



THE LITTLE
FAIRY SISTER

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IDA RENTOUL OUTHWAITE
and
GRENBRY OUTHWAITE

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THE LITTLE FAIRY SISTER

BY
IDA RENTOUL OUTHWAITE
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CONTENTS



CHAPTER	PAGE
I. BRIDGET SEES NANCY - - - - -	1
II. THE LAND OF THE WEE PEOPLE - - - - -	11
III. WHY THE KOOKABURRA WAS AFRAID - - - - -	21
IV. THE MERMAN'S POOL - - - - -	29
V. THE DRAGON-FLY AEROPLANE - - - - -	37
VI. THE MERMAN'S GLASS HOUSE - - - - -	43
VII. THE LAND OF HEART'S DELIGHT - - - - -	51
VIII. THE TEASING BROWNIES - - - - -	59
IX. THE HONEYSUCKLE BOWER - - - - -	67
X. WHAT THE ANIMALS THOUGHT - - - - -	73
XI. THE TREE-MAN - - - - -	83

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS



PLATE	Facing Page
1. THERE WERE SEVEN OF THEM ALTOGETHER, FROM BABY COWSLIP TO GREAT-GIRL HYACINTH (<i>IN COLOUR</i>) - - - - -	<i>Frontispiece</i>
2. TWO RABBITS SAT UP ON THEIR HIND LEGS AND LOOKED AT HER - - - - -	9
3. THE LIZARD BEGAN TO GET LIVELY - - - - -	16
4. SO SHE MADE UP HER MIND ALL AT ONCE, AND THREW HERSELF OVER THE EDGE (<i>IN COLOUR</i>) - - - - -	19
5. THE FARTHEST ONES LOOKED LIKE GREAT BUTTERFLIES (<i>IN COLOUR</i>) - - - - -	22
6. BRIDGET CUDDLED UP AGAINST A FAT BABY KOOKABURRA (<i>IN COLOUR</i>) - - - - -	25
7. "YOU WANT TO GET ACROSS MY POOL, MY DEAR?" (<i>IN COLOUR</i>) - - - - -	32
8. A WHOLE HOST OF DRAGON-FLIES CHASING EACH OTHER IN A WILD GAME OF FOLLOW-MY-LEADER - - - - -	53

viii

List of Illustrations

PLATE	Facing Page
9. A FLOCK OF LITTLE BIRDS TWITTERED AND CHIRPED, TRYING TO WARN HER - - - - -	38
10. MR. MERMAN AND HIS DAUGHTER IN THEIR GLASS-HOUSE UNDER THE WATER - - - - -	43
11. SHE RAN LIGHTLY DOWN THE SPIDER-LINES INTO THE LAND OF HEART'S DELIGHT (<i>IN COLOUR</i>) - - - - -	48
12. PERIWINKLE PAINTING THE PETALS (<i>IN COLOUR</i>) - - - - -	65
13. THE LITTLE ONE TOOK HIS PAWS OUT OF HIS MOUTH AND LOOKED RATHER STARTLED (<i>IN COLOUR</i>) - - - - -	72
14. HIS IMMENSE WHITE BEARD BLEW OUT BEFORE HIM - - - - -	74
15. BY THIS TIME ALL THE ANIMALS HAD CAUGHT HER UP AND WERE LISTENING EAGERLY - - - - -	81
16. NANCY RAN RIGHT INTO THE ARMS OF THE FAIRY QUEEN - - - - -	88

THE LITTLE FAIRY SISTER

I.—Bridget sees Nancy

IT was a very hot day. The rains had not yet come, and the air felt thick and heavy to breathe. Mother said that Bridget might have her usual afternoon sleep in a hammock outside under the shade of the trees.

“Will you promise to sit beside me all the time?” Bridget asked.

“I can't do that, darling, for Father has to drive over to see some people on business, and I am going with him. Nurse will sit in the verandah, and you will be sound asleep, I hope, until tea-time. You were up so early this morning to get a gallop on Sturdy.”

Sturdy was Bridget's own pony.

“Will you sit there and tell me about the little sister that went to live with the fairies?” asked Bridget. “Then I'll go to sleep.”

Bridget was an only child and so she generally had her own way, and presently her Mother was

seated in a garden-chair beside the hammock holding one hot, moist little hand in her own. Bridget lay dreamily looking about, and what she saw was very pretty, for many flowers of all colours grew in the grass, and the butterflies with coloured wings of soft down, and the dragonflies in shining green and gold, fluttered and darted about in the air. A few small birds hopped and twittered lazily in the twigs of the trees.

“Darling Bridget,” said Mother, beginning to tell the story as she had told it many times before, “after Father and I were married we wanted very much to have a little girl of our own, but for a long time none came to us. But at last one day we were surprised and delighted when we found that the fairies had brought us not one, but two girl-babies: you and a little sister. You were wee solemn things, not so big as Jemima”—Jemima was Bridget’s largest doll. “We called you Bridget and the sister Nancy. You were exactly alike in every way but one. You were the same size and had the same pudgy noses and round faces, and looked just the same except that you had grey eyes and Nancy’s were hazel. That was the only way we could tell you apart.

“Well, you slept and ate and learned to laugh, and then, just when you were beginning to pull your-

selves up on to your feet and stand instead of crawling about, little Nancy seemed to be ailing. The Doctor couldn’t say what was the matter with her. Perhaps it was that she was pining to go back to the lovely Country of the Fairies, which she had come from. At last she went away and we never saw her again.”

“Oh!” said Bridget, drawing a long sigh, “I wish I had gone too.”

“And left poor Mother and Father?”

“No. I don’t want to leave you, Mum. But I would like to go on a visit to Nancy in the Country of the Fairies, the same way that you went on a visit to Aunt Lily last year. I would go for a little while and see what it was like, and get to know Nancy, then I would come back again.”

There was silence, and only the hum of the bees sounded drowsily in the hot afternoon air which was so still.

Bridget’s eyes were closing fast, her fingers loosed their hold, and in a very sleepy voice she said:

“Mother, do you think if I asked Nancy she would let me visit her?”

“You might try.”

“What do you think I should see in the Fairy Country?”

“Well, the animals generally can talk with the fairies, can't they?” said Mother softly. “The kookaburras, and possums, and the wise owls, and the fat, furry little bears, and the kangaroos, and——”

Very gently she drew her hand away and moved toward the house, for Bridget was asleep. After waiting for a minute or two to see she did not move, Mother went over to the house, and soon the wheels of the car were heard on the gravel as she and Father drove away. Then Nurse came out on to the verandah with some white work. She looked across to where Bridget swung in the hammock with her head resting on a pretty cushion. She lay very still. It was dull in the verandah, and now the sound of voices and laughter came from the back part of the house, so Nurse put down her work and went to join in the fun.

“Nancy!” said Bridget suddenly, and as she said it she sat bolt upright. Her eyes had been closed the moment before, and when she had opened them she had seen a most exquisitely-dressed little girl standing by the hammock on tip-toe looking down upon her. It was extraordinary, but she was sure, perfectly certain, it must have been Nancy, for she was just about her own size, and so like herself, with rippling hair of light-

brown, but she had hazel eyes full of light and laughter. She was as light and graceful as a butterfly, and indeed she had soft brown wings, shaped like those of a butterfly, standing out behind her shoulders. On her head was the dearest little chain of pink-tipped daisies, and she was dressed in a little frock that seemed to be made of flower-petals woven together, so cool and satiny did it look.

Yes, Nancy had been there, had come to visit her! But where was she now?

Bridget looked all round, but could see no trace of her.

“Nancy!” she cried again.

“Lie down again and shut your eyes,” said a merry, mischievous voice from behind the tree to which the hammock was tied.

It was the hardest thing Bridget had ever had to do, for she longed, oh, ever so much, to jump out and dash round the tree to see if it really was her little sister from the Country of the Fairies. But she shut her eyes and clasped her fingers together, and lay still trembling with excitement.

“Yes, I'm Nancy,” said the merry little voice from behind the tree. “And you are Bridget. I know you want to visit the Country of the Fairies because I heard you say so to Mother. Now

perhaps I can do that for you, but it isn't easy. I couldn't do it unless you had happened to be just exactly like me."

"Except for the eyes."

"Except for the eyes. That is a pity, but we must take our chance. If you like, Bridget, I'll turn you into a fairy for a little while. You won't be a real fairy with fairy powers, you'll only be a make-believe one. But it will be enough for you to visit the Country of the Fairies and have great fun. You don't know how glorious it is there. You'll never want to come back."

"Oh yes, I shall," said Bridget, lying still on her back with her eyes tightly shut. "It would be selfish not to, for Father and Mother would be so lonely without me."

"We'll see. But I must explain some more. If I make you look a fairy and able to do some fairy-things you must promise one thing in return. You must never try to see me in that Fairy Country, because if you do they will know you are not ME but a human child, and terrible, awful things would happen. I don't know what they are, but that is the first thing every young fairy is taught. If a human being is admitted into the Fairy Country there will be a great disaster. So you see I'm taking risks, and I wouldn't do it

except for a little twin-sister like you, Bridget, and because I know you do so really truly want a peep at that lovely land."

"But I want dreadfully to see you," said Bridget. "I only had just the wee-est peep, and I know you are Nancy because your eyes are hazel. Can't I watch you while you turn me into an imitation fairy?"

"No, no. If you peep you will spoil it all. I'm going to come round the tree and stand near you and turn you into a make-believe fairy, but if you open your eyes even just a little crack that a pin would go into while I'm doing it, I shall disappear and you will still be just a little girl, and never see all the wonderful, beautiful things in the Country of the Fairies."

"Are they very splendid, Nancy?"

"Oh, simply glorious. More lovely and exciting and delightful and interesting than anything you could ever imagine."

"More beautiful than the party last Christmas?"

"The party last Christmas!" Nancy said, laughing. "You wait! Now keep your eyes shut tighter than ever, I'm coming."

"How shall I know when to open them? I can't keep my eyes shut for the rest of my life," said Bridget.

The Little Fairy Sister

“ I'll tell you when.”

Bridget lay very still ; she felt nothing, she heard nothing. She was very impatient and thought Nancy must have gone away. She was just going to cry out, “ When are you going to begin ? ” when a trilling laugh came from behind the tree :

“ Now see—now see—now see ! ”

It grew fainter and fainter and fainter.

Bridget opened her eyes. She felt extraordinarily light and bright and wide-awake, not heavy and drowsy with the heat as she had done. She found herself swinging still, but not in a hammock. What do you think it was ? A spider's web !

