother Meg was dead!

'She is perfect now,' said the king's son, as Wicked Wanda knelt weeping beside the couch, and the

venomous serpent crept out of her bosom and fell lifeless to the floor, 'and all love her—even Wicked Wanda; we may open the crystal heart.' And they did so; but sweet and powerful as it had been, all they found was a bruised violet!

Wicked Wanda lived for many years, and became as humble and patient as before she had been cruel and violent. But she would not change her name, but kept it to the end of her life, that she might never forget how sinful she had once been. The crystal heart, with its bruised violet, was kept as a precious relic; and though many years have passed away since then, it has never lost its power or its fragrance, but whenever it is worn and cherished, sweet thoughts of patience and forgiveness dwell in every bosom.

VI.

THE ROSE OF PERPETUAL YOUTH.

SCHOOL was out; but instead of going home at once, Barbara, Lotta, and Phemie were gathered in a little group at the corner of the one sunny street of Cornertown. The boys ran past them with their usual whoop and halloo, but did not as usual provoke a skirmish of words. The street sank into silence after the hubbub of children's voices had died away, and the afternoon sunshine threw long shadows across the schoolhouse, and brooded on distant hill and meadow with golden warmth and stillness. But the three children never stirred. Barbara was spokeswoman.—'And she lives in a cavern under the East Hill, where the sun

rises, and the fountain bubbles up every morning at dawn, and dies down in the daytime. It is at dawn that one must drink of the fountain in order to remain young for ever.'

This was the conclusion of her speech, and the two listeners drew long breaths.

'If one were quite sure,' said Lotta hesitatingly.

'Oh, I am quite sure,' cried Phemie, a pale-faced, flaxen-haired little maid, with the most innocent blue eyes in the world. 'Barbara is so clever; but—I don't think I want to remain young, there'll be so much to do when I am grown up, mother says.'

'Well, and so we will grow up,' said Barbara; 'but we'll never grow *old*, and lose our hair and teeth, and hobble about on crutches.'

'I would like,' said Phemie timidly, 'to be just such an old lady as my grandmother,—mother says I'm like her.'

'La, child!' said Barbara impatiently, 'do you want to sit in an arm-chair in the chimney-corner knit, knit, knitting from morning till night?'

Phemie thought of the arm-chair in the chimney-corner where she had learnt the first lessons of her life, where she brought all her troubles, always sure

of a kiss and a sugar-plum, and where she stood up to read out of a certain big book which always lay within reach of a soft withered hand, and she doubted, —for Phemie was an old-fashioned little woman, but she wisely kept her doubts to herself.

'Ah,' said Lotta meditatively, 'it must be pleasant never to grow wrinkled, and lose all the brightness of one's eyes and the colour out of one's cheeks.'

Lotta was the prettiest girl in Cornertown.

'And always to hear and enjoy the birds' songs, and to see the flowers, and roam through the woods,' chimed in Barbara, who, by the by, did not in the least care for these pleasures herself.

Phemie's face brightened and then fell.

'Granny *would* like to hear the birds sing,' said she sadly; 'but she is deaf, and can only hear the canary when it sings *very* loud. And then we've often got to cover it up.'

'Exactly,' said Barbara; 'and you'd like to be like that, wouldn't you?'

'No,' replied Phemie with a sigh. 'I should like always to be able to wander through the woods and gather primroses, and listen to the thrushes in spring.'

'Then all we've got to do is to go to the East Hill,

where the Witch lives, and drink a few drops of the Fountain of Youth when the sun rises,' said Barbara triumphantly. 'We'll start to-morrow night and be there before dawn.'

Phemie was not quite easy in her mind that night, and did not know whether she wanted to remain young or go on and find out what being old was like. Perhaps, though, she might bring back some of the water for her grandmother to drink—how nice that would be! So, when Phemie came to say good-night, she said—

'Granny, wouldn't you like to be made young again?'

