

The Counterpane Fairy

Katharine Pyle

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CHAPTER FIRST. THE PRINCESS OF THE GOLDEN CASTLE

TEDDY was all alone, for his mother had been up with him so much the night before that at about four o'clock in the afternoon she said that she was going to lie down for a little while.

The room where Teddy lay was very pleasant, with two big windows, and the furniture covered with gay old-fashioned India calico. His mother had set a glass of milk on the table beside his bed, and left the stair door ajar so that he could call Hannah, the cook, if he wanted anything, and then she had gone over to her own room.

The little boy had always enjoyed being ill, for then he was read aloud to and had lemonade, but this had been a real illness, and though he was better now, the doctor still would not let him have anything but milk and gruel. He was feeling rather lonely, too, though the fire crackled cheerfully, and he could hear Hannah singing to herself in the kitchen below.

Teddy turned over the leaves of Robinson Crusoe for a while, looking at the gaily colored pictures, and then he closed it and called, "Hannah!" The singing in the kitchen below ceased, and Teddy knew that Hannah was listening. "Hannah!" he called again.

At the second call Hannah came hurrying up the stairs and into the room. "What do you want, Teddy?" she asked.

"Hannah, I want to ask mamma something," said Teddy.

"Oh," said Hannah, "you wouldn't want me to call your poor mother, would you, when she was up with you the whole of last night and has just gone to lie down a bit?"

"I want to ask her something," repeated Teddy.

"You ask me what you want to know," suggested Hannah. "Your poor mother's so tired that I'm sure you are too much of a man to want me to call her."

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"Well, I want to ask her if I may have a cracker," said Teddy.

"Oh, no; you couldn't have that," said Hannah. "Don't you know that the doctor said you mustn't have anything but milk and gruel? Did you want to ask her anything else?"

"No," said Teddy, and his lip trembled.

After that Hannah went down—stairs to her work again, and Teddy lay staring out of the window at the windy gray clouds that were sweeping across the April sky. He grew lonelier and lonelier and a lump rose in his throat; presently a big tear trickled down his cheek and dripped off his chin.

"Oh dear, oh dear!" said a little voice just back of the hill his knees made as he lay with them drawn up in bed; "what a hill to climb!"

Teddy stopped crying and gazed wonderingly toward where the voice came from, and presently over the top of his knees appeared a brown peaked hood, a tiny withered face, a flapping brown cloak, and last of all two small feet in buckled shoes. It was a little old woman, so weazened and brown that she looked more like a dried leaf than anything else.

She seated herself on Teddy's knees and gazed down at him solemnly, and she was so light that he felt her weight no more than if she had been a feather.

Teddy lay staring at her for a while, and then he asked, "Who are you?"

"I'm the Counterpane Fairy," said the little figure, in a thin little voice.

"I don't know what that is," said Teddy.

"Well," said the Counterpane Fairy, "it's the sort of a fairy that lives in houses and watches out for the children. I used to be one of the court fairies, but I grew tired of that. There was nothing in it, you know."

"Nothing in what?" asked Teddy.

"Nothing in the court life. All day the fairies were swinging in spider—webs and sipping honey—dew, or playing games of hide—and—go—seek. The only comfort I had was with an old field—mouse who lived at the edge of the wood, and I used to spend a great deal of time with her; I used to take care of her babies when she was out hunting for something to eat; cunning little things they were,—five of them, all fat and soft, and with such funny little tails."

"What became of them?"

"Oh, they moved away. They left before I did. As soon as they were old enough, Mother Field—mouse went. She said she couldn't stand the court fairies. They were always playing tricks on her, stopping up the door of her house with sticks and acorns, and making faces at her babies until they almost drove them into fits. So after that I left too."

"Where did you go?"

"Oh, hither and yon. Mostly where there were little sick boys and girls."

"Do you like little boys?"

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"Yes, when they don't cry," said the Counterpane Fairy, staring at him very hard.

"Well, I was lonely," said Teddy. "I wanted my mamma."

"Yes, I know, but you oughtn't to have cried. I came to you, though, because you were lonely and sick, and I thought maybe you would like me to show you a story."

"Do you mean tell me a story?" asked Teddy.

"No," said the fairy, "I mean show you a story. It's a game I invented after I joined the Counterpane Fairies. Choose any one of the squares of the counterpane and I will show you how to play it. That's all you have to do,—to choose a square."

Teddy looked the counterpane over carefully. "I think I'll choose that yellow square," he said, "because it looks so nice and bright."

"Very well," said the Counterpane Fairy. "Look straight at it and don't turn your eyes away until I count seven times seven and then you shall see the story of it."

Teddy fixed his eyes on the square and the fairy began to count. "One—two—three—four," she counted; Teddy heard her voice, thin and clear as the hissing of the logs on the hearth. "Don't look away from the square," she cried. "Five—six—seven"—it seemed to Teddy that the yellow silk square was turning to a mist before his eyes and wrapping everything about him in a golden glow. "Thirteen—fourteen"—the fairy counted on and on. "Forty—six—forty—seven—forty—eight—FORTY—NINE!"

At the words forty—nine, the Counterpane Fairy clapped her hands and Teddy looked about him. He was no longer in a golden mist. He was standing in a wonderful enchanted garden. The sky was like the golden sky at sunset, and the grass was so thickly set with tiny yellow flowers that it looked like a golden carpet. From this garden stretched a long flight of glass steps. They reached up and up and up to a great golden castle with shining domes and turrets.

"Listen!" said the Counterpane Fairy. "In that golden castle there lies an enchanted princess. For more than a hundred years she has been lying there waiting for the hero who is to come and rescue her, and you are the hero who can do it if you will."

With that the fairy led him to a little pool close by, and bade him look in the water. When Teddy looked, he saw himself standing there in the golden garden, and he did not appear as he ever had before. He was tall and strong and beautiful, like a hero.

"Yes," said Teddy, "I will do it."

At these words, from the grass, the bushes, and the tress around, suddenly started a flock of golden birds. They circled about him and over him, clapping their wings and singing triumphantly. Their song reminded Teddy of the blackbirds that sang on the lawn at home in the early spring, when the daffodils were up. Then in a moment they were all gone, and the garden was still again.

Their song had filled his heart with a longing for great deeds, and, without pausing longer, he ran to the glass steps and began to mount them.

Up and up and up he went. Once he turned and waved his hand to the Counterpane Fairy in the golden garden far below. She waved her hand in answer, and he heard her voice faint and clear. "Good—bye! Good—bye! Be brave

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and strong, and beware of that that is little and gray."

Then Teddy turned his face toward the castle, and in a moment he was standing before the great shining gates.

He raised his hand and struck bravely upon the door. There was no answer. Again he struck upon it, and his blow rang through the hall inside; then he opened the door and went in.

The hall was five-sided, and all of pure gold, as clear and shining as glass. Upon three sides of it were three arched doors; one was of emerald, one was of ruby, and one was of diamond; they were arched, and tall, and wide,—fit for a hero to go through. The question was, behind which one lay the enchanted princess.

While Teddy stood there looking at them and wondering, he heard a little thin voice, that seemed to be singing to itself, and this is what it sang:

"In and out and out and in, Quick as a flash I weave and spin. Some may mistake and some forget, But I'll have my spider-web finished yet."