She had been just going to leap to the ground and rush round the tree to find Nancy, quite forgetting the promise, when she made this discovery, and she was so delighted with it that for a minute or two she made the web dance up and down, for it was much more elastic than the hammock. Then she saw she had on no longer her plain little white muslin frock, but a little frock made of the fine delicate petals of some pink flower just like Nancy's. It was cool and soft to the touch, and a chain of daisies was thrown round her.

Then, as she sat up she discovered, with a



TWO RABBITS SAT UP ON THEIR HIND LEGS AND LOOKED AT HER

shriek of delight, that behind her were two large elegant wings, so transparent, yet so strong. As she cried: "Wings! Mine!" two rabbits who had been nibbling the grass near her sat up on their hind legs and looked at her. That told her at once that she really was a fairy now, for otherwise they would certainly never have come so near. They did not run away even when she leaped, light as a ball of thistledown, out of the spider-web hammock down among the daisies. They only moved their noses this way and that, and the smaller one looked a little startled.

"It's only a fairy, Skip-and-Jump," said the bigger one. "You need not be so timid. It's not a human little girl because it's got wings."

"Who's afraid, Nibble-Nose?" said the smaller one, jauntily.

"Yes, I'm a fairy now," said Bridget, giving a little skip of delight, and heedless of the warning she dashed round the tree. If Nancy *had* been there this story would never have been written, for Bridget would probably have changed back again into a little girl that very instant, and never had all the wonderful adventures that I am going to tell you about. However, Nancy was far away by this time, so Bridget was still a fairy—but she did not know where the Country of the Fairies was!

She came back to the rabbits and asked them, and if they thought it rather a funny question for a fairy to ask they were too polite to say so.

“Not far off,” said Nibble-Nose.

“But where?”

He pointed with his long ears to the chain of mountains which rose up blue and grand into the sky not far from Bridget's home. It looked odd to see him point with his ears, but then, of course, he hadn't any fingers.

VERY soon after Bridget had learned from the rabbits, Skip-and-Jump and Nibble-Nose, where the Country of the Fairies was, she was off to go to it. She hardly knew herself how she started. She had always thought that the mountains were a long way off. She knew there was no road there, for her Father had said so. She had heard him speak of great precipices and chasms and of peaks and enormous rocks. No one went there, not even to take sheep to pasture, for it was too dangerous.

Yet, now she was a fairy to think was to do. No sooner had Bridget thought, “I should like to go there,” than she found herself flitting and skimming along, never very far from the ground, as you have sometimes seen a butterfly do over a meadow field where the flowers and grasses grow tall and sweet. It seemed to her a very short time indeed before she was dancing up the grassy slopes and shoulders of the mountains, and then—all in a moment—she was right in among them. Even here there were grassy spaces with beautiful fresh

cool grass and flowers growing on them, and there were, too, huge broken rocks frowning black, and great spaces filled with nothing but blue air and sunshine, for they ran down so deeply you could not see the bottom.

To a human being it might have been a terrifying place, for it would be so easy to slip and break a leg or an arm and lie there out on the crags helpless. But to a fairy-girl who could dance and leap and fly it seemed delightful to be there in the pure fresh mountain air with the wide spaces and great heights all round.

Presently Bridget found herself on one of the little grassy slopes at the top of a great precipice, and somehow she knew quite well that the Country of the Fairies lay down there at the bottom through the blue mistiness of the great gulf lying in between the peaks as a lake lies surrounded by hills. She wanted very much to go down there, but she was just a little bit afraid of casting herself off. Her wings had carried her very well over the flat land and up the slopes, but she had never been very far from the earth. She was like someone who has just learned to swim, and can go well enough when he knows he has only to put down his foot if he gets into difficulties, but dare not swim out of his depth.

Bridget balanced on the edge of the precipice and looked over. She thought: "Supposing this is only a dream, then if I throw myself over and wake and find I'm only a little girl after all, I shall go crash on the rocks."

Then she thought: "But if it is a dream, these are only dream rocks, not real rocks, so I shouldn't hurt myself."

While she waited and could not make up her mind, she saw two birds wheeling and circling in the air higher up even than she was. They were not afraid, why should she be afraid when she, too, had wings? So she made up her mind all at once in a great hurry and threw herself over the edge, feeling inside that kind of delicious excitement you feel when you first plunge into the surf of the sea.

But she wasn't used to wings as the birds are, and for the first few seconds they swung folded against her back and she shot down with frightful speed. Then she remembered her wings and thought how silly she was not to use them, and even as she thought it they spread out and supported her. She had done it as easily as you can spread out your arms when you think about it. And when she had once begun to use them she found them so delightful that she did not drop at once to earth, but wheeled and glided and floated and circled as she

saw the birds doing overhead. It was great fun, but in the end she wanted so much to see the Country of the Fairies that she glided gradually down and down, nearer and nearer to the ground.

As she dropped through the haze she saw the tops of many trees, some bright green and others dark blue-green, and among them now and then a flash of pink or white as if snow or pink snow had fallen just there. That, she knew, must be blossom. There were open spaces carpeted with flowers; one she was sure was full of poppies, for it was one sheet of bright scarlet; and there were others sky-blue, perhaps forget-me-nots, and others again all colours mixed.

In between the trees were lakes shining like crystal or reflecting the sky so that they looked like brilliant blue jewels. Silver rivers wound in and out like ribbons, and there was such a sense of freshness and delight Bridget could have cried out aloud for joy.

Was it true, or did she only *think* she was getting smaller and smaller as she drew nearer and nearer to the ground? She could not be sure, and she thought it might only be because the great spaces were so huge and the mighty rocks so towering that it made her feel small. Presently she thought no more about it, for she had been

looking eagerly for some sight of the fairies, and she fancied she saw moving across an open space the most beautiful lady dressed in a long flowing robe of the pale-green of water lilies, with her golden hair waving over her shoulders and two wee Mannikins holding up her train. It was only for an instant and then she disappeared under the trees, but it made Bridget's heart beat very fast. She wanted to see that lovely lady again more than she had ever wanted anything before.

After this she was in a great hurry to land, and she saw she was going to alight into the midst of some lovely flowers like enormous daisies, and the idea came into her head that she would just put down one toe and perch on one of the big daisies, and see if it would hold her up and if she could balance there. So she did, and found it no more difficult to do than a butterfly finds it to perch on a great wide-open rose.

"You did that all right, why were you so frightened?" asked a voice near. It was a throaty sort of voice yet smooth, too, and Bridget looked all round her and could see no one.

"Where are you and who are you?" she cried out, presently going round and round on the daisy on one toe as a top spins on its one foot.

"Right in front—whirr—no—you've gone

past. Next time you face this way I'll wave a paw."

So he did, and she stopped her twirling round opposite to an old broken tree-stump which had grown green with age and damp. Clinging to it was the queerest creature she had ever seen. It was really the kind of Lizard which is called a Chameleon, and Bridget must certainly have seen one round her home, but now she was quite tiny, for she had jumped down into that part of the Fairy Country called the Land of the Wee People. That was why the Lizard appeared to be so monstrous to her, as big as a horse or a cow. Its pointed snout and long mouth were turned to her, and it looked just as mild as a good homely cow. So she did not mind its scaly skin or its clawed feet, or even the long thick tail that the body ran into.

Why she had not noticed it before was because it was exactly the colour of the rough green bark of the old stump, and really so like it that it was only when it moved you could see it properly, and as soon as she saw it it began to get lively.

"I wasn't frightened," Bridget said indignantly in answer to its first remark. "I was only careful."

"My mother taught me always to be careful," said the Lizard, "especially when there are flies



THE LIZARD BEGAN TO GET LIVELY

The Land of the Wee People 17

about. It doesn't do to be careless then, for they are such care-free fellows themselves. They never know or care"— here he flicked out a long tongue like a whip-lash and neatly caught on the end of it a fly which had just stopped a second to preen his wings in the sunshine—"where they are going," ended the Lizard, as he sent the fly on its journey down its slippery dark throat.

Bridget laughed. "I'm glad I'm not a fly, but if I were one I'd be more careful than that," said she. Then she asked eagerly: "Where are the—other—fairies?" She remembered just in time to put in "other," but she needn't have been afraid, for the Lizard was stupid, and, like all stupid people, very conceited about the few things he could do such as catching flies.

"There were some of them here a little while ago," he answered. "I heard them say the Fairy Queen was going to the Land of Heart's Delight, so they were all going too."

"Where is the Land of Heart's Delight?" asked Bridget, on the tip-toe of eagerness to be off. For she knew now that the lovely lady in water-lily green must have been the Fairy Queen.

"Where it always was, of course," said the Lizard.

"You are silly," she said angrily, forgetting



SO SHE MADE UP HER MIND ALL AT ONCE AND THREW
HERSELF OVER THE EDGE

The Land of the Wee People 19

once?" Bridget asked with interest. "Supposing you lay down on a carpet all orange and blue and green and red and brown and crimson and scarlet and pink and yellow and——"

"That did happen once to a friend of mine," said the Lizard seriously. "It wasn't exactly a carpet, but the moral is the same, he split up into a thousand million little bits of different colours. However clever you were—not *silly*, I mean—you couldn't have pieced him together again."

"I shouldn't like to have tried," said Bridget; "it would have been worse than the worst jig-saw puzzle."

III.—Why the Kookaburra was Afraid

BRIDGET jumped airily down to a great king-cup which held a drop of crystal water in its golden bowl. At least, it really was a drop, but to Bridget it looked like a basinful. She bent the flower head toward her and drank refreshingly. It was deliciously cool and pure, like the water that trickles down from the mountain heights through the heather. Afterwards she looked about for something to eat, and thrust her hand into the purple hood of a great plant which shook its bells in the breeze. She drew out of it a little cake of honey. The honey we get here is sticky and liquid, and much too messy to handle without a spoon, but this fairy honey was like a cake of clear jelly, yet firm with the yellow light shining through. When Bridget ate it, it was not too sweet, but most excellent, so good that she thought she had never eaten a cake like it in her life. She had just finished it, and was considering whether she would have another, when the sound of fairy bells, ringing a sweet and merry peal, rose in the air. Looking up, she saw hundreds of fairies, rising higher and higher, floating up and away far above

The Little Fairy Sister

her head in the pure, pale blue sky. She could not make out the Fairy Queen; in fact, she was sure she could not be there among them, for there was not one in the long floating robe of water-lily green—they were in pinks and mauves and blues, and their frocks were short like her own, showing the fairness of their white arms and legs.

Right in front, leading them it seemed, was a little Pixy or Brownie in the most absurd attitude, scattering rose and other flower petals with both hands as he went. He ended in points both ways, for his long, thin green legs ran into shoes with points, and his funny bald head had two points sticking out of it like horns. He waggled his head and shook his arms and legs and whole body in a wild attempt to keep ahead of that gorgeous trail of fairies who followed him so easily, floating on their transparent spreading wings which flashed all colours of the rainbow in the sunlight. Suddenly the Brownie cackled loudly, and a rippling peal of laughter ran down that splendid wavering line of fairies. The sweet bells of their voices rang and chimed like the clash of bells in a steeple at wedding-time, only far more silvery and light than any church bells.