'Bless the child!' exclaimed the old grandmother, quite in a flurry, 'what has got into her head now? Young again? No, child; I should feel all put out, someways, to be young again at this time of day, especially with all you young ones about. No, no; I had just as lief jog on quietly to the end. I shall be made young enough some day, if it's good for me, and then I suppose it'll come natural to me again.' And Phemie went to bed more puzzled than ever.

The next night the three girls set out on their expedition. There was a fine moon, and the East Hill

was not very far off; but they were so much alarmed at their boldness, that they would willingly have gone back if they had dared to confess it to each other. They met with no adventure, however, beyond tearing their clothes and wounding their tender feet with stones, so that they bled. But then one must go through something in order to procure perpetual youth, mustn't one?

'Is the Witch cruel? Will she kill us?' whispered Lotta.

They were nearing their destination, and there was a brightness in the east which betokened that the sun was not far off.

'Oh no; she cannot be cruel,' returned Barbara; but she looked uneasily round.

'This must be the cavern,' said Phemie tremulously, as they paused in a dark cave under the hill; 'but there is no fountain.'

'Good-morrow, my young maids. What brings you here so early?'

A little old woman in a red cloak was hobbling in at the mouth of the cave—a pretty little old woman, too, with a pair of very bright black eyes.

The girls all started at the sound of her voice, and

huddled together in some dismay. Barbara was the first to recover herself.

'We came to be made young,' said she boldly.

'To be *made* young, my young maids; and pray what age might you be?'

'I mean,' said Barbara, not half so boldly as before, 'to *remain* young.'

'And pray, my young maids, can't you be satisfied with the present, without looking so far forward?'

'But,' said Lotta eagerly, 'it is so dreadful to be old and ugly.'

'No doubt, no doubt,' replied the old woman. 'And what do *you* think, my young maid?' turning abruptly to Phemie.

'Please,' said Phemie, 'grandmother is deaf, and can't hear the birds sing, and she can only sit outside the cottage door when the sun is *very* warm, and I should not like that; and then, too, I thought I would bring her some of the water of the Fountain of Youth, —but I don't think she cares about it,' concluded Phemie sadly.

'I am sorry for you, my dears,' said the little old woman in red, 'but there is no Fountain of Youth here—it has long since been dried up. However, I

will give you each something to take home with you, for I give a good many gifts to those who come to see me. Here, for instance, is a little bottle labelled "Essence of Liquefied Lily Leaves"—it produces a brilliancy of complexion hitherto unrivalled, and imparts a delightful fragrance to the skin—it is the true Elixir of Youth'—

'Me—me!' cried Lotta.

'Here,' continued the old woman, 'is a box containing an aromatic nut—a small fragment of which, eaten daily, produces an elasticity of spirits, a clearness and power of intellect, and a delightful sense of continual rejuvenescence, which'—

'Ah,' cried Barbara, 'that is the youth for me—I want none of your ointments for the complexion,' casting a contemptuous glance at Lotta.

'As for you, my young maid,' said the old woman, turning to Phemie—

'Please,' interrupted Phemie, 'I don't want any of those things; mother never lets me wash my face with anything but plain water, and I don't think she would like me to take medicine unless I were ill; but, if I might have this beautiful rose.'

It was a large magnificent red rose, the one blossom

on a small bush which grew in the centre of the cavern, and Phemie had been eyeing it longingly ever since she came in.

'Ah,' said the Witch, 'that is indeed a rare and beautiful rose; and there is never more than one at a time on the bush.'

'Nonsense, child,' cried Barbara; 'do find something better to take than a paltry rose, which you can get dozens of any day.'

'No,' said Phemie quietly; 'we have very few at home, and mother likes them so.'

'Take it, take it, my child,' said the little old woman, plucking it as she spoke, 'and wear it always in your bosom; the root of the rosebud has been watered by the Fountain of Perpetual Youth, and its roses never fade.'

'Well,' said Barbara, after they had thanked the old woman and left the cavern, 'you are very silly, Phemie, —think of *our* gifts, almost as good as drinking the water of youth; and then to think that you should only have a common rose, even though it shouldn't fade.'