When Teddy heard the song, he knew that someone must be awake in the enchanted castle, so he began looking about him.

On the fourth side of the wall there hung a curtain of silvery-gray spider-web, and the voice seemed to come from it. The hero went toward it, but he saw nothing, for the spider that was spinning it moved so fast that no eyes could follow it. Presently it paused up in the left-hand corner of the web, and then Teddy saw it. It looked very little to have spun all that curtain of silvery web.

As Teddy stood looking at it, it began to sing again:

"Here in my shining web I sit, To look about and rest a bit. I rest myself a bit and then, Quick as a flash, I begin again."

"Mistress Spinner! Mistress Spinner!" cried Teddy. "Can you tell me where to find the enchanted princess who lies asleep waiting for me to come and rescue her?"

The spider sat quite still for a while, and then it said in a voice as thin as a hair: "You must go through the emerald door; you must go through the emerald door. What so fit as the emerald door for the hero who would do great deeds?"

Teddy did not so much as stay to thank the little gray spinner, he was in such a hurry to find the princess, but turning he sprang to the emerald door, flung it open, and stepped outside.

He found himself standing on the glass steps, and as his foot touched the topmost one the whole flight closed up like an umbrella, and in a moment Teddy was sliding down the smooth glass pane, faster and faster and faster until he could hardly catch his breath.

The next thing he knew he was standing in the golden garden, and there was the Counterpane Fairy beside him looking at him sadly. "You should have known better than to try the emerald door," she said; "and now shall we break the story?"

"Oh, no, no!" cried Teddy, and he was still the hero. "Let me try once more, for it may be I can yet save the princess."

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Then the Counterpane Fairy smiled. "Very well," she said, "you shall try again; but remember what I told you, beware of that that is little and gray, and take this with you, for it may be of use." Stooping, she picked up a blade of grass from the ground and handed it to him.

The hero took it wondering, and in his hands it was changed to a sword that shone so brightly that it dazzled his eyes. Then he turned, and there was the long flight of glass steps leading up to the golden castle just as before; so thrusting the magic sword into his belt, he ran nimbly up and up and up, and not until he reached the very topmost step did he turn and look back to wave farewell to the Counterpane Fairy below. She waved her hand to him. "Remember," she called, "beware of what is little and gray."

He opened the door and went into the five-sided golden hall, and there were the three doors just as before, and the spider spinning and singing on the fourth side:

"Now the brave hero is wiser indeed; He may have failed once, but he still may succeed. Dull are the emeralds; diamonds are bright; So is his wisdom that shines as the light."

"The diamond door!" cried Teddy. "Yes, that is the door that I should have tried. How could I have thought the emerald door was it?" and opening the diamond door he stepped through it.

He hardly had time to see that he was standing at the top of the glass steps, before—br-r-r-r!—they had shut up again into a smooth glass hill, and there he was spinning down them so fast that the wind whistled past his ears.

In less time than it takes to tell, he was back again for the third time in the golden garden, with the Counterpane Fairy standing before him, and he was ashamed to raise his eyes.

"So!" said the Counterpane Fairy. "Did you know no better than to open the diamond door?"

"No," said Teddy, "I knew no better."

"Then," said the fairy, "if you can pay no better heed to my warnings than that, the princess must wait for another hero, for you are not the one."

"Let me try but once more," cried Teddy, "for this time I shall surely find her."

"Then you may try once more and for the last time," said the fairy, "but beware of what is little and gray." Stooping she picked from the grass beside her a fallen acorn cup and handed it to him. "Take this with you," she said, "for it may serve you well."

As he took it from her, it was changed in his hand to a goblet of gold set round with precious stones. He thrust it into his bosom, for he was in haste, and turning he ran for the third time up the flight of glass steps. This time so eager was he that he never once paused to look back, but all the time he ran on up and up he was wondering what it was that she meant about her warning. She had said, "Beware of what is little and gray." What had he seen that was little and gray?

As soon as he reached the great golden hall he walked over to the curtain of spider-web. The spider was spinning so fast that it was little more than a gray streak, but presently it stopped up in the left-hand corner of the web. As the hero looked at it he saw that it was little and gray. Then it began to sing to him in its little thin voice:

"Great hero, wiser than ever before, Try the red door, try the red door. Open the door that is ruby, and then You never need search for the princess again."

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"No, I will not open the ruby door," cried Teddy. "Twice have you sent me back to the golden garden, and now you shall fool me no more."

As he said this he saw that one corner of the spider-web curtain was still unfinished, in spite of the spider's haste, and underneath was something that looked like a little yellow door. Then suddenly he knew that that was the door he must go through. He caught hold of the curtain and pulled, but it was as strong as steel. Quick as a flash he snatched from his belt the magic sword, and with one blow the curtain was cut in two, and fell at his feet.

He heard the little gray spider calling to him in its thin voice, but he paid no heed, for he had opened the little yellow door and stooped his head and entered.

Beyond was a great courtyard all of gold, and with a fountain leaping and splashing back into a golden basin in the middle. But what he saw first of all was the enchanted princess, who lay stretched out as if asleep upon a couch all covered with cloth of gold. He knew she was a princess, because she was so beautiful and because she wore a golden crown.

He stood looking at her without stirring, and at last he whispered: "Princess! Princess! I have come to save you."

Still she did not stir. He bent and touched her, but she lay there in her enchanted sleep, and her eyes did not open. Then Teddy looked about him, and seeing the fountain he drew the magic cup from his bosom and, filling it, sprinkled the hands and face of the princess with the water.

Then her eyes opened and she raised herself upon her elbow and smiled. "Have you come at last?" she cried.

"Yes," answered Teddy, "I have come."

The princess looked about her. "But what became of the spider?" she said. Then Teddy, too, looked about, and there was the spider running across the floor toward where the princess lay.

Quickly he sprang from her side and set his foot upon it. There was a thin squeak and then—there was nothing left of the little gray spinner but a tiny gray smudge on the floor.

Instantly the golden castle was shaken from top to bottom, and there was a sound of many voices shouting outside. The princess rose to her feet and caught the hero by the hand. "You have broken the enchantment," she cried, "and now you shall be the King of the Golden Castle and reign with me."

"Oh, but I can't," said Teddy, "because—because——"

But the princess drew him out with her through the hall, and there they were at the head of the flight of glass steps. A great host of soldiers and courtiers were running up it. They were dressed in cloth of gold, and they shouted at the sight of Teddy: "Hail to the hero! Hail to the hero!" and Teddy knew them by their voices for the golden birds that had fluttered around him in the garden below.

"And all this is yours," said the beautiful princess, turning toward him with——

* * * * *

"So that is the story of the yellow square," said the Counterpane Fairy.

Teddy looked about him. The golden castle was gone, and the stairs, and the shouting courtiers. He was lying in bed with the silk coverlet over his little knees and Hannah was still singing in the kitchen below.

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"Did you like it?" asked the fairy.

Teddy heaved a deep sigh. "Oh! Wasn't it beautiful?" he said. Then he lay for a while thinking and smiling. "Wasn't the princess lovely?" he whispered half to himself.