Bridget held her arms outstretched and leaped to join that merry band. Up and up she went



THE FARTHEST ONES LOOKED LIKE GREAT BUTTERFLIES

quite easily at first, and as she rose she could see more and more fairies rising—always rising from a place beside a still sheet of water near some trees. They were coming up against the breeze and flew in great half-hoops and circles, and the farthest ones didn't look like fairies at all, but just great butterflies beating up with pink and blue wings so that their bodies were hidden. It was a beautiful sight, and one that no human child had ever been allowed to see before. Bridget wondered if Nancy was among the happy crowd, and she tried to see, but could not, for the fairies were so high above her, she could not see their faces properly.

Then all at once a doubt swept over her with a chill. "They go so fast and have got so much start I shall never catch them up," she thought, and the very minute she thought it her wings seemed to lose their strength. She beat and fluttered in the air and didn't seem to be getting on at all. Some of the rose leaves floated down around her and caught in her hair, and she smelt their fragrance and made another effort, but the silver voices were growing fainter and fainter. Even the last fairy of all had risen up from beside the silver lake to follow in the train which was flying away from the Land of the Wee People to serve their beloved Queen in the Land of Heart's Delight.

Slowly and sadly Bridget fluttered earthwards with the fallen rose leaves all about her. She had not yet learned the first lesson of Fairyland—that you can do all you think you can do, but if you begin to doubt and despair and say "I can't," well then, of course, you can't, and this is sometimes true in the world of human people too. Very dolefully Bridget returned to the place she had thought so lovely and gay a little time before. But that was before she had seen the fairies flying away. She noticed a tree with a great branch sticking out of it just right for a resting-place. Growing over and round the tree were some sprays of jasmine with its pure white starry flowers spreading their scent all round them.

Bridget sat down near them and began to look at them, wondering why she had never seen flowers as big and beautiful at home, and then she heard a scraping and a scratching, and the most enormous bird, far larger than herself, waddled awkwardly along the branch to her, and tried to thrust its soft breast against her. For the first minute she thought it must be an ostrich at least. Then she considered that ostriches don't climb trees, and have very long legs, so that didn't fit at all. Then she remembered that it was she who was very very small, and this bird was probably just an ordinary size. What had



BRIDGET CUDDLED UP AGAINST A FAT BABY
KOOKABURRA

made the flowers seem so huge to her made the bird seem huge too. It was a Kookaburra and a young one at that. She knew that directly she examined him, because he was so very fluffy and his eye had that mild beam of kindness only seen in the eyes of very young things who have never known cruelty or pain.

Bridget cuddled up to him and found him softer than a down-pillow, and that was natural, because in his case the down was outside. It was much nicer, she thought, to be quite small when a baby-Kookaburra was beside you. Of course fairies generally were small. Stupid not to have thought of that before. Nurse, who was Irish, had told her so, and told her, too, of the little green men like the one Bridget had seen leading the procession in the sky. Then, of course, there was the Chameleon; if she had thought about him for a moment she would have known this Kookaburra was the usual size the same as he was.

As the Kookaburra shuffled as near as he could he said, "Poor little Nancy." He didn't seem to have any more to say, he was not talkative, but Bridget thought here was a fine chance to find out where Nancy was, and if she had gone over with the others to the Land of Heart's Delight. She would have to be careful with her questions as the

Kookaburra evidently thought she was Nancy herself, so after thinking a bit and trying to be very clever, she asked :

“When did you see me last, Kookaburra dear?”

“That’s a joke,” said the Kookaburra low down in his throat, as if he wasn’t very sure if he was expected to laugh or not.

“Funny, isn’t it?” said Bridget cunningly. “But tell me when you saw me—was it this morning?”

“It wasn’t Funny,” said the Kookaburra, “Funny and Queer are always together, and neither of them was there. It was you yourself.”

“What did I say to you?” asked Bridget.

“Ha, ha,” chortled the Kookaburra, sure he had got hold of the right thing now. “*That* is a joke, isn’t it?” He puffed out his feathers and looked at her with a smile in his eye.

“Yes, it’s a joke. You tell me just what I said—I believe you have forgotten.”

“I don’t forget,” said the Kookaburra—“not a thing like that. You said, ‘I’m going over to Heart’s Delight now at once to make ready for the Fairy Queen. I’m in attendance on her to-day.’”

He stopped suddenly and looked at her with round eyes.

“But you aren’t!” he said, horrified.

“There are reasons,” began Bridget, imitating one of her aunts who always said that when she did not want to answer a question. “I’m going though to Heart’s Delight straight away at once.”

“Aren’t you afraid?” asked the Kookaburra in an awestruck voice.

“Afraid? Why should I be?”

“Of crossing the Merman’s Pool——”

“Oh, that,” said Bridget scornfully, though, of course, she hadn’t the least idea what the Merman’s Pool was or where it was.

“I forgot,” said the Kookaburra. “You can fly high over the tops of the trees, so you will be quite safe. Do you know I’m not very good at flying yet.” He snuggled up closer against her. “Don’t tell anyone, will you? That’s why Mother won’t let me go to the Land of Heart’s Delight yet. She says I’d fly low down over the water and the Merman would catch me by the feet and pull me in. Gr-r-r-r!”

It sounded very awful. Still, Bridget was determined to go. She might not be able to fly so high as the fairies, but she could fly better than the Kookaburra, and perhaps just well enough not to let the Merman catch her by the legs and pull her in.

“I suppose there’s no way round that you could go?” she asked.

The Little Fairy Sister

“None; the Merman’s Pool is as broad as the sea and as long as a river, and no one knows where it begins or ends.”

Yet Bridget determined to go, and at the back of her naughty little mind was the idea, “Of course, I’m not going to *seek* for Nancy, but if I did happen to *find* her what fun it would be!”

IV.—The Merman’s Pool

WITHOUT knowing how she had got there, Bridget found herself standing on the edge of a large sheet of water. It was quite still and dark green, because so many tall trees grew round it that their heavy foliage shadowed it and made reflections in the water. Still it was very beautiful, for there were pink lilies floating on the surface with their many pointed petals and flat green leaves like plates, and tall reeds and bulrushes grew on the sides, and though there was no wind they rustled mysteriously together so that it sounded as if they said, “Hush, hush, hush,” over and over again. Close by where Bridget stood was a tree decorated by long streamers of pink convolvulus.

Now Bridget was feeling rather angry, because she wanted to get across the Merman’s Pool, but when she thought of what the Kookaburra had said, she was not at all sure that she dared to fly. If she could have gone high over the tree-tops it would have been quite safe, but she had already found she could not fly right up as the fairies did

so easily. Supposing she started under the trees, but pretty high, how did she know that the Merman's arm might not shoot out yards high like an elephant's trunk or a giraffe's neck, and drag her down into the green depths?

So she stamped her foot and ran up and down crying out aloud: "I *will* go over; I want to see Nancy," and shook herself about in what Nurse called "one of her tantrums."

Then she stopped and looked at the water very much excited. Dare she do it?

What was that? There was a swirl in the water, a round ripple which spread and spread quite close to her, something was rising up out of the water. Presently, just below the surface, appeared something like an enormous duck's egg, and while Bridget clasped her hands and watched, it rose up and showed it was the bald head of the queerest old man anybody ever saw. He was sitting on a rock which had risen up through the water with him on it, as if it were a new sort of lift. He was all greeny from the crown of his head to his toes—no, not his toes, for he hadn't any, only a fish's tail. His long green beard was coarse like a kind of seaweed, and his fingers had claws instead of nails and were joined together by webs like a duck's foot. These things were interesting and

curious, and not what you would see every day, but almost more curious was his face, which was very ugly, and had a surprised, delighted expression, just as if he said: "Years ago I lost a little friend and never expected to see her again, and here she is—oh, hightum-tightum tiggledy-oh!"

Almost the most curious thing of all, however, was his nose, which began in a lump and ended in a point almost an unbelievable long way off.

"You want to get across my Pool, my dear?" said he, and his voice was gurgly like water running out of a spout. "Very well, come along, I'll take you."

Bridget didn't want to be rude, and she thought the Kookaburra might have exaggerated a little about the Merman catching hold of people's feet when they would rather not. He looked so "pleased-surprised," and the Kookaburra was a very soft little bird, so she thought she would ask some questions and try to find out more about the old man before she said "yes" or "no."

"That is very kind of you," she said in her best party voice. "Do you live always in the Pool?"

He gurgled. "I have the dearest little house down under the water. It's all made of glass, perhaps you would like to see it?"

"Made of glass," said Bridget. "Why do you need a house? I thought mermen lived in water."

"So we do. Ha-ha! Very witty that. We live *in* the water, but surrounded by air; we must breathe, you see."