But Phemie carried home her rose and said nothing. All through the winter Phemie wore her rose in her bosom, and there's no saying how much it gladdened the eyes of those around her when the snow was on

the ground and the icicles hung from the eaves. It was a perpetual whisper of summer. At first, Phemie, like Barbara, thought it only a common rose, though a beautiful one, but by and by she began to discover that it had some peculiar properties of its own. Not that it made her either beautiful or witty; indeed, Phemie never found out that it had any effect on herself at all, it was its effect on outside things that she wondered at. One day, one dark wintry day, when the snow lay on the ground, and the murmuring river that ran past Phemie's cottage had long been held in silent bondage, a robin came and perched on the window-sill where Phemie was scattering a few crumbs, and sang a little song of thanks before picking them up. Phemie was so delighted with its scarlet breast and bead-like eye, that she stopped at the window to watch it.

'Pretty Robin,' said she, 'you are the only bright thing there is to see this morning.'

'Except your rose,' replied the Robin.

Phemie started. 'Why, Robin, can you speak?'

'Surely,' replied the Robin; 'I knew how to speak long before you did, only you did not understand my language.'

'Then how have I learnt to know it now?' asked Phemie, bewildered.

'Ask your rose,' replied the Robin, busily picking up the crumbs.

Phemie looked at her rose. It certainly was very large and bright, but that did not tell her how she had learned the Robin's language.

'Well, pretty Robin,' said she, 'I am very glad to know your language, though I don't know how I learned it. But now you must come every morning and tell me pretty stories.'

'I have nothing new to tell,' said the Robin.

'Then tell me something old,—I like old stories the best.'

The Robin hopped about and chirped, and put its head on one side, as if he could tell a good deal if he chose. 'I have no story to tell,' said he, 'except that

'The ice is on the stream,
And the snow is on the lawn;
But I had a little dream,
That came to me at dawn.
And it told me that a fay
Had caught a sunbeam's tail,
And would make a flower to-day
Down in the dale.'

And the Robin flew away, and was seen no more.

Phemie laughed heartily at the Robin's story; but the next morning she scattered a plentiful meal of crumbs, and hoped he would come and tell another, which he did, and for several mornings after that, till the sun had melted the snow, and the buds came out on the hedges. And by that time Phemie had heard a good many stories about the fairies and their flower-making. When the spring came on, the Robin disappeared; he said he had his pairing and nesting to see to, and ever so much more important business, but he promised to come next winter. Phemie was rather disconsolate at first, but she also had a good deal to attend to; for after she had been to school, and helped her mother, and read to her grandmother, she had to go into the woods and hunt for primroses and bluebells. And it was certainly very odd, but Phemie never remembered to have seen such fine ones as there were this season. After this she had to plant her garden—and you never saw such a garden as it was! Phemie thought it delightful, for it was a perfect tangle of flowers, most of them weeds. But Phemie was passionately attached to her weeds, for, after all, weeds are only flowers in the wrong place, and in her garden they were in the right place, she considered.

'How pretty you are, Daisy!' said she, hanging over a root of daisies in full bloom.

'Not a bit of it,' replied the biggest Daisy; 'we are only open and bright, that's all.'

'But you look like babies' faces,' said Phemie.

'And so we are,' replied the Daisy. 'The old earth is our mother, and we are her babies,—and babies are always pretty to their mothers, you know.'

'You are pretty to me,' said Phemie.

'Yes; because you are a true child of earth, and wear one of her fadeless roses in your bosom.'

'Shall I always be young?' asked Phemie.

'Always,' said the Daisy, and said no more.

So you see the rose had taught Phemie a new language, and given her new eyes, for she never remembered such a glorious summer, with such a wealth of birds and flowers, and such a sea of golden sunshine.