The Counterpane Fairy got up slowly and stiffly, and picked up the staff that she had laid down beside her. "Well, I must be journeying on," she said.

"Oh, no, no!" cried Teddy. "Please don't go yet."

"Yes, I must," said the Counterpane Fairy. "I hear your mother coming."

"But will you come back again?" cried Teddy.

The Counterpane Fairy made no answer. She was walking down the other side of the bedquilt hill, and Teddy heard her voice, little and thin, dying away in the distance: "Oh dear, dear, dear! What a hill to go down! What a hill it is! Oh dear, dear, dear!"

Then the door opened and his mother came in. She was looking rested, and she smiled at him lovingly, but the little brown Counterpane Fairy was gone.

CHAPTER SECOND. THE OWLS AND THE GAMBLESOME ELF.

THE next morning when Teddy awoke it was still very early; so early that even Hannah was not yet stirring.

Outside everything was wrapped in a silvery mist, and now and then a drop of moisture plumped down on the porch roof.

Teddy lay still for a while, growing wider and wider awake, and then he began to stir restlessly and wish that his mother would come. After a while he called her, but the house was so silent that he didn't like to call very loudly, and there was no answer.

He thought he would call again, and then suddenly he remembered the Counterpane Fairy, and wondered if she would like little boys who called their mothers so early.

He turned over in bed, and raising his knees into a hill stared at the yellow silk square and thought of the wonderful golden castle where she had taken him the day before. He wished he knew what all the bird people would have done when they reached the top of the stairs. He thought they would have put a golden crown on his head and made him king.

And the princess was so beautiful he longed to see her again. How surprised Hannah would have been if she had heard voices, and had come up—stairs to see who it was, and had found the beautiful princess sitting with him, and had seen the golden crown on his head! If she only knew about it she would never call him a mischievous boy again. He had done a great deal more than Hannah could.

"Oh dear, oh dear!" said a little voice just back of his knees; "almost at the top, anyway." Teddy knew the voice; it was that of the Counterpane Fairy, and there was the top of her brown hood showing over his knees. He watched, breathless with eagerness, until he saw her face appear above them, and then he cried out: "I wondered whether you would come; I'm so glad. Are you going to show me another story, and will you stay a long while?"

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The Counterpane Fairy said nothing until she had sat down on top of his knees for a while and caught her breath, and then she said: "Well, well! It's steeper than it was yesterday. I thought I should never get across that satin square, it was so slippery."

"Shall I put my knees down?" asked Teddy, moving them.

"For mercy's sake! no," said the fairy, clutching at the quilt. "You might upset me. Keep right still and I'll show you another story."

"Oh, yes!" cried Teddy; "please do; and let me go to the golden castle again."

"No, I can't do that," said the Counterpane Fairy, "for that was yesterday's story, and this will be another."

"But what became of the princess?" asked Teddy.

"Oh! she married the hero, of course," said the fairy.

"But I thought I was the hero."

"There, there!" said the fairy, impatiently, "I told you that was yesterday's story, and if you want to see any more you must choose another square."

"Well, I will," said Teddy. "May I choose that green square?"

"Yes," said the fairy. "Now fix your eyes on it while I count."

Teddy began to stare at the green square so hard that he scarcely winked, but he heard the Counterpane Fairy counting on in her thin little voice until she reached FORTY-NINE.

The green square spread and grew just as the yellow one had done while she counted, until Teddy seemed drifting off into endless green spaces. Then the Counterpane Fairy clapped her hands and he saw that he was hovering over a grassy hillside.

"Now you are an elf, you know," he heard the fairy say.

At the bottom of the green hill there was a brook, and at the top was a line of shady green woods. Overhead the sky was very blue, with shining heaps of cottony white clouds; a soft wind was blowing, but the sun was warm, and insects were buzzing past intent on business. A brown bird whirred by and dropped out of sight among the grasses.

Teddy floated through the air lighter than a feather, and he felt so happy that he clapped his hands together and turned head over heels in the air. As he came right side up again he saw a bit of thistle-down drifting on up the hill, and he was so little that when he flew after it and set himself astride of it, it seemed as big as a barrel to him. He floated on up the hill with it, and the wind was like a cushion behind him.

As they reached the edge of the hill the thistle-down caught on a bush, and Teddy almost has his leg wedged between it and a leaf. He jumped off in a hurry, and stood looking about him and wondering what he should do next.

Suddenly he saw something that made him open his eyes wide in astonishment. Four large black-and-yellow butterflies were tied to a knot on an old tree close by, but it was not at the butterflies themselves that he wondered,

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for he had often seen them flitting about the fields; it was at the way they were loaded down with the strangest things: all sorts of fairy household furniture—little chairs and tables, bedsteads, tiny pots and pans, a great soup-kettle almost as large as a huckleberry, two thistle-down mattresses, and a number of other things. All these were very neatly packed and tied between the butterflies' wings with spider-web ropes.

In the middle of the knot was a hole, but instead of being round, as a knot-hole generally is, it was square, and there was a little door fitted into it.

Suddenly this door opened, and on the threshold of it stood a beautiful little fairy. She stood there looking about, and then she drew from her pocket a handkerchief, thin and delicate as gossamer, and wiped her eyes. After that she began to sob, and Teddy knew that what he had thought was the buzzing of a bee inside the knot had really been the sound of her weeping.

"Hello!" called the elf.

The fairy stopped sobbing and looked about her. When she saw Teddy she stared at him for a moment and then she began to wipe her eyes and sob again.

Teddy climbed up the branch of a blackberry bush until he was quite close to the knot-hole, and sat down on the stem and stared at her. "What makes you cry?" he asked.

Still the fairy said nothing, but she folded her little handkerchief, though it was quite wet, and put it carefully back into her pocket.

Just then in the doorway at her side appeared another fairy. He was quite different from her, though he, too, was very small. He was as withered as a dried pea, and looked as though he must be at least a hundred years old.

"Is everything packed up?" he asked in a querulous voice. Then his eyes fell on Teddy the elf. He scowled until his little pin-pricks of eyes almost disappeared. "Ugh! there's one of those nasty gamblesome elves," he said. "Now mischief's sure to follow."

"I'm not a gamblesome elf!" cried Teddy.

"Yes you are!" said the withered old fairy. "You needn't tell me! Look at your red cap and the way your toes turn down. I say you are a gamblesome elf."

Teddy looked at his toes and sure enough they did turn down. "I wonder if I am a gamblesome elf," he thought.

But the old fairy paid no more attention to him. He seemed to be in a great hurry and very cross. He bustled in and out of the knot-hole, bringing a broom and an old coat that had been forgotten, and packed them on the butterflies, and then he helped the lady fairy on to one, and clambered on another himself.

After they were all ready to start he found that he had forgotten to unhitch the butterflies, and grumbling and scolding he clambered down again and untied them. Then he climbed back once more, and away they flew down the hillside and out of sight, the lady fairy weeping all the time as though her heart would break.

"I wonder what she was crying about," said the gamblesome elf to himself, as he stared after them.

"I can tell you that easily enough," said a little voice so close to his elbow that it made him jump.

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He looked around and saw close to him a brown beetle, sitting on a blackberry leaf. Teddy looked at the beetle for a while in silence, and then he said, "Well, why is it they're going?"