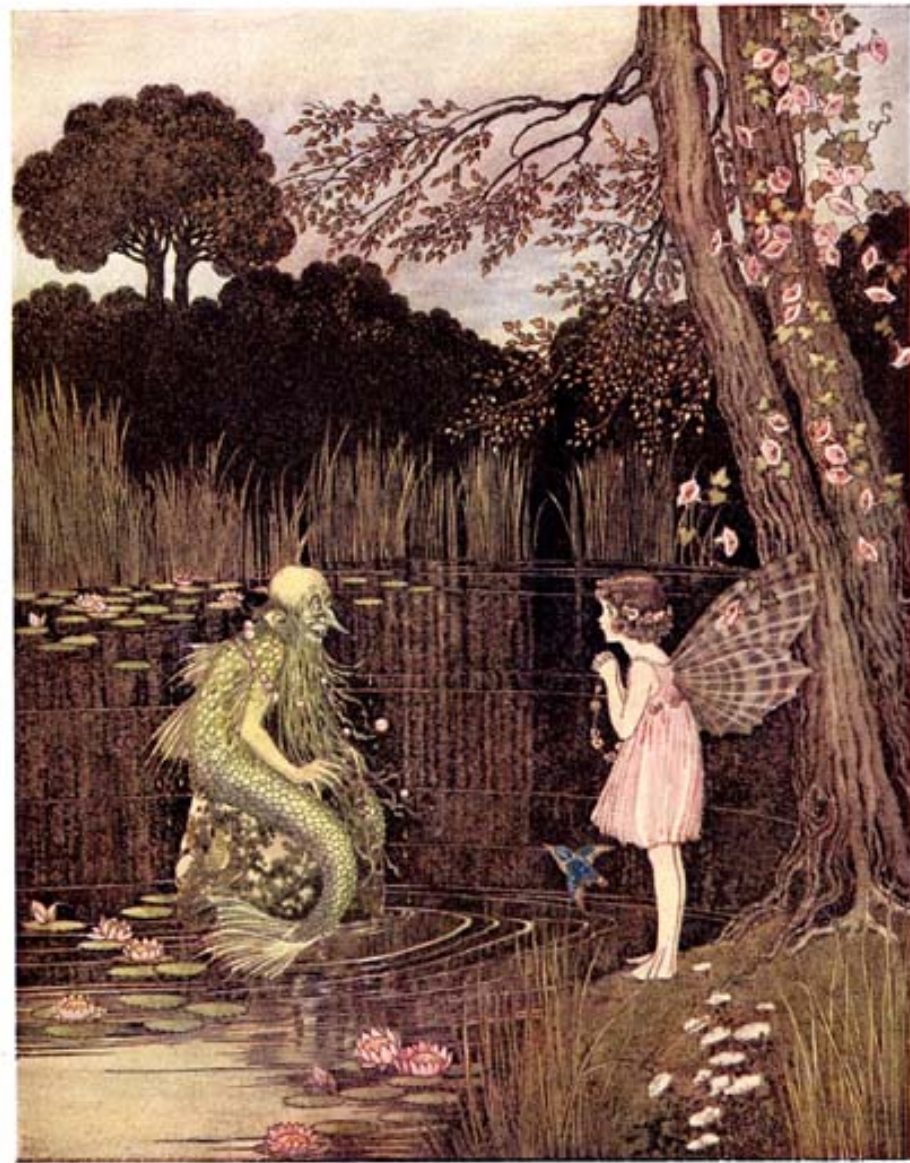
"Must you? I didn't know that. I thought you could breathe in the water like the fish."

"I don't think you number many mermen among your acquaintance," said he, and Bridget felt he was treating her exactly like a grown-up person, "or you would know that we must breathe. So my beautiful bell glass-house holds the air in it, and we can breathe very safely beneath the water."

"'We'—who's 'we'?" Bridget forgetting to be grown-up in manner in her interest.

"It may surprise you to hear," said the Merman, putting up his claw-like hand to brush away a tear—or it might have been a drop of water—"that I married a fairy. She came down there to live with me—not perhaps exactly head-long as people say on earth when they mean 'very willing,' but feetlong, which is the next best thing. She died—alas!—but left behind her a very beautiful little daughter. Very like you, my dear."

Bridget peered into the water.



"YOU WANT TO GET ACROSS MY POOL, MY DEAR!"

"You can't see her. She stays at home, unless she is out at work with me."

"Work? What work?"

"We keep the Pools cleaned out and the rivers and streams free from rubbish so that the water flows off to the sea. If we did not do this the water would be choked up and rise and spread and flood the whole country and drown all those who live there. The fairies know this and so they let us alone—very much alone—sometimes I think too much alone." As he said this his mouth widened in a frightful smile until it seemed as if it must meet round at the back of his head. Bridget watched with interest. What would happen if it did? Would the top of his head come clean off as the top of an egg does when you slice it with a knife?

She rather liked the old man; she did not think he could be so cruel if he had a beautiful daughter like herself. No one had ever called her beautiful before, though she had heard visitors say to Mother, when they didn't think she was listening, something about "your pretty little daughter."

"Now come," said the Merman, gurgling deliciously. "You aren't afraid, surely? You will let me take you across the ferry?"

Bridget was almost persuaded to say yes, and

she had actually opened her lips to speak when a blue kingfisher flew out close to her and said in a sort of whispering voice: "Don't go." It was gone like a flash of blue fire, and the Merman would have had to be very sharp to grab hold of it.

Bridget looked again at his green scaly armour shining all down to the tail-end, and she noticed a fat frog crawling up the rock. She didn't like these things, but she did so very much want to get across the water.

"It wouldn't take very long, would it?" she asked doubtfully.

"Not so long as it took me to rise up from my house to come to your help when I heard your desire," said he.

He certainly was very polite, and he seemed to feel it that the fairies did not trust him. Once again she opened her lips to say "Yes," and once again the blue kingfisher darted past and said, quite clearly this time: "Don't go."

Bridget looked quickly at the old man to see if he had heard, and she caught such a wicked gleam in his goggle-eyes that she shuddered—oh no, she could not go with him.

"Oh dear, what am I to do?" she cried out. "I wish I had an aeroplane!"

“And why not?” broke out a curious shrill chorus among the trees, growing louder and louder, as a swarm of dragon-flies darted out over the Pool with their peculiar sharp movements this way and that as if they stabbed the air.



A WHOLE HOST OF DRAGON-FLIES CHASING EACH OTHER IN A
WILD GAME OF FOLLOW-MY-LEADER

V.—The Dragon-Fly Aeroplane

THE instant the Merman heard the dragon-flies coming, he touched a spring in his rock and it began to sink back into the water again, but it went slowly, and long before even his tail was covered, the dragon-flies were all about him in the air, flouting him and mocking him with their enormous eyes shining like lamps. They flashed their gauzy wings so swiftly that you saw their bodies surrounded by a shimmering haze. They beat at the Merman's bald head as they passed, so that he put his scaly hands over it to protect it, and cowered down. Slowly, slowly he went under, and at last the top of his head sank again like a duck's egg falling through the water.

“Take me, oh take me with you to the Land of Heart's Delight,” cried Bridget.

One of the largest of the dragon-flies swooped, then paused shimmering his wings near her. In an instant she leaped. Her bare feet were planted firmly on his shining armour behind the head. Finding in her hand a wisp of grass, she

The Little Fairy Sister

caught it round him like a bridle, but she did not need it, for she found she could balance upright without the least difficulty while he darted and skimmed out over the Pool. Then began the maddest, merriest game. The dragon-fly did not seem to have any intention of taking her straight across as if he were a ferry-boat. He dashed this way and that, higher and lower, now hanging poised for a second or two, then swooping again. In one of his great curves Bridget glanced back and saw the whole host of dragon-flies chasing them in a wild game of follow-my-leader. Bridget forgot her desire to reach the Land of Heart's Delight, she forgot even the Merman glowering helplessly beneath the water. She had never enjoyed herself so much in her life. She turned and swung and balanced, and though she felt safe, she had to be careful to sway this way and that as the dragon-fly leader curved and banked and dived.

At last, before she had had time to get tired, the dragon-fly headed across the Pool to land her on the farther side. They were about half-way across when a very alarming thing happened. The dragon-fly seemed to be growing smaller and smaller very fast indeed. It is easy enough to ride on a dragon-fly as big as yourself, but not quite so



A FLOCK OF LITTLE BIRDS TWITTERED AND CHIRPED,
TRYING TO WARN HER

comfortable when he gets to half that size, which this one very quickly did. As a matter of fact it was Bridget herself who was growing back to her natural size. For half-way across the Pool ended the Land of the Wee People, and in the Land of Heart's Delight the fairies were human size, though the Brownies of course remained small. Bridget did not feel herself getting big, she thought the dragon-fly was getting small. It is rather the same thing when you look out of the window of a moving train. The trees and fields seem to be flying past while you sit still, but really it is you who are moving and they remain the same.

So Bridget grew larger and larger, and the dragon-fly, though he struggled bravely, could no longer hold up her weight. It was soon a question which would happen first—whether he would reach the shore of the Pool safely and land her just in time, or whether he would sink and slip away from under her so that she dropped straight into the green water where the Merman was waiting for her.

Oh, would he reach the other side in time?

The other dragon-flies, seeing the danger, came fluttering round and tried to hold her up with their wings, but what could even hundreds of

them do when they were no bigger than her hand?

Bridget had to stand on one foot only for some time, and the dragon-fly shrank and shrank, or seemed to do so, until he was only the length of her foot, but he was marvellously strong.

There were twenty yards more, fifteen, ten—at ten yards she saw a wooden boat of ordinary size floating on the water. She was falling, falling—her feet almost touched the surface of the Pool. Suddenly, with a mighty heave, all the dragon-flies together gave her a sort of push, and Bridget with a little flutter sank into the boat as they all darted away again.

“What a duffer I was!” thought Bridget. “I could have flown quite well if I had only used my wings, but it happened so quickly, and I was so frightened, I never once thought of them.”

She laughed now, for she felt safe once more. The boat was quite near to the land, and she could any time flutter across. There were no oars in the boat, but she picked up out of the bottom a little flute such as Peter Pan might have used, and began to play a little tune on it. She put her fingers over the holes and made the different notes. It was very pleasant sitting there so comfortable and safe after the great danger she had passed through.

The flowers grew gaily on the banks near, and though the trees and bushes were still thick round the water, making it look dark and oily, Bridget did not mind. She just played heedlessly on the little pipe, making up tunes as she went.

A flock of little birds flew out of the trees near and clustering round, flying up and down very fast in their excitement, twittered and chirped as birds do when a cat is creeping near their young ones. It was a note of alarm, of warning. But Bridget took no heed of it. She wasn't listening to them, she was listening only to the sweet notes of the flute which was her own song. The birds were quite small, and though they grew much excited they could not attract her attention. At last two of them flew right into her face quite rudely and pecked at her nose. She put up her hand to knock them away, and so her little tune stopped, and she heard all the birds twittering in their small voices: “Take care, take care.”

She looked over the edge of the boat into the water, and there she saw a queer sight, which interested her so much that she stared at it hard. She was exactly over the Merman's glass house of which he had told her!

VI.—The Merman's Glass House

MR. MERMAN was actually in it, sitting there at tea. Opposite to him was a beautiful girl, who must be his daughter. You have never seen anything like this wonderful house under the water; indeed, very few have, even among the fairies, who were a little afraid of Mr. Merman, but let him live there quietly because he did much good work in clearing out the beds of the streams and rivers. In saying that he had told Bridget the truth.

Well, this house of his was like an enormous glass bell under the water, and it held the air in it. That Bridget could see, because bubbles were rising up into it as they do in the outside air. Long water plants grew up behind the Merman very gracefully, and rocks rose out of the water for seats and a table. They were not ordinary rocks, but smoothed and decorated with pretty patterns of tiny shells stuck on to them, just as human people decorate arm-chairs by putting chintz covers over them. On one rock was a tea-tray with a tea-pot, and—of all things—a



MR. MERMAN AND HIS DAUGHTER IN THEIR GLASS-HOUSE
UNDER THE WATER

plate of cakes shaped like star-fishes. Bridget wondered very much if they were real star-fishes, for they were pink. But she thought that star-fishes don't live in fresh-water lakes or pools, only in the sea, so she supposed they must be cakes shaped like them. All this she saw as plainly as a picture through the clear water and the glass, and she was in no hurry, because, you see, in spite of what the little birds had said, she still thought she was quite safe and could fly over to the land any time she liked.