In the meantime, Barbara and Lotta were growing up the observed of all observers. Barbara had become so witty and intellectual that she was in constant request, and had to give up helping her mother for the more important duties which she had taken upon herself. Lotta, too, was very beautiful; and when she was not in the midst of a circle of admirers, she was

so busy looking at herself in the glass that she had not time to accompany Phemie in *her* search for beauty in the summer woods. In fact, they both rather despised Phemie, and called her *childish;* so it was clear that *her* kind of perpetual youth did not suit *theirs.*

Time passed on, and the old grandmother died, and Phemie married and became the mother of a large family. And now, strange to say, the rose acquired a new power. The birds and flowers no longer spoke to Phemie, and she *did* sometimes regret the days when there was a 'splendour in the grass' and 'a glory in the flower;' but this was only in dark moments, of which there were but few in Phemie's fairy-gifted life. *Now,* her babies were her birds and flowers, and their thoughts were her stories, old yet ever new. For the rose had given her the power of reading these thoughts in their innocent faces, of *living* in their games when they only played, and of turning them all into stories,—stories of fairies and fairy gifts, stories of angels and angels' messages, stories of earth, and stories of heaven. Then, too, the rose seemed to have gained a heart—perhaps a bit of Phemie's, against which it had nestled so long. Phemie's was sometimes sad and weary, for there was a great deal to do in her life, and her limbs

were not quite so supple as they used to be, in spite of her gift of youth; the *rose's* heart was always strong and cheerful. Phemie's heart was sometimes sore and angry; the rose's was always patient and loving. Phemie's heart sometimes grew tired of the world; the rose's was always fresh and hopeful as a child's.

'Mother,' says the child at her knee, 'how comes it that you know all our thoughts so well, and tell us such beautiful stories about them? Sometimes it seems as if I remembered them, and yet I could not tell them as you do.'

'It is the rose,' answers Phemie. 'I was a child once, and had all these thoughts myself, only I forgot them when I grew up, but the rose has them treasured up in its heart, and that is how I can tell them. Only they have been there so long that they have grown into stories.'

'Phemie,' said her old friends Barbara and Lotta, 'it is quite clear *you* never had the gift of perpetual youth. Why, you are wearing yourself out, and getting wrinkles in the corners of your eyes with nursing, and teaching, and running, and fretting after all those children.'

'*I*,' said Barbara, 'send all mine to a school where

they are taught on a new system, all laid down in rules, one hundred and eighty I think there are,—a very admirable system; that leaves me time to attend to the cultivation of my mind. It is that which keeps me so young, you see.'

'And I,' said Lotta, who had never married at all, 'am very glad I have no children. Why, I should soon lose my good looks if I had. I am not so young as I once was, perhaps, but every one says my bloom is wonderful; and I think myself, it looks *more* natural than life.'

Phemie looked at her friends. Barbara was *very* intellectual, there was no doubt about it; her eyes absolutely *glared* with intellect, and that is a sure sign of it. Lotta, too, was excessively blooming; so much so that, like a wax doll, it was dangerous for her to go too near the fire or stand in the sun. In the face of these triumphant facts Phemie had not a word to say, and could only kiss her last baby, whose cheeks had never known the beautifying contact of liquefied lily leaves.

But Phemie had not yet come to the end of her rose's fairy powers. For now she herself was an old grandmother sitting in the chimney-corner with her

knitting, and knew what it was not to be able to hear the birds sing, or to go hunting for primroses in the woods. But the rose, the beautiful rose, which was the only thing about Phemie that was unwithered now, made up for it by giving her out of its large heart such beautiful dreams, that the children thought it worth while having a granny who dreamt such dreams—it was as good as a fairy godmother.

'Look, Granny,' said the last born rosy grandchild, 'here are the largest and loveliest primroses in the wood; they grew under a tree where two dear little birds have their nest, and are singing all day long. Wouldn't you like to hear them, Granny?'

'I dreamt,' said Granny, 'of a beautiful place—far larger and lovelier than any of the woods about Cornertown—where the flowers are like lilies and roses, and the birds that fly about are beautiful little child-angels that sing stories all day long.'