"It's all because of old Mrs. Owl," said the beetle. "She and old Father Owl used to live deep in the woods in a hollow tree, but one time they determined to move out to the edge of the hill, because the air was better, and what tree should they choose for their home but this very one where Granddaddy Thistletop has been living as long as I can remember. Then when the owls were all settled they began to complain. They said that Granddaddy Thistletop and Rosine were so noisy all day that they couldn't sleep.

"After the little owls hatched out it was worse than ever, for the old mother said that every time Rosine cooked the dinner it made the little owls sneeze, and so the fairies must go."

"I wouldn't have gone," cried Teddy.

"Oh, yes you would," said the beetle. "The owls could have stopped up the doors and windows, or they could—well, they could have done almost anything, they're so big. You may go in and look at the house, if you want to. I have to go down the bush and see old Mrs. Ant. Good-bye! I'll see you again after a while."

When the beetle had gone, Teddy climbed up to the knot-hole and went in. There was a long entry as narrow and dark as a mouse-hole, and with doors opening off from it here and there. At the end of the hall was a room that must have been the kitchen. It was very bare and lonely now, and there was a fireplace at one end with a streak of light shining down through the chimney.

While Teddy was standing by the chimney, he heard a rustling and stirring about overhead; one of the little owls clicked its beak in its sleep, and he heard a sleepy, whining voice: "Now just you stop scrouging me. Screecher is scrouging me!"

Then he heard the Mother Owl: "Hus-s-s-h! Hus-s-s-h! Go to sleep; it's broad daylight yet." After that all was still again.

"I wish," thought Teddy to himself, "that I could do something to make the owls go away." Then he began to giggle to himself, and put both hands over his mouth so that the owls up above wouldn't hear him.

He tiptoed back to the door in the knot-hole, and looked down at a bush with long thorns on it, that grew close by. "I'll do it," he said to himself; "I'll break off the thorns and put them in the nest, so that the owls just can't stay there." In a moment he was down on the bush and tugging at a tough thorn.

As soon as it broke off, he lifted it on his shoulder and clambered up the rough bark of the tree to the great black hole where the owls lived. When he looked down into it, there they were in the nest, fluffy and gray, and fast asleep. Very quietly he slipped down, and set the thorn in the side of the nest, with the point sticking out. After that, he softly clambered out again.

Up and down, up and down the tree he climbed again and again, carrying thorns and quietly setting them in the nest, and as he went up and down he kept whispering to himself: "I'm a gamblesome elf; oh, yes, indeed I am a gamblesome elf."

After he thought he had put enough in the nest, he went into old Granddaddy Thistletop's kitchen, and, crouching down by the fireplace, he listened. It was getting to be twilight now, and the owls were beginning to stir. Presently he heard a voice cry out: "Ouch! Flipperty is sticking his toes into me."

"No I ain't, neither," said another voice. "It's Pinny-winny. There, she's doing it to me, too. Now just you stop."

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"Tain't me," cried a little squeaky voice; "it's Screecher hisself. Ow! Ow! I'm going to tell," and she began to cry.

"You naughty little owls," cried the Mother Owl's voice, "what do you mean by digging your little sister?"

"I didn't," cried Screecher and Flipperty, together. "Ouch! Ouch! There's something sharp in the nest."

"My dear," said old Father Owl's voice from the branch outside, "can't you keep those children quiet?"

"Quiet indeed!" cried old Mother Owl. "Here is the nest all set full of thorns, and you expect them to be quiet. No wonder the poor children make a noise. Just you come here and help me get the thorns out."

"Thorns!" cried Father Owl. "How did they get in there?"

"That's more than I can tell," said the Mother Owl. "Perhaps it's old Granddaddy Thistletop's doings. I thought those fairies had gone away, but they must be down there still. I'll just fly down and see, and if they are, I'll make them sorry enough."

With that, down flew the Mother Owl, and putting one big yellow eye at the kitchen window, she looked in.

"Who—o—o! you fairies," she cried, "are you in there still?"

At first, her eye looked so very big and yellow that Teddy was frightened. Then he remembered that he was a gamblesome elf, so he made a face at her, and began to hop up and down and twirl about on his toes, singing:

"I won't go away! I won't go away! I'll stay all night, and I'll stay all day. Oh, my cap and toes! I'm a gamblesome elf. Old owl, you had better look out for yourself."

The old owl looked in for a moment, and then without a word she flew back to her nest as fast as she could. Teddy ran over to the chimney and listened. He heard the old owl brush into the hollow above, and then he heard her saying in a frightened voice: "Husband, husband, what do you think! A gamblesome elf has come to live in old Granddaddy Thistletop's house."

"Oh, my tail—feathers!" cried old Father Owl aghast. "This is bad business; we'll be having trouble and mischief all the time now. It would have been better if we had let old Thistletop stay. What shall we do?"

"Do! do!" cried old Mother Owl in an exasperated voice; "what is there to do, I should like to know, but to get the children away? I wouldn't keep them in the same tree with that gamblesome elf—no, not a night longer—for all the mice you could offer me."

"But how can we get them away?" asked old Father Owl. "They can't fly."

"No, we can't fly!" cried all the little owls. "Oh, what shall we do? Ow! Ow!"

"Can't fly! They've got to fly," said Mother Owl, "and you and I must help them. Back to the old tree we go this very night."

After that there was a great to—do up in the hollow. Teddy watched it all lying on his stomach in the door of the knot—hole, for it was moonlight by this time and almost as bright as day.

The little owls got up on the edge of the hollow and there they sat, teetering and flapping and afraid to fly. Their mother grew crosser and crosser, and at last she got back of them and gave them a push, and then down they went, fluttering and tumbling and bumping into the tree—trunks.

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The Father Owl sailed about from branch to branch, calling, "Who-o-o-o! Who-o-o-o! Come on! Spread your wings and go like this. Who-o-o-o!" and then he would sail on to another bush; but the Mother Owl flew down beside them and showed them how to spread their wings, and pushed them with her beak, and gradually the fluttered farther and farther into the darkling woods, their cries growing fainter and then dying away until all Teddy could hear was the Father Owl's voice, very faint and far away. "Who-o-o! Who-o-o!" Then it too died away, and the woods were still.

After a while the moon set and Teddy began to feel very sleepy.

Then a little breeze sprang up; the light grew clearer and the east was red, and at last the sun peeped over the top of the hill opposite.

As the first beam struck old Granddaddy Thistletop's tree, Teddy started to his knees, gazing out down the hill-slope. There were the four black-and-yellow butterflies flying directly toward the tree as fast as their wings could carry them, and on the two foremost ones were old Granddaddy Thistletop himself and the beautiful Rosine.

They drew rein at the knot-hole, and the old fairy, skipping from his butterfly and never pausing to fasten it, tottered straight to Teddy and threw his arms about his neck. "Our preserver!" he cried. "And to think I should have called you a gamblesome elf! But never mind; I will make it up to you."

Suddenly he turned and caught the blushing Rosine by the hand. "Here!" he cried; "she is yours, and you shall live with us, and learn to turn your toes up, and we will all be happy together."