The Mermaid actually held a star-fish cake in one hand and in the other a cup of tea. How beautiful she was! Her long golden hair rippled out behind her. Bridget could understand now that her mother must have been a fairy, for her sweet face, rather sad, was just like the fairies, but alas! her body ended in a fish's tail like her father's. It was not a very happy life for her, but, of course, she *was* a Mermaid and loved the water, though it must have been dreadful for the poor prisoned fairy mother. Perhaps the Merman was afraid his daughter might join the fairies, and that was why he never let her out of the glass house by herself.

Bridget was quite sure *she* wasn't cruel, and she began to think she should rather like to go

down there through the water and have tea in the glass house, and bite the star-fish cakes to see if they were real cakes, especially because she saw a great fish swimming near, ready to snap up crumbs as a pet dog does on land. As she thought this the Mermaid looked straight up and saw her, and she waved her long white arms, showing her delicate white hands, not webbed and clawed, as if she longed to come up and join Bridget. Then the Merman looked up, too. He grinned with a horrible grimace, showing all his teeth, with an expression quite different from the surprised-friendly face he had shown to Bridget on the surface. It was just for a second, but it frightened her terribly, and she thought she certainly would not go down and pay them a visit in their glass house. But she could not take her eyes off the Merman, they seemed to be glued to his. Then he raised his claw-like hand and swept it round in a circle, once, twice, thrice!

With a great effort Bridget pulled away her eyes and fell back into the boat. Then she saw that the water round the boat was beginning to swirl in great circles, faster and faster, so that the boat was carried round and round with it. Every second it grew quicker. There was no time to lose. Bridget tried to stand up so that she could

use her wings and fly off, but each time she tried she fell back into the bottom of the boat again. The wind made by the boat turning round caught her wings and made them helpless, and when she tried to stand up she grew giddy, and that was why she fell down again. But worse than all, she noticed now, for the first time, that the boat was not only twirling round, but sinking lower and lower in the water, as if it was being sucked in by some great power from below. This was a terrible business.

Oh, how she wished she had listened to the little birds and got away before the Merman discovered her. It was so annoying, too, because the shore was so near she could really have jumped across without using her wings at all, but she couldn't stand up long enough to take the jump. Every time she got on her feet down she went again into the bottom of the boat. And always, each time she had a glimpse of it, the edge of the boat was nearer to the surface of the water. Faster and faster it flew round; it was simply twirling and whirling now, and when the water tipped over the edge and filled it, the boat would sink, and down with it would Bridget go to the house of glass! Even if she managed to fling herself over the edge to scramble to land that would be no better, for

the long elastic arm of the Merman would reach up through the water and claw her down by the leg.

But she must do something; there was only an inch left at the edge of the boat. She remembered how the little birds had come before to help her. Though she had knocked them rudely away and taken no notice of what they had said, surely they would be kind and help her now that she was in such danger.

She seized the flute and, lying in the bottom of the boat where the wind of the movement did not choke her breath, she gave out one or two notes. Instantly the little birds were all round her again, chirping and calling in their tiny voices:

“What is it? What is it? What is it?”

“Help me, save me!” cried Bridget. “I don't want to go to the Merman, even though he has got a lovely daughter.”

“The spider is the only hope,” twittered the little birds. “Shall we go and find him?”

“Yes, yes! only be quick, or it will be too late.”

She lay there eagerly looking up, and as the water touched the very edge of the boat and some of it began to run down in little cascades at the sides, she saw on a branch above her a big hairy

The Little Fairy Sister

spider of the kind that eats birds and mice. It had been very brave of the little birds to call him, she thought, and she noticed that they had all disappeared.

The spider said nothing, but smiled grimly, and threw out toward her a long sticky elastic line. She missed it as she clutched. Then, as the boat began to sink, another line came swinging down. Bridget quickly caught it, and clinging to it saw the boat disappear under her feet—down, down into the green water. She gave a crow of delight as she thought how disappointed the Merman would be when he found it empty. For he could not see what was happening up above, through all the commotion in the water. In a few seconds more Bridget had swung herself up lightly, hand over hand, and stepped on two great cables which tethered the spider's web on shore to the boughs of the tree above.

She ran lightly down these without the least difficulty, and as she nearly reached the shore, where huge pink flowers were growing, a gigantic bubble burst up through the water and floated near her. She laughed merrily, and put out her hand for it to rest upon. She was quite sure that the huge bubble had burst out in the water from the Merman's savage words of rage and hate when



SHE RAN LIGHTLY DOWN THE SPIDER-LINES INTO
THE LAND OF HEART'S DELIGHT

The Merman's Glass House 49

he discovered that she had escaped him after all. Strange that a thing so beautiful should have started from anything so horrid! Perhaps, after all, it came from the sigh given by the Mermaid when she knew the little fairy girl had escaped again into the lovely land of life and laughter where she could never go!

Bridget still felt a little sorry for the Merman's daughter.

She was now in the Land of Heart's Delight, where was the Fairy Queen and all the fairies, and—above all—Nancy!

VII.—The Land of Heart's Delight

IT had been very pleasant in the Land of the Wee People with its rivers and trees and monstrous birds and lizards, but when Bridget found herself in the Land of Heart's Delight, she was astonished at the loveliness of everything around her. The birds sang more beautifully than she had ever heard them before, and the flowers glowed ruby-red and sky-blue and emerald-green, as if they were real jewels. The air was full of fragrance and laughter. Yes, laughter; once or twice she heard it and ran forward, only to find nothing but the birds and the flowers and the sunshine.

Then a most surprising thing happened. Quite close to her she heard a fairy say distinctly: "Where is Nancy, Curly-Locks? I want to show her the most clever little house you ever saw; it was made by the rabbits, and they invited me to go in, but I can't."

Bridget wanted very much to see the rabbit-house, but she dare not go out because she was

sure the fairies would notice directly that she had grey eyes and not hazel ones, so she waited, and she heard the second fairy say: "Oh, Sunny-Face, do show it to me."

As they moved off laughing Bridget ran out and followed them as hard as she could go, leaping lightly over the brambles and creepers in the way. The two fairies went straight to the roots of an old hollow tree, and bending down their heads peeped in. Just as they did so out rushed a Brownie in a great hurry, spluttering with rage.

"How dare you peep into *my* drawing-room without leave?" he cried.

Sunny-Face and Curly-Locks stood a little way off laughing at him. "Oh, please, we didn't know it was your house," they said, pretending to be very sorry. "We thought it was a rabbit's."

"Do rabbits have carpets of moleskin?" demanded the Brownie, stamping and puffing about. "Do rabbits have tables and chairs?"

"No, no, no!" cried Sunny-Face and Curly-Locks, laughing all the time.

"Do rabbits have soup-plates made of walnut-shells, and cups to drink out of made of acorn-cups?"

"No, no, no!" cried the two fairies, delighted.

He stopped. "Go on," they cried. "What else don't rabbits have?"

But he began to be sulky. So Sunny-Face mimicked him, stamping her feet and wriggling her body and puffing herself out. "Do rabbits have red noses and very long legs?"

"No, no, no!" cried Curly-Locks.

"Do rabbits have enormous goggle-eyes and long pointed ears?" cried Sunny-Face.

"Yes, yes, yes!" cried Curly-Locks, and they laughed at that, and even the Brownie laughed too, not so angry now.

"You can come in if you want to," he said rather sulkily.

"But we can't," said both the fairies together. "That is, not unless we made ourselves small, and we don't want to do that now, we must go and join the dance," added Sunny-Face.

"We only wanted to peep, and now we know all about it, so we don't want to do that," added Curly-Locks. "You describe so well, dear Brownie, you ought to be a writer."

Then the little man puffed and strutted as if he would burst with pride.

In her amusement Bridget had crept nearer and nearer and now they saw her. She had one moment of fear, and then Sunny-Face ran toward

The Little Fairy Sister

her. "Here's Nancy, dear Nancy," she cried. "I wanted you dreadfully, Nancy—where have you been?"

Before she could answer the sound of sweet music rose in the air, and the fairies took each one hand of hers and together they leaped and danced toward the music. There, on a little knoll, were several fairies dancing in a ring on some soft green turf that looked as if it had been cut and mown and kept in order just to be a carpet for their twinkling bare feet. Immediately they all joined up and sang together as the larks sing because they were so joyous they could not help it.

There were seven of them altogether, and as they made dainty steps and swayed about this way and that, up and down, lightly and gracefully, their beautiful little flower frocks flew out in the wind they made. They danced as if they could not help dancing, because their feet went by themselves. There was one very small one with an innocent baby face, and one a great girl with a star holding her long hair close against her head. The baby was called Cowslip, and the tall girl Hyacinth. Bridget was next to Cowslip with Sunny-Face on her right hand. Opposite to her was Curly-Locks, whose very curly hair grew



THERE WERE SEVEN OF THEM ALTOGETHER, FROM
BABY COWSLIP TO GREAT-GIRL HYACINTH

The Land of Heart's Delight 55

short all over her head. They were so sweet and pretty and good-natured, that Bridget felt she could go on dancing for ever and ever.

Presently, however, she got a start, for they began singing about the work the Fairy Queen had given them to do in this lovely land. Hyacinth had nodded to little Cowslip, who quite understood this game, and began in a sweet clear little treble voice to sing :

“ I paint the flowers in colours so bright.”

They all echoed in chorus as they danced round and round :

“ So bright, so bright.”

Next to Cowslip was a beautiful little fairy with dark hair called Eglantine, and she chimed in :

“ I string the dewdrops in rainbow light,
Rainbow light, rainbow light.”

It was then Hyacinth's turn, and she began without waiting a second :

“ I scatter the fragrance far and wide,
Far and wide, far and wide.”

Then Bridget got very anxious because she saw that her turn was quickly coming. What could she say? And if she did not say anything would they not all stare at her and notice that her

eyes were grey, so that she could not be Nancy! It was an awful moment. But the fairies were still leaping and laughing as the next little fairy, who wore a blue bodice because her name was Blue-Bell, sang :

“ My task the tendrils 'tis to guide,
'Tis to guide, 'tis to guide.”

Curly-Locks broke out with great energy and in a loud clear voice :

“ I gather dead blooms and bury them deep,
Bury them deep, bury them deep.”

They all sang deep down in their throats, pretending to be very serious, but for Bridget it *was* serious.

Sunny-Face lost no time in chanting :

“ I waken the seeds from their winter sleep,
Winter sleep, winter sleep.”