'Was that when you were young?' asked the grandchild wonderingly.

'Not when I *was* young,' said Granny, 'that is when I *shall* be young.'

'Granny,' said the eldest boy, 'I fought with Roderick in the market-place to-day, and gave him a black

eye; then I went to find new plants for your garden, but I could not find *one* good one, they were all torn and blemished, and the prettiest of all had a worm in it.'

'Ah,' said Granny, 'I dreamt the other day of a large and beautiful city, with a market-place ten times bigger than ours. There were numbers of people walking in it, and each carried a new plant in his hand, and some one told me it was called the Peace-flower. Do you know where that plant grows, grandson? It never has a worm in it.'

'Granny,' said Phemie the third, who was the eldest of the group of grandchildren, one day, 'do you *never* wish to be young?'

'I *am* young,' said Granny, smiling. 'Look at my Rose.'

Phemie looked wistful.

'But, Granny, shouldn't you like to be able to dance and sing like all of us, and hear the music in the big church, which you cannot get to?'

'No,' said Granny; 'because, when I had a baby, I no longer wished for a doll. Besides, my dear, my Rose's heart is young, and always will be, whatever becomes of me.'

In the meantime Barbara and Lotta had long departed this life. Barbara's intellect had grown so powerful, owing to the frequent use of her aromatic nut, that, like a wild beast, it had torn her body to pieces; while, as to Lotta, she had beautified herself to such a degree, that one morning she had been found in bed with her face all on one side; and as no lady who wanted to be young and beautiful for ever could in decency live with a face all on one side, Lotta had accordingly given up the ghost. Phemie was grieved for her friends, but did not much wonder at the fate which had befallen them.

'There shall be a beautiful dream to-morrow,' said Granny one evening, 'because it will be my birthday, and we shall have pancakes for supper,'—at which there was a general jubilee. And the next morning Phemie the third went softly up to Granny's bed, that she might awaken her with a bunch of dewy cowslips laid on her pillow. And Granny had dreamt a beautiful dream—such a beautiful dream, that it had left a smile like a sunbeam on her lips, such a beautiful dream that from it she awoke no more.

And the rose of perpetual youth, with its childlike heart, and its spirit of love and faith? It still blooms

somewhere in the world; only I am afraid that, powerful though it is, it cannot keep us from wrinkles and grey hairs; for that we must be content to wait till we have all dreamt Granny's beautiful dream.

. . . . . .

It was evening in the Red Forest. The setting sun was tinging the copper beeches with crimson, and the Fairy Rubinetta sat drinking her tea, with the blue cat and the yellow dog.

'So that's done with,' said she; 'and now I may rest my old bones in peace.'

'And much good you have done,' said the Wizard Katchookatchkan, emerging from behind a copper beech.

'Well,' said the Fairy, 'that depends upon whether people make a good use of their Fairy Gifts or not. Some do.'

'And more don't,' said the Wizard.

'At all events,' said the Fairy with great spirit, 'I have done the Queen's bidding, Sir Katchookatchkan, and it's no affair of ours how it turns out.'

'Well, that's one way of benefiting the human race,' sneered the Wizard, 'not caring how it turns out.'

'By your leave, Sir Katchookatchkan,' said the Fairy, 'I have done with the human race for the present, and

mean to leave them to themselves. Don't think, however, that *you* will ever be able to influence any one who carries one of *my* Fairy Gifts in his bosom. Fairies are not what they were in the good old times, but they beat Wizards and Witches with their serpents and potions *any day*.' And the Fairy retired into her hut and shut the door.

It will not be of the slightest use for you to go and hunt for the Red Forest and its inhabitants. It is at the very end of the world, and the Fairy can make it invisible whenever she chooses—which is always. One thing, however, I can tell you for your consolation, which is, that the Fairy Rubinetta, like the old woman of immortal memory who

'lived under a hill,
If she's not gone, is living there still.'

And there she may stay!

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