"But--but--" cried Teddy, starting back, "don't you know? I'm not an elf at all. I'm---"

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"Well, well! Here we are back again," said the Counterpane Fairy, "and stiff enough I feel after all that journeying."

"Oh! wasn't it funny?" said Teddy, and his knees shook with laughter. "They really thought I was a gamblesome elf."

"Take care!" cried the fairy. "There you are shaking your knees again. I think, my dear, that if you were to lower them very, very carefully, the hill would not be quite so steep."

"Yes, ma'am, I'll be careful," said Teddy, beginning very slowly to slide his feet down in the bed. Suddenly, the door-knob turned, and Teddy gave a start;--quick as a flash the Counterpane Fairy had disappeared.

His mother was coming in carrying his breakfast and a little vase of violets on a tray.

"Why, my darling, what a bright, happy face!" she said. "I think my little boy must be feeling better this morning."

CHAPTER THIRD. STARLEIN AND SILVERLING.

"MIS' THOMAS, Ann McFinney's downstairs to see you about that sewing you said she could do for you," said Hannah, putting her head in at the door. Mamma was sitting close to the bed playing a game of Old Maid with Teddy.

The Counterpane Fairy

"Very well, Hannah; tell her I'll be there in a moment," she said.

"Oh, please don't go yet," said Teddy. "It's my draw. Match! You're the old maid. Oh, Mamma! You're an old maid!" And he pointed his finger at her and laughed.

"Why, so I am," said mamma. "Now you can shuffle the cards, and when I come back we'll have another game."

"Don't stay long," begged Teddy.

"I'll come back as soon as I can," said mamma, and then she went out.

Teddy lay propped up on the pillow and shuffled and shuffled the cards, and wished his mother would hurry. He did not like Ann McFinney, for when she came she always cried, and wiped her eyes on the corner of her apron, and told how her husband was out of work, and the children needed shoes.

Now it was some time before mamma came back, and when she did she had her bonnet on. "Darling," she said, "I have to go out for a while. Mrs. McFinney's baby's sick, and I've promised the poor thing to come over and see it. I won't be gone long, and when I come back I'll bring you a sheet of paper soldiers to cut out."

"I'd rather have a paper circus," said Teddy.

"Very well," said mamma, "I'll bring you a circus instead." Then she gave him some picture-books to look at while she was out, and kissed him good-bye, telling him to be a good boy.

She went out through the next room, and he heard her pause to wind the music-box and set it playing. "There," she called back to him, "you'll have the music to keep you company," and then she went on down-stairs.

After she had gone Teddy lay fingering the books and not caring to open them, he knew them so well. "Oh dear!" he sighed, "I wish the Counterpane Fairy was here!"

"Oh dear, dear, dear! How steep this hill is!" said a little voice just back of his knees. "Don't break, me little staff, or down I'll go, head over heels to the bottom." Teddy knew the voice well, and his heart gave a leap of pleasure. There was the pointed cap and the withered face of the Counterpane Fairy just appearing above the counterpane hill.

"Oh, Mrs. Fairy, I'm so glad you came, and I have the loveliest square picked out!" cried Teddy. "I hadn't seen it before, because it was the other side of my knees. It's that white one with the silver leaves on it, and my mamma says it was a scrap left from her wedding dress."

"Wait, wait," said the fairy, "till a body gets her breath. Now which one is it?"

"It's that one," said Teddy. "Will you tell me about it?"

"Why, yes," said the fairy, "if that's the one you want. Now fix your eyes on it while I count."

Then the Counterpane Fairy began to count. He heard her voice going on and on and on. "FORTY-NINE!" she cried.

* * * * *

The Counterpane Fairy

When Teddy looked about him he saw that he was standing in a long hall of white marble veined with silver. There were arches and pillars of silver and all the walls were carved with lilies.

Teddy walked slowly down this hall, and as he walked a rosy glow seemed to move with him. He looked down to see what made it, and found that he was dressed in a tunic of rose-colored silk, such as he had never seen before, and it was fastened about the waist with a golden girdle. His feet were bare, but the air was so mildly warm that the marble did not chill him.

After a while, as he walked slowly and wonderingly down the hall, he turned a corner and found himself in another hall just like the first, only at one side there was a great crystal window, and sitting on a marble seat before it was the Counterpane Fairy herself. She sat quite still as though she were listening, and she paid no attention to Teddy.

He was sure it must be the Counterpane Fairy, for it looked like her, though she was quite large now; she looked as large as a real woman.

Teddy stood looking at her for a while, and waiting for her to see him, but she paid no attention, and so at last he whispered, "Counterpane Fairy!"

"Hush!" said she. "I'm listening."

Then Teddy listened too, and as soon as he did he heard a sound of music like that of the music-box in the nursery at home, only it was very much clearer, and sweeter, and fainter.

It seemed to come from outside the crystal window, and looking through it Teddy saw that outside was the most beautiful garden he had ever seen. The grass of the garden was a silvery green; and the paths were white. The leaves of the trees were lined with silver, and the branches hung with shining fruit. There were lilies growing beside the paths, and in the centre of the garden a fountain leaped and fell back into a marble basin. The water sparkled as though it were made of diamonds, and as Teddy listened he knew that the music he heard was the voice of the fountain.

Presently it ceased and then the fairy turned to him and smiled.

"Oh, Counterpane Fairy!" cried Teddy, "may I go out into that garden?"

"That I don't know," said the fairy, "but if you want to get there the best thing for you to do is find Starlein and Silverling, for they are the only ones who can show you the way into the garden."

"Where are they?" asked Teddy.

"I can't tell you that, either," said the fairy, "but they're somewhere in the halls."

"I'll go find them," cried Teddy, and without waiting any longer he turned and ran down the hall as fast as he could, he was in such haste to find them and get them to show him the way into the garden.

On and on he ran, through one hall after another, through arched doorways, and along echoing corridors, until he felt all bewildered and out of breath. All the time he was running he seemed to hear the music of the singing fountain in his ears, but whenever he stopped to listen everything was still.

He was so out of breath that he had begun to walk, when turning another corner he suddenly saw before him a little girl who he somehow felt sure was Starlein.

The Counterpane Fairy

Her hair was of a silvery yellow and was like a mist about her head; she was very beautiful and was dressed from head to foot in silver that shone and sparkled as she moved. Around her was flying a flock of white doves, and she was playing with them and talking.

As soon as she saw Teddy she cried out, "Oh, it's a little child!" and running down the hall to him, with her doves flying about her, she put her little hands on his cheeks and kissed him. Then she stood back and looked at him with her hands clasped. "You dear little boy!" she said. "Where did you come from?"

"I came through the white square," said Teddy.

"I don't know the white square," said the little girl, "but I'm glad you came. I haven't anyone to play with since Silverling went away."

"Where has Silverling gone?" asked Teddy. "I must find him."

The little girl shook her head. "I don't know," she said. "We quarrelled once and he went away. He must be in some of the halls, but I've been hunting and hunting ever since and I can't find him."

Then Teddy told her how the Counterpane Fairy had said that he must find Silverling and Starlein and that then perhaps he could get into the garden where the singing fountain was.

The little girl shook her head again. "I am Starlein," she said, "but I can't take you into the garden, because I have never found the gate into it since Silverling went away," and she went over and sat down on a marble bench beside the wall, and all the doves settled about her on her knees and shoulders.