“ Now all together,” cried Hyacinth, forgetting for a moment that they had begun at Cowslip :

“ I paint the flowers in colours so bright.
I string the dewdrops in rainbow light.
I scatter the fragrance far and wide.
My task the tendrils 'tis to guide.
I gather dead blooms and bury them deep.
I waken the seeds from their winter sleep.”

“ But Nancy, Nancy,” chorused all the rest — “ Nancy hasn't sung yet. We all know what she does !”

Poor Bridget! Into her head came a rhyme :

“ I wait on the glorious, gracious Queen,
In her lovely robe of spangled green.”

But she couldn't sing it, for it would be a lie ; she was not Nancy and so she did not wait on the Queen. Bridget had many faults ; she was impatient and wilful and sometimes selfish ; but she was a brave little girl, much too brave to tell a lie to save herself from danger, so she said nothing, but stood there getting redder and redder, for they had all loosed hands and were looking at her.

“ Why, Nancy,” said one, “ where *is* the Queen, and why aren't you with her ?”

“ Why, Nancy,” said another, “ what's the matter with you ? Why don't you sing ?”

“ Why, Nancy,” said a third, “ you look different somehow. What is it ?”

“ Why, Nancy,” said a fourth, “ what have you done to your eyes ?”

Then Cowslip began : “ I don't think it *is*——”

At that moment the music to which they had been singing and dancing, as it came floating

down from a tree-top, changed suddenly and became a great clangour of bells ringing urgently.

The fairies broke up at once, running this way and that, exclaiming :

“ We must be quick, we shall never have time to finish. Oh, quick, quick !”

Before Bridget understood what it was all about, they had darted off on all sides and left her alone. For the first moment she had thought the bells were clashing because she had been found out, but as she stood there wondering, she saw other fairies scurrying away in the air and on the ground, taking no notice of her, and she heard them saying : “ How much have you to do ?” “ I’ve nearly cleared up mine,” and “ It’s a beautiful thing to do, I love it,” and so on.

those wonderful yellow markings in the heart of the purple pansies. How many things there were to learn !

All at once the little fairy looked round and called out in a great hurry : “ Where are you, Brownies ? Where have you all gone to ? Paint, please, more paint, quickly.”

Before you could have said “ Cuckoo,” the place was alive with little men tumbling, tripping, scrambling over each other in their haste to bring the paint. “ Coming, Periwinkle, here we are,” they cried in their funny voices, sometimes so shrill and chirpy, sometimes as hoarse as an ogre with a sore throat.

They were the funniest little creatures, you could not help laughing simply to look at them. Most of them wore tight-fitting green breeches and stockings, with ridiculous little purple coats, but others had purple breeches or stockings and green coats. They had all the long pointed brown caps which are the special sign of a Brownie. These were pulled down to their enormous ears, which matched in absurdity their great goggle eyes.

It is rude to make personal remarks, but somehow it did not seem to matter with Brownies, and Bridget heard herself exclaiming :

a second or two here and there, and as she took them away there were the flowers all gloriously pink and mauve. This was the more wonderful, because she was perched very inconveniently on one of those toad-stools that run up to a point like an umbrella half shut, and are very squashy. She was balancing on this by keeping her feet pressed on to a smaller one lower down. She was so lost in her task that she never noticed Bridget, who looked at her for quite a long time without speaking. She had straight cropped hair which lay smooth on her head, and she wore a grey gauze frock covered with spangles, and she had a beautiful pair of grey wings to match. Bridget wanted so very much to talk to her that at last she said :

“You *are* doing that nicely.”

The little fairy just glanced carelessly round at her, and said “Hullo, Nancy!” and went on with her painting.

Bridget thought of the many flowers she had examined at home, looking down quite close into them. They often had delicate little lines of another colour decorating them. Now she understood how they came. It was the fairies' work of course. That dear little green frilly edging on the inner cup of the snowdrop, and

those wonderful yellow markings in the heart of the purple pansies. How many things there were to learn!

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"I never saw such ears."

"You don't 'saw' with ears," muttered a Brownie near her.

Periwinkle laughed without stopping her nimble fingers. "I once heard a tale," she said, "of a man who had such huge ears, he used to cuddle up and go to sleep in one of them."

The Brownies giggled and nudged each other. For a few minutes they were too busy supplying paint to do anything else, but after a while they looked at Bridget curiously and began to whisper among themselves.

"That *is* queer," she heard one of them say. He came nearer, strutting and straddling his long legs, and stared straight up at her. His enormous eyes seemed to swell and swell almost out of his head, and then all at once he drew them in and they grew quite small, then out they popped again, looking like balls of green glass with drops of ink in the middle, and when Bridget glanced uneasily away from him, she found they were all standing in a half-circle about her, popping their eyes at her. It made her feel uncomfortable, for she did not know eyes could pop, and, anyway, she was quite sure Nurse would have said it was a "rude trick."

"That *is* queer," repeated the first Brownie, out loud this time, quite boldly.

"It isn't, you silly-billy; *I'm* Queer," said another; at once they all roared with laughter and fell backwards on the grass, holding their sides as if they would split.

"A very little thing seems to amuse you," said Bridget with dignity, beginning to move away.

"No, but I say—look at her—isn't it funny?" squeaked another.

"No, it isn't; *I'm* Funny," said another in a deep bass voice.

At that they all roared again, and rolled over one another on the grass.

Bridget felt sure that these sharp little men had noticed her eyes were grey, while Nancy's were hazel, and she thought the best thing she could do was just to stroll away as if she didn't care in the least what they said; so she turned her back on them and pretended to pick a flower, and danced off humming a little tune to herself.

But they all ran after her. They ran in front of her, tripping her up. They bounced up against her suddenly like indiarubber balls, and when she tried to spread her wings, she felt two of the little wretches hanging on to them. Angrily she tried to shake them off, and then she began to run, and

thrust her back against the tree trunks, but the more she tried to get rid of them the more they enjoyed teasing her.

"They must know I'm only a make-believe fairy," she thought, "or they wouldn't dare to go on like this."

So at last, rather hot and ruffled, she sat down on a great mossy rock, and snatched at one of the little men, and caught and held him wriggling in her two hands. All the others stood at a safe distance grinning and wagging their heads.

"Tell me," said Bridget, "what it is you think is——" she didn't like to say "funny," so she said "'queer' about me."

"I'm Queer and I'm about you," said the Brownie in a trembling voice. "Please won't you let me go now I've answered?"

"Yes, I'll let you go," she squeezed him a little tighter, "when you've told me why you all laughed at me."

"But please *I* didn't," said the wee man, so she squeezed again. "Please take care. I'm like a nut, you know, once cracked never to be mended."

"I can't help that," said Bridget firmly. "Why did you laugh at me?"

"Because I'm Queer."

She gave him up at that and made a sudden



PERIWINKLE PAINTING THE PETALS

Page 59

dive at another Brownie who had ventured too near. She got this one by the leg and hung on, letting Queer go. Presently she held the new prisoner whimpering in front of her.

“Now you tell me—” she thought hard of a new word—“what you found so odd about me?”

There was a shout of laughter from the rest, who went head over heels backwards into the bushes in their delight.

“I didn’t find ‘Odd’ about you,” he quavered. “You put me there yourself.”

It took her a minute to understand this, then she said: “You are called Odd, are you?”

“We all are,” he said mildly.

At that she lost patience and dropped him.

Then as he scampered away all the little men cried out in chorus:

“We laughed, because when we went to fetch the paint for Periwinkle we saw you sleeping in the Honeysuckle Bower, and when we got back again we found you there too, wide awake.”

Up started Bridget. So Nancy *was* here, not very far away, sleeping in the Honeysuckle Bower. Oh, she must have just one peep! It wouldn’t matter surely if Nancy were asleep.

“Where is the Honeysuckle Bower?” she cried, forgetting everything in her eagerness.

“Why, up the Fir-Tree Hill, of course,” they screamed. That wouldn’t have helped her much, but they pointed with their long arms, cracking the joints and snapping the fingers.

She started off in such a hurry in that direction that the Brownies ran away pell-mell, scattering through the wood.

IX.—The Honeysuckle Bower

THE hill they had pointed out was not very far away, and now she was free from the little pests Bridget easily skimmed there on her wings, in and out through the straight tree-trunks and over the undergrowth. She soon reached the beautiful slope covered with emerald-green moss, and she rose over it and alighted on the top, looking eagerly down on the sunny side, which fell to a winding stream. Yes—they had not lied—there, about half-way down, was a mass of honeysuckle growing over a fallen tree-trunk, so that it looked almost like a green bower. The fragrance of the honeysuckle filled the air, and as Bridget, breathless with excitement, floated nearer and nearer, she heard the soft murmur of bees. They did not disturb themselves as she drew near, and she presently saw sticking out from under the honeysuckle; which grew right over like a grotto, a dear little bare foot with pink toes. Beside it sat a bright-eyed mouse, and if the ants ran over the little foot he brushed them off with his tail!

Bridget held her breath and knelt to peep into the delicious cool green shade. She remembered

very well all that Nancy had said, that something awful might happen if they met face to face, and that the fairies would be very angry. Yet she felt she *must* look. She wanted to so much, she could not resist it. After all, if Nancy were asleep nothing terrible might happen. Anyway, she was going to risk it.

At first, when she bent her head and looked into the bower, she saw nothing but a glorious mass of the softest stuff lying in a heap. It looked green in the shade of the leaves, for all round they made a sort of trellis or lattice-work screen, and the sun shining on them threw the green colour over everything inside. Hanging down everywhere were sprays of the lovely honeysuckle flower, which made a sweet fragrance and entirely hid the face of the sleeper. Bridget put up her hand and lifted them aside, and as she did so there burst out yells of mischievous laughter from behind her. Those impish Brownies had followed her secretly out of pure wickedness, and now broke out noisily just at the very moment when everything depended on being quiet!

As their piercing shrieks and hoarse cackles broke the stillness and the even drowsy hum of the bees, the figure in the bower stirred, and sat up—face to face with Bridget.

But it was not Nancy!

This was the most beautiful face that could be imagined. For it was the face of the Fairy Queen, the lovely lady Bridget had just had a glimpse of in the Land of the Wee People. Her great blue eyes were full of love and happiness and kindness. When you looked into them you wanted to tell her everything that you had ever done that was naughty, and promise to be good for always. Her glorious golden hair fell down round her to her knees, over that pale green dress that shone like satin and had silver flowers shimmering on it.

Bridget was so much astonished that she forgot everything she ought to have remembered, and exclaimed aloud:

“You’re not Nancy!”

She heard a crackling of twigs, and a scutter among the honeysuckle leaves on one side of her as she spoke, and through the screen she saw someone, who had been lying asleep close to the Queen, but on the other side of the bower, spring up and dash away. She did not see the face, but even through the leaves she recognised the little pink frock and the figure, and knew that this must be Nancy!

She looked again at the lovely lady, who was now rather stern and sorrowful. The Brownies

pressed in nearer; one of them even stumbled and fell forward, clutching at the Fairy Queen's dress. He would never have dared to do it, but had been pushed on by the others behind in their eagerness to see what was happening in the bower.

A lightning flash shot into the Queen's beautiful eyes.

"Punish them for their presumption," said she, and her tone cut like a sword.

The bees flew out and down as she spoke, and surrounded the Brownies in clouds, with a great angry buzzing, very different from the soft lullaby with which they had soothed her to sleep. The Brownies backed out and away, anywhere, in a much greater hurry than they had come in. Some of them screamed with terror, and others tried to shout out something cheeky, but the instant one opened his wide mouth like a cavern, a bee flew straight at it, and if he hadn't shut it very quickly, it would have flown in and stung him. So the Brownies were forced to keep quite silent!

Then an army of mice scampered out, and nibbled their heels, and ran up their long thin legs, and bit their fingers, and the Brownies began to run away as hard as they could go. They had to keep their eyes shut as well as their mouths, for the bees flew bang into them whenever they were

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THE LITTLE ONE TOOK HIS PAWS OUT OF HIS MOUTH AND LOOKED RATHER STARTLED

X.—What the Animals Thought

WHEN the wind stopped as suddenly as it began and Bridget felt the sun hot on her back, she raised her head and looked up. She was all by herself on the hillside. Brownies, Fairy Queen, and honeysuckle bower, even the bees and the mice had all vanished completely! Yet it was the same place, for there were the same trees growing around, and close by her hand was one spray of honeysuckle, crushed and torn.

Bridget was amazed, and a little frightened, for she felt sure that this must be the "great disaster" Nancy had told her about. She hadn't seen Nancy's face certainly, but she had *seen* her, and the Fairy Queen had known that she, Bridget, was not Nancy!

The mischief was done!

Bridget felt very sad and sorry now. She thought of the lovely Queen's happy eyes when she waked, and she knew that her own curiosity and disobedience had brought sorrow into them. Oh, now, if she only had it all over again, she felt she would rest content with her great treat, and never, never, never be wilful any more!

Then she looked up and saw the storm rolling away, and the sun racing in behind it as it went, and—oddly enough—there was actually a curious bent figure crouching along in the rain, swept forward by the wind. Without thinking an instant of her own safety, Bridget beat her wings, and flew fast after it, and then she saw that, alas! it was not the Fairy Queen, but a very aged man wrapped in a long brown hooded cloak like a monk's, with his head bowed over so that he was nearly double. His immense white beard, which was longer than his whole body, flew out before him like the steam from a railway engine, only this was in front instead of behind.

Bridget made a desperate effort to reach him, so that she could ask him what had happened to the Fairy Queen, but before she got anywhere near him the old man and the storm, with the wind and the rain, had all swept together over a great cliff into a huge lake and disappeared! Once more the sunshine, and the soft air, played about, and there sounded a hum of insects, as if no great disaster had happened.

Bridget stood still, with her bare toes in a cushion of soft moss that looked as if it were made of tiny ferns, and for the first time in her life she was really sorry that she had insisted on having



HIS IMMENSE WHITE BEARD BLEW OUT BEFORE HIM

her own way without taking any heed of what another person had told her. Well, there was one thing that was quite clear. She must undo the mischief if she could, and the first thing was to find out what really *had* happened. As she could see no living thing round her to ask, she started off, skipping and jumping and fluttering through the forest, to see if she could find anyone. As she went the trees grew larger and darker, but she never thought of herself or of any possible danger; all she thought about was how she could help that lovely lady and bring back that happy look into her eyes again.

Presently, skimming lightly round the trunk of an immense tree, she came upon a very pretty sight. Two fat little Teddy Bears were sitting on the ground side by side on the fallen leaves. The bigger one had his paws folded across his front, and the smaller one was sucking his. For a minute Bridget stopped, for she was afraid they might get up and run away if she went nearer to them. Then she remembered that she still had her wings and looked like a fairy, and the animals are never afraid of fairies, so she went gently toward the Bears, and knelt down in front of them. They stared at her solemnly out of their small eyes, and the little one took his paws out of his mouth, and

looked rather startled, but they did not move away.

"Did you notice a storm just now?" Bridget asked politely, after nodding to them.

The bigger Bear wagged his thick head and said: "Wuff," which she knew meant "yes."

"Was it—er—I mean, do you often have storms like that?" she went on.

"Only once in a while," said Wuffy, the bigger one, after thinking a minute.

"How do you mean 'once in a while'?" asked Bridget. "Have you ever had one in the past?"

"Not in the past," said Wuffy solemnly—"in a while' I said."

Bridget gave that up, and began another way. "Do you think anything has happened to the Fairy Queen?"

They woke up in a moment, and became very lively, nodding their fat heads and waving their thick paws about.

"That's it—the Fairy Queen"—then with a great deep "woof" Wuffy boomed out: "She's gone!"

"Oh!" exclaimed Bridget, rather startled. "Where has she gone?"

"Only the Tree-Man knows that."

•Bridget looked up at the trees, solemn and

stately above them; they did not look as if they would tell her *any*-thing!

"Where shall I find the Tree-Man?" she asked.

They looked at one another, and cuddled closer together.

"Don't ask," said Snuffy the little one in a muffled voice, his nose pressed into his brother's fur.

"But I must go to him and ask him to release the Queen if he's got her," said Bridget. "For it's all my fault."

"Ow-wo-wo-ough," they both said so dismally that she felt her heart sink.

"I must be brave," she said aloud. "I must be brave, because it was through me it all happened. Please tell me where I can find the Tree-Man."

"In the middle of the wood," said Wuffy at last.

"But I don't know how to find the middle of the wood," said Bridget. "How do you find the middle of a thing if you can't fold it up? Won't you show me where it is?"

Both Bears sucked their paws violently.

"Will the Tree-Man hurt you?" Bridget asked, seeing how reluctant they were to go.

"No, no," they grunted. "*We* are animals."

"Why are you afraid then?"

"You're a fairy."

"You think he'll eat *me* then? Oh please, Wuffy dear, and Snuffy dear" (she knew their names from the way they talked), "will you come with me and take care of me?"

With much deliberation Wuffy got up and dusted himself all round to get rid of the dead leaves, then he held out a great paw to her. Up got Snuffy in a great hurry and tried to brush himself behind his own back as his brother had done, but his arms were too short. Then he too held out a friendly paw, and they all three went off through the wood together.

They had not gone very far before they met a Pelican stalking along under the trees, as if it were quite a natural place for a Pelican to be. He looked so wise, with his great pouched bill, that Bridget stopped, and without letting go of the Bears' paws she asked:

"Can you tell us what has happened?"

And the Pelican said:

"A Great Disaster, Nancy."

Bridget asked:

"Is it the Fairy Queen?"

And the Pelican answered sensibly, as you would expect a Pelican to do:

"She has been carried away."

Bridget asked:

"How can I find out where she has gone?"

And the Pelican answered:

"Only the Tree-Man can tell you that."

As they were turning away, to go on with their journey, he said aloud to himself in a strange voice:

"That's queer, that's very queer!"

Presently they saw an Opossum peeping round a tree-trunk at them, and Bridget stopped to ask:

"What has happened?"

Before the Opossum could answer, his wife jerked her head down from a branch above him and said chatteringly:

"A Great Disaster, Nancy."

Bridget asked:

"Is it the Fairy Queen?"

The wife-possum answered irritably, as you would expect a possum to do:

"Who else do you suppose it would be!"

Bridget asked:

"How can I find out what has happened?"

And the husband-possum answered—while his wife gave him a cuff on the head for interrupting her talk:

"Only the Tree-Man can tell you that."

As they were turning away, to go on with their journey, the husband-possum said aloud:

The Little Fairy Sister

"That's queer, that's very queer!" and his wife began to chatter like a machine.

They hadn't gone very much farther before a Lizard peeped out at them from some rocks, and Bridget smiled to remember how big the Chameleon, which is only a sort of Lizard, had looked when she was tiny. She stopped and asked :

"What has happened?"

The Lizard said quickly :

"A Great Disaster, Nancy."

Bridget asked :

"Is it the Fairy Queen?"

The Lizard answered very fast, as you would expect a Lizard to do :

"May be," and he darted out his long tongue, like a whip-lash, on a fly, not caring much about anything which did not concern himself.

Bridget asked :

"How can I find out what has happened?"

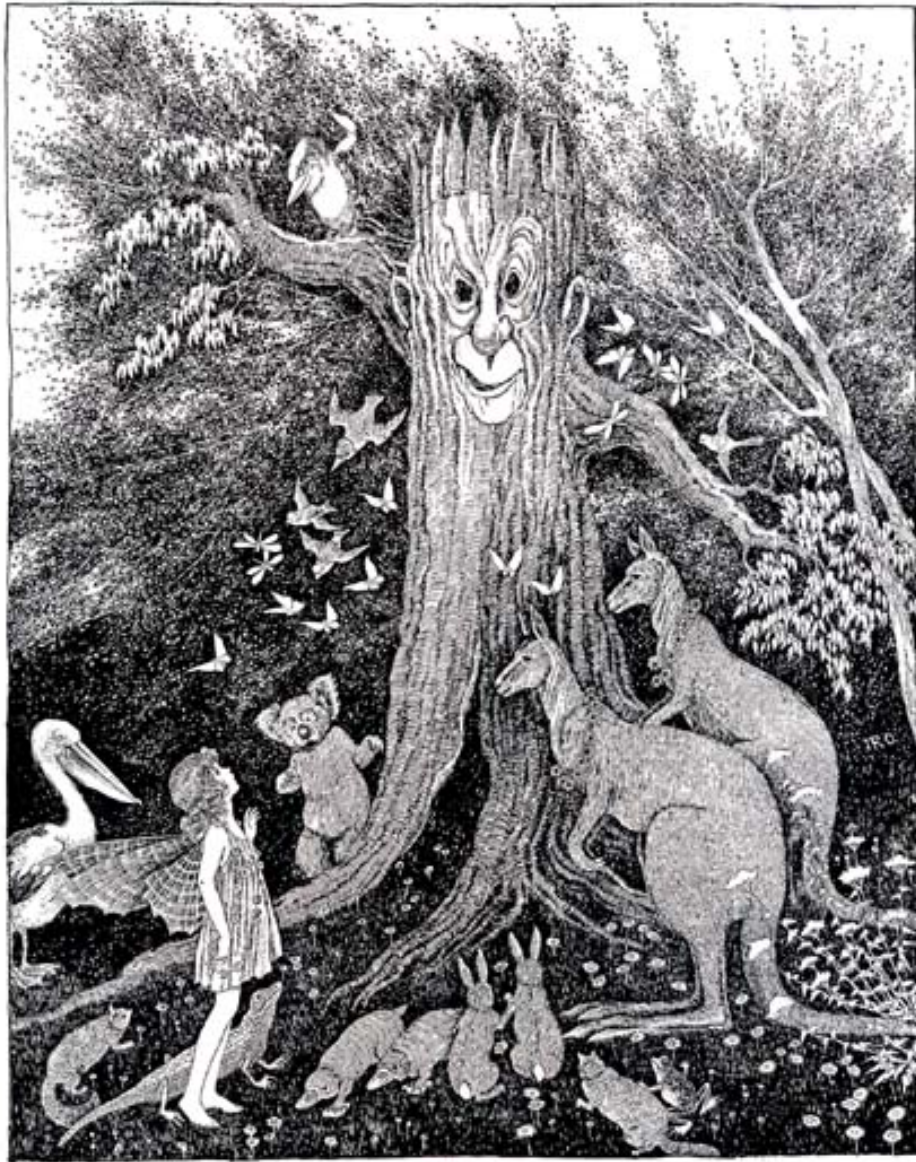
And the Lizard answered :

"Only the Tree-Man can tell you that."