"Never mind," cried Teddy, bravely, "you wait here and I'll go and find him. I found you and I'll find him too."

Turning he ran down the hall and through an arched way into another hall, and there, far, far down at the other end, he saw a little boy dressed in silver, who was tossing a silver ball up into the air and catching it again.

When he saw Teddy he slipped the ball into his pocket and ran to meet him, leaping with delight and clapping his hands. "Oh, little boy! little boy!" he cried, "will you come and play with me?"

"Are you Silverling?" cried Teddy, breathlessly.

"Yes," said the little boy.

"Then come! come quick!" cried Teddy. "Starlein is just around the corner, and she is waiting for you to come and show us the way into the garden where the singing fountain is."

He caught Silverling by the hand and without another word they ran as fast as they could up the hall and around the corner, through the silvery archway, and into the other hall. There Teddy stopped short, looking blankly about him. Starlein was gone.

Silverling shook his head sadly. "I know how it would be," he said. "I've been hunting for her ever since we quarrelled, but I can't find her, and I can't find the way into the garden of the singing fountain either."

"What did you quarrel about?" asked Teddy.

"We quarrelled about this," said the little boy, touching a slender golden chain that hung around his neck. "We found it in the garden and we quarrelled about who should wear it, but I'd be so glad to give it to Starlein now if

The Counterpane Fairy

she would only come back again."

"Well, wait!" said Teddy. "She can't be far away and I'll go and find her."

"No, no!" cried Silverling. "You can't find her, and I'll lose you too. Stay here awhile, little boy, and play with me, for I'm very lonely. Look! Let's play with my silver ball," and taking it from his pocket he tossed it to Teddy. Teddy caught it and threw it back to him, and so they played together in the marble hall, tossing the silver ball and shouting with laughter.

At last Silverling missed the ball, and as it rolled on down the hall he ran after it, stooping and trying to catch it, but always just missing. Teddy shouted and clapped his hands, jumping up and down with his bare feet, and then he stood still watching Silverling as he ran far, far down the hall.

As he stood thus, suddenly he heard from just around the corner the cooing of Starlein's doves.

He did not stop a moment, but turning ran around into the next hall, and there sure enough was Starlein with her doves about her.

"Oh, little boy!" she cried, "I was afraid I had lost you."

But Teddy caught her by the hand. "Come quick!" he cried, "I have found Silverling."

They ran together into the hall where a moment ago Silverling had been playing with the silver ball, but it was vacant now; Silverling was gone.

"Well, I never!" said Teddy. Then he turned to Starlein. "Starlein, you shouldn't have gone away when I told you not to."

"I didn't," said Starlein. "I stayed right there."

Teddy thought awhile. "Then it must have been the wrong hall," he said. "But never mind! I'll find him again, and this time I'll surely bring him to you; only wait here no matter how long it is."

"Stop! oh, stop!" cried Starlein. She caught one of her doves in her hands and held it out to Teddy. "Here, little boy," she said; "take this with you, and if you can't find me again, give it to Silverling and tell him he is to keep it for his very own."

"Yes, I will," said Teddy, and he took the dove and put it in the bosom of his tunic, and it nestled there all warm and soft and still.

Then he turned and walked quietly down the hall and into another. He went on and on, but he did not run and jump now, for he was thinking. After a while, when he turned into another hall he once more saw Silverling at play with his silver ball.

"Did you find her?" cried Silverling, eagerly.

"Yes," said Teddy, "I found her, and she sent you a dove for your very own; but, Silverling, I think this. I think the only way for us ever to find her together is for us to set the dove free, and to follow it when it flies back to her."

"But we couldn't follow it," said Silverling. "It would fly so fast that it would be out of sight in a minute."

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"I know," said Teddy, "but we could tie something to it."

"What could we fasten to it?" asked Silverling.

The two little boys stood looking about them and wondering what they could use. Suddenly Teddy clapped his hands so the dove in his tunic started. "We'll fasten the end of your golden chain to it," he cried.

No sooner said than done. In a moment Silverling had taken the chain from his neck and unfastened the ends. It was so long that it had been twisted several times around his neck. Very gently they took the dove and fastened the chain to its leg, and then they let it go.

It fluttered up over their heads and circled about them once or twice, and then it flew on down the hall with the little boys following it.

They turned many a corner and went through many a door, and at last they came into a hall and there—there was Starlein waiting for them with her doves about her.

"Oh, Starlein!" cried Silverling.

"Oh, Silverling!" cried Starlein.

They ran to each other and threw their arms about each other's necks and kissed, while the white doves flew circling about them. Then they told each other how sorry they were that they had quarrelled, and that they would never do it any more, and then they kissed again.

"And you may have the golden chain, Starlein," said Silverling.

"No, no! you must keep it," said Starlein.

"Oh, I know what we'll do!" cried Silverling; "we'll give it to this little boy, because if it hadn't been for him we wouldn't have found each other."

"Oh, yes!" said Starlein.

But Teddy held up his hand—"Hush!" he whispered; "don't you hear it?"

Then they all listened, and sweeter and clearer than ever before they heard the voice of the singing fountain in the beautiful garden.

"It is the fountain!" cried Starlein and Silverling, half fearfully.

They each caught Teddy by the hand, and all ran down the hall together, and the very first corner that they turned they found themselves at the door of the garden.

The wind was blowing the lilies, the fruit on the wonderful trees shone and glistened in the sunlight, and the fountain—ah! the fountain was no longer singing, for the music-box in the nursery had run down.

Teddy looked about him. Instead of the garden there was the flowery India-room. The clock ticked, the fire crackled;—he was back in bed once more, and he heard mamma speaking to Hannah in the hall outside, so he knew she was home again.

The Counterpane Fairy

"And that is the end of that story," said the Fairy of the Counterpane.

CHAPTER FOURTH. THE MAGIC CIRCUS.

TEDDY was still in bed, though the doctor had said that very soon he might have the big chair wheeled up to the window and sit there awhile. Now he was propped up against the pillows playing with the paper circus his mother had brought to him the day before.

His little cousin Harriett had come in yesterday to spend the afternoon with him, and together they had cut out the figures—the clown, the ring-master, the pretty lady on the white horse, the acrobat on his coal-black steed, and all the rest.

This morning he had put some large books under the bedquilt, and smoothed it over them so as to make a flat plane, and was amusing himself setting the circus out, and arranging his soldiers in a long procession as if they were the audience coming to see it.

He seemed so well entertained that his mother said she would go over to the sewing-room for a little while to run up some seams on the machine.

When Teddy was left alone he still went on playing very happily, but as he set out the soldiers two by two, he was really thinking of the Counterpane Fairy and her wonderful stories.

The evening before he had fallen asleep while his mother was reading something to his father (for they both sat in Teddy's room in the evenings now that he was ill), and when he woke they were talking together about him. They did not see that his eyes were open, so they went on with what they were saying. It was his mother who was speaking. "He's such an odd child," she was saying; "just now he is full of this idea of the Counterpane Fairy and her stories, and he talks of her just as though she were real. I don't know where he got the idea. It isn't in any of his book and I thought you must have been telling him about it."