As they were turning away to go on with their journey, the Lizard stopped his darting to and fro on the rocks, and looked up and said aloud :

"That's queer, that's very queer!"

After that they met two Kangaroos leaping



BY THIS TIME ALL THE ANIMALS HAD CAUGHT HER UP
AND WERE LISTENING EAGERLY

along easily. They stopped with a timid old-maidish air, when Bridget asked :

“What has happened?”

They stood there leaning a little forward with their eyes fixed on her, and answered as the others had done :

“A Great Disaster, Nancy.”

Bridget asked :

“Is it the Fairy Queen?”

And the Kangaroos answered anxiously, as you would expect a Kangaroo to do :

“We greatly fear it is!”

Bridget asked :

“How can I find out what has happened?”

The Kangaroos answered :

“Only the Tree-Man can tell you that.”

Then, just as she was turning away, she heard them saying to each other :

“That’s queer, that’s very queer!”

And then they met two rabbits, exactly like Skip-and-Jump and Nibble-Nose

And two Duck-billed Platypus

And a Frog

And a great many birds, including a Kingfisher and a Kookaburra

And a great many dragon flies (how small they looked now!).

And each and all of them answered in the same way, and at the end of the conversation, just as Bridget and the two Bears were turning away, every single one of them said:

“That’s queer, that’s very queer!”

Bridget felt it *was*, very, very queer, and the more so because, as they got nearer and nearer to the heart of the dark wood, she looked back, and saw that all the animals she had spoken to, from the Pelican to the winged insects, were following her!

BRIDGET was quite sure now that the most important moment of her life was close ahead. Something there would be for her to do, and she would show them all she wasn’t afraid! So she held up her head, and threw out her feet, but she couldn’t flutter even a little way, because of the Teddy Bears, who had been so kind in coming to show her the way.

Presently she saw that the trees grew thinner in front, and soon they came out into an open space, a kind of clearing in the wood. She gripped the Bears’ paws a little tighter, and felt the same excited tremor she had felt when she first threw herself off the precipice into the Country of the Fairies.

For the first moment when they stepped out into the clear space she was rather disappointed, because she saw nothing at all exciting, only a great tree-stump in the middle; then, as Wuffy and Snuffy pulled away their paws and ran behind it, she raised her head higher and saw that what she had thought was just a large dead tree, was in reality the Tree-Man himself!

He had two withered branches for arms, stretched widely out, and the queerest and most enormous face you could ever imagine, about half-way up the trunk. But though a truly comical face, and frightening because of its size, it was not unkind. Bridget thought, the very first moment she set eyes on it, that it was very like the face of old Noakes, the odd man about the garden at home, and that made her more comfortable, for she and Noakes were great friends.

Yet she felt very small as she stood there all alone.

The Tree-Man spoke first :

"So you've come," he said. "I knew you would have to, so I didn't fetch you with me."

"No one made me come, I came by myself," said Bridget, for she could tell by the look in his eye that he, at least, knew that she was no fairy, but only a little girl playing at being one.

"Hi, hi! Hoity-toity! Very grand, I'm sure! Well, what *did* you come for?"

Bridget looked round. By this time all the animals had caught her up and were standing round, listening eagerly, so she felt she must play at being very brave before them, no matter what she felt like inside.

"I came to find out what has happened to the

This was a long speech, and by the time he finished the animals were all very much excited, pricking their ears and craning their necks to peer into Bridget's face. She heard small voices creeping round from one to the other :

"I knew it wasn't Nancy."

"There *is* something queer about her."

"Nancy's got hazel eyes."

"Didn't I say so?"

"Grey eyes! Whoever heard of a fairy with grey eyes?"

"Blue—oh, yes, blue, but these aren't blue, I tell you, they're grey."

"Grey eyes, grey eyes, grey eyes!"

"But Nancy has hazel eyes, and this one's grey."

"Then it isn't Nancy."

"Couldn't Nancy change her eyes?"

Loud above the rest broke in the chatter of the female Opossum to her husband. "If you'd only listened to me, I'd have told you. I knew the very minute I set eyes on her. But then you never listen to a word I say."

Bridget did not bother herself about them or what they said. She clasped her hands, and held them up to the Tree-Man.

"So it *was* you who carried off the Fairy Queen,

for them, I and my brave sons—yes, we could do that. In the end we made a treaty. Do you know what a treaty is? It means that the weaker side gives up almost everything in consideration of being allowed to keep something. In this case the treaty was that I and my sons should remain trees all the time, and not be tree-men running about when we liked, and turning into trees when we chose, as we had been in the habit of doing. We were to be trees, clamped down and rooted to the soil, except—this was our side of it—except if the fairies ever allowed a human being to enter the country. We didn't want human beings, with their axes and loppings and cuttings, and once we were real trees we didn't feel safe unless the fairies promised us that. So they agreed that if ever a human being entered their country, then we should be free once more to take the shape of men as we used to do, and exercise our power over the weather. Trees do have power over the weather; you ask your father if that isn't true. So when it was known that a human being had actually entered this wood, I crashed out, free again once more, after more years than you could count if you counted for a week, or a month, even without stopping. My brave sons are dead or fallen—I alone live, and I have shown these fairies what I can do."

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"So it *was* you who carried off the Fairy Queen,

and it all happened because of me! I am so very, very sorry. Can't you let her go?"

"Ha-ha!" laughed the Tree-Man gruffly. "What would become of Nancy then? Wouldn't your beautiful Fairy Queen be very angry with Nancy for having let you in?"

"I don't think so," said Bridget after a moment. "I think she would forgive her, because, you see, I am her very own twin-sister, and she did it because I wanted her to come so very much; and oh,—I *have* enjoyed myself! Fairies understand all about things like that, and the Fairy Queen has such kind eyes—I'm quite sure she will forgive Nancy, if you'll only let her go. Oh please please, do! I'll do *anything* you ask, if you'll only let her go."

"'Anything,' will you?" asked the Tree-Man grimly. "Do you know I eat nice little girls, plump and tender like you? I like to have them inside me. Will you come and be eaten up?"

Bridget stood still looking at him. This sounded very terrifying, but she wasn't quite sure whether he was not laughing at her. He was so ridiculously like old Noakes that she couldn't believe he was an Ogre. The only thing that really bothered her was the memory of that bowed old man with the long, long beard. Supposing she crawled inside the Tree-Man and found *him* there.



NANCY RAN RIGHT INTO THE ARMS OF THE FAIRY QUEEN

She didn't like that idea at all, it made her feel creepy.

"What must I do?" she asked timidly.

"You would have to crawl into that crack down there between my roots," he answered. "My back is too stiff, I can't bend down to look at it, but I know it's big enough to take you."

"If I don't do it?"

"Then you'll leave the Fairy Queen to her fate, whatever that may be," and he laughed horribly so that his branches creaked and groaned as they swung about. He did not look so like old Noakes then.

Bridget thought of the lovely lady with the sweet eyes in the honeysuckle bower, and made up her mind.

"I'll come," she cried, and darted forward quickly before she had time to be afraid.

Down on her hands and knees she went, right into that yawning crack of blackness, gaping at the foot of the tree. She heard all the animals give loud hisses and cries of fear and astonishment. She heard Wuffy groan a deep "woo-oo-oof!" but the instant she was right inside in the black darkness there was a kind of explosion, only not very loud, and the tree flew to pieces all round her in every direction, and she seemed to be floating peacefully

in the air high up. She saw the animals flying helter-skelter in all directions as the bits of wood fell among them and rained down on them. Then, as she rose higher still, she saw a little knoll, or hillock, most beautiful to look at. On the top of it stood the glorious, gracious Fairy Queen with her rippling hair falling like waves of sunshine over her shoulders. Her pale-green dress embroidered with starry flowers swept the ground, and the long train was held up by two little Brownie pages, while two others stood by at attention holding up long spikes of flower-bells.

The daisies spangled the grass, and masses of pinkish blossom showed up behind against the dark trees. As Bridget watched, Nancy came running up—dear little Nancy with a chain of flowers round her hair, and her soft brown wings furled behind.

The Fairy Queen held out her arms most lovingly, and Nancy ran right into them. She was forgiven!

The picture faded away. Something shook Bridget by the shoulder, and she heard a voice shouting, "Wake up, Missie, wake up! The rain's a-coming and you'll get wet if you bides hereaway." Bridget opened her eyes, and saw, standing over her, old Noakes, the odd man in the

garden. She burst out laughing: yes, he *was* like the Tree-Man.

But her glorious visit to the Country of the Fairies was not just a dream, and she knew that, because, when she had jumped out of the hammock and run down to the house through the big splashing drops that were beginning to fall here and there she met Nurse looking rather white and frightened, and she cried out:

"Why, wherever have you been, Miss Bridget? You've frightened me nearly to death. I went to fetch you in when the clouds gathered, and could see nothing but the cushion in the hammock."

So you see Bridget had really been away on a journey, and just got back as old Noakes came past. She had visited the Land of Wee People and the Merman's Pool and the Land of Heart's Delight in the Country of the Fairies, but whenever she tried to tell grown-up people about it, though they smiled and spoke kindly, she could see that they thought it was only a dream.

But Bridget often wondered what would have happened if she had been too much of a coward to crawl into the black hole in the trunk of the Tree-Man.

The End.