"No," said papa, "I didn't tell him."

"Perhaps it was Harriett," said mamma, and then she saw that he was awake and began to speak of something else.

Teddy wished his mother could see the Counterpane Fairy herself, and then she would know that it was a real fairy and not a make-believe. When he saw the Counterpane Fairy again he was going to ask her if he mightn't take his mother into one of the stories with him.

He was thinking of her so hard that it did not surprise him at all to hear her little thin voice just back of the counterpane hill. "Oh dear, dear! and the worst of it is that I hardly get to the top before I have to come down again."

"Is that you, Counterpane Fairy?" called Teddy.

"Yes it is," said the fairy. "I'll be there in a minute"; and soon she appeared above the top of the hill, and seated herself on it to rest, and catch her breath. "Dear, dear!" she said, "but it's a steep hill."

"Mrs. Fairy," said Teddy, "I want to ask you something. You know my mother?"

"Yes," said the Counterpane Fairy, "I know who she is."

The Counterpane Fairy

"Well," said Teddy, "she's just gone over into the sewing-room, and I want to know whether you won't let me take her into a square sometime."

"My mercy, no!" said the fairy. "Have you forgotten what I told you the first time I came?"

"What was that?"

"I told you I went to see little boys and girls. I don't go to see grown people. They wouldn't believe in me."

"My mother would," said Teddy. "She plays with me and she likes my books and I tell her all about you."

"No, no!" cried the Counterpane Fairy, "I couldn't think of it. I'm very glad to take you into my stories, but if you don't care to go by yourself—" and she picked up her staff and rose as though she were going.

"Oh, I do, I do!" cried Teddy. "Please don't go away."

"Well, I won't," said the fairy, sitting down again, "if you really want me to show you another. Have you chosen a square?"

"No, I haven't yet," said Teddy. He looked the squares over very carefully, and at last he chose the black-and-white one where the circus was standing.

"Very good," said the fairy. "Now I'm going to begin to count." Teddy fixed his eyes on the square and she commenced.

Gradually he began to feel as though the white silk of the square was a pale cloudy sky. Before him stretched a white streak, and in the distance were some things like black squares; he did not know quite what.

"FORTY-NINE!" cried the fairy.

When Teddy looked about him he and the Counterpane Fairy were journeying along a dusty white road together, and the fairy looked just as any little old woman might, except that her eyes were so bright behind her spectacles.

Before them lay a city with black roofs and spires; there was a sound of drums and music in the distance, and a faint noise as though a crowd of people were shouting a great way off.

"What are they doing over there?" asked Teddy, hurrying his steps a little. "Is it a parade?"

"No," said the fairy, "it's not a parade, but it is a grand merrymaking, and it's because of it that I've brought you here. But I'm tired and hungry, for we've come a long way, so let us sit down by the roadside a bit, and while we rest I'll tell you all about the goings on and what we have to do with them."

Teddy was quite willing, so he and the Counterpane Fairy sat down together on the soft grass beside the road, with the mild and misty sky overhead, and the fairy took from her pocket a piece of bread and cheese; she broke it in half and one part she gave to Teddy. It seemed to him that he had never tasted anything so good, for, as the fairy remarked, they were both of them hungry.

After they had finished it all to the very last bit, the fairy brushed the crumbs from her lap, and, sitting there with the soft wind blowing about them and the black roofs of the city in the distance, the Counterpane Fairy told him the story of the King of the Black-Country and the Princess Aureline.

The Counterpane Fairy

"Far off yonder toward the east, where the sky looks so pale and bright," began the fairy, "there lives a king, who is called King Whitebeard, because his beard is as white as snow. He had only one child, a daughter named the Princess Aureline, and she was as beautiful as the day and as good as she was beautiful.

"Because she was so good and beautiful princes used to come from all over the world seeking her hand in marriage, and among them came the King of the Black-Country, the richest and most powerful of them all.

"The Princess Aureline would have nothing to say to him, however, because he was wicked as well as rich, so at last the King of the Black-Country gathered his army together and marching against King Whitebeard he conquered him and carried off the Princess Aureline captive.

"Now there are great rejoicings in the Black King's country, but the Princess Aureline sits and grieves all the time, and nothing the King can do can make her smile. The more the Black King does, the more she grieves, but she is so very beautiful that the King would deny her nothing except to let her go home to her father."

"I should like to see a princess," said Teddy.

"So you shall," said the fairy, "for you are a great magician now, and you have come here to do what no other hero in the world dares to do; you have come to rescue the Princess Aureline and carry her back to her own country."

"Do you mean I am a real magician?" asked Teddy.

"Why, yes," said the fairy. "Don't you see you are dressed in a magician's robe? And there is your magic-chest on the grass beside you. Look!" So saying the fairy drew a mirror of polished steel from under her cloak and held it up before Teddy, and as he looked into it he hardly knew himself; he was dressed in a black hood, and a long black robe strangely woven about the hem with characters in white, and he held a white staff in his hand. Beside him on the grass was a box bound round with iron, and that was his magic-box.

After he had looked in the mirror for a while the fairy hid it away again under her cloak. "Now come," she said, "for it is time we were journeying on."

"But what have I in my box?" asked Teddy, as he picked it up and joined the fairy, who was already hobbling along toward the city.

"Don't you remember?" said the fairy. "It's your circus."

"Oh, yes, I remember now," said Teddy.

After a while he and the fairy reached the city, and everywhere along the street were people laughing and dancing and feasting, and all the houses were hung with white and black flags. The black flags were for the King of the Black-Country, and the white flags were for the Princess Aureline. Everywhere they came the people made way for them and whispered, "Look! look! That is the great magician who had come to show his magic before the Princess Aureline."

At last they reached an open square, and there was the greatest crowd of all. On a raised platform covered with silver cloth, and with steps leading up to it, were two thrones; upon one of the thrones sat a tall, fierce-looking man dressed in black velvet, and with a crown upon his head cut entirely from one great black diamond; upon the other throne sat a beautiful young princess. She was as pale as a lily and as beautiful as the day, and was dressed in shimmering white. Her hands were clasped in her lap and her face was very sad.

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On the steps that led to this platform stood two heralds in black and white with trumpets in their hands, and all about were ranged soldiers two and two. They made Teddy think of the toy soldiers he had been playing with, only they were as big as men, and instead of being gay with red paint they were in black.

As soon as Teddy and the Counterpane Fairy appeared in this square, the two heralds blew a loud blast and come down to meet them. "Make way! make way for the magician!" they cried, and they escorted him and the fairy through the crowd to the foot of the steps.

The King of the Black-Country stared at him, and his eyes were so black and piercing that Teddy felt afraid.

"Are you the great magician?" he asked.

"Yes, I am," answered Teddy, bowing.

"Then let us see some of this magic that we have been hearing about," said the King; "and harkye, Magician, if you can make the Princess smile you shall have whatsoever you wish, even to the half of my treasure."

Teddy bowed again, and then he set the chest on the ground, and drawing from his girdle an iron key he unlocked it and put back the lid. There was the paper circus, just as he and Harriett had cut it out: the acrobat and the lovely lady, the horses, the clown, the ring-master,— not one of them was left out.

With his magic wand, Teddy drew upon the ground a circle, and then, while everybody round craned and stretched their necks to see what he was about, he took out the figures and set them, one by one, in the ring. Then he waved his wand over them and cried "Abraca-dabraca-dee!"

All the people stood on tiptoes, and the King himself leaned forward to see,—but nothing happened.

"Abraca-dabraca-dee!" cried Teddy again.

Still nothing happened; he looked around at the crowd of people, at the grim-looking soldiers, and the King, and his heart sank.

"Abraca-dabraca-dee!" he cried for the third time, striking the ground with his wand.

Then a wonderful thing happened. The circle he had drawn upon the ground began to spread, just as a circle does in the water after one has thrown a stone into it. Now it was a great circus ring, and the paper circus itself had changed to a real circus. The clown walked about, joking, with his hands in his pockets; the ring-master cracked him whip; the paper horses were two magnificent steeds, one as black as night, and one as white as milk, that cantered round and round, while the music sounded, and all the people far away on the outside of the ring clapped and applauded.

"Wonderful! wonderful!" cried the King of the Black-Country.

But now there was something more that was wonderful. As the black horse cantered round, Teddy ran to him and leaped upon his back, light as a feather, and there he rode, his black robe with the white figures flying and fluttering around him.

Then, still riding around, he unfastened his gown and threw it from him, and there he was dressed in white and silver, and his magic wand was changed to a little silver whip.

The Counterpane Fairy

After that he leaped up into the air, and turned a somersault, lighting again upon his horse, while the music played louder and louder.

Teddy rode round and round, now riding backward, now forward, now on one foot, now on his hands with his feet in the air. Then he leaped upright, and putting his fingers to his mouth he gave a shrill whistle. At that the white steed suddenly dashed into the ring and galloped up beside the black one, and now Teddy rode with a foot on each. Faster and faster he rode, crying "Houp-la!" and even the King clapped his hands. Once and twice he rode round the ring and past the platform, but as they came round for the third time, Teddy waved his whip in the air. "Houp-la!" he cried. "Up! up!"

With that his steeds suddenly leaped from the ring and up the steps of the platform to the very top. There Teddy sprang from them and caught the Princess Aureline by the hand. "I have come to rescue you!" he cried, and before the King could move or speak he had set her upon the white horse, he had sprung upon the black, and with a clatter of hoofs they were dashing down the steps and across the square.

Then the King of the Black-Country started to his feet. "Stop them! stop them!" he cried.

The soldiers had been standing as though turned to stone, but at the King's voice they started forward, reaching out to catch the bridles of the horses, but again Teddy raised his magic whip.

"Abraca-dabraca-dee! As you were once you shall be!"

he cried.

At the magic words every soldier's arm fell by his side, their eyes changed to little black dots, their faces grew rounder, their legs stiffened, and there they stood, nothing more nor less than wooden soldiers just like the one—were they his own soldiers? And the Princess! Was she only the doll that Harriett had forgotten the night before and that Teddy had set up against his knees to watch the show? Were the streets only black and white silk?

There he was, back in his own room with the little wooden soldiers and the paper circus. There was the square of silk with the book under it, and the Counterpane Fairy sitting on his knees.

"Oh! but, Counterpane Fairy," cried Teddy, "what became of us? Did we get away? Oh, I didn't want to come out of the story just yet!"

"Why, of course you escaped," said the fairy. "How could the King stop you after you had changed his soldiers into wood?"

"And what became of you?" asked Teddy.

"Oh, I took the clown's cap," said the fairy, "for it was the wishing-cap, and fast as you and the Princess rode back to the country of King Whitebeard I was there before you."

Teddy thought for a while and then he heaved a deep sigh. "I wish I really had a circus horse," he said, "and could ride round and have all the people watching and shouting. But what did the Princess say when she found I had rescued her?"

"Hark!" said the fairy, "isn't that your mother coming along the hall? I must be going. Oh, my poor bones! What a hill it is to go down! Oh dear, dear, dear!"

CHAPTER FIFTH. AT THE EDGE OF THE POLAR SEA.

"THE crocuses are up on the lawn," said Teddy's mother, who was standing at the window and looking out. "And just hear that blackbird! I always feel as though spring were really here when I hear the blackbirds sing."

Teddy was still in bed. It seemed to him sometimes that he had spent his whole life lying there in the India-room, under the silk counterpane, and that it was some other Teddy who used to go to school and shout and play with the boys in the street.

"I wish I could go out—of—doors the way I used to," he said.

"So do I," said mamma. "But never mind, darling. The doctor says it won't be so very long now before you can be out again, and this afternoon we'll play some nice game or other that you can play in bed. Now what would you like it to be?" But before Teddy could answer she added, "Oh dear! There comes Aunt Mariah."

Aunt Mariah lived down at the other end of the village, and she generally came every fortnight to spend an afternoon with Teddy's mother. She always brought her knitting in a bag, and a white net cap that she put on before the glass as soon as she had taken her bonnet off.

Teddy liked to have her come, her needles flew so fast, and she used to recite to him,—

"A was an archer, and shot at a frog; B was a butcher, and had a great dog."

Then when he was tired of sitting with her and mamma, he could run out—of—doors and play.

But he found it was different to-day from what it had been before. He was still weak from his illness, and after she had told him all the verses that she knew, he grew weary of hearing her talk of Cousin George's wife, and Mrs. Appleby's rheumatism.

His mother saw that he was growing restless and that his cheeks were flushed, so she asked Aunt Mariah to come over to her room to look at some calico she had been buying.

When they had gone Teddy lay for a time enjoying the silence of the room, but after a while it began to seem too still and the clock ticked with a strange loud sound. He wished Aunt Mariah would go away and let mamma come back again. It was so lonely, and he was tired of his books.

He was lying on his back, and presently he drew up his knees, and then over the tops of them he could only see the upper half of the window, and the tips of the pine-trees against the still blue sky outside.

"Oh dear, dear, dear!" said the Counterpane Fairy's voice just behind the hill. "Steeper than ever to-day. Will I ever get to the top?" A minute after he saw her little figure standing on the hill, dark against the sky, and the staff in her hand like a thin black line.

"Oh, dear Counterpane Fairy!" cried Teddy, "have you come to show me another story?"

"Are you sure you want to see one?" asked the Counterpane Fairy.

"Oh, yes, yes, I do!" cried Teddy. "Your stories don't make me feel tired the way Aunt Mariah's do."

The fairy shook her head. "I thought her stories were very pleasant," she said.

The Counterpane Fairy

"So they are," said Teddy, "but I like her stories best when I'm all well, and I like your stories best when I'm sick. Besides I only hear her stories and I see yours."

The fairy smiled. "Well, then, which square will you choose this time?" she said.

"I think I would like that one," said Teddy, pointing to a square of watered ribbon that shaded from white to a sea-green.

"That's rather a long story," said the fairy, doubtfully.

"Oh, please show it!" begged Teddy.

"Well," said the Fairy, "fix your eyes on it while I count."

Then she began and he heard her voice going on and on. "FORTY-NINE!" she cried.

* * * * *

Teddy was floating on a block of ice across the wide, green Polar sea. The Counterpane Fairy was with him, and all around were great fields of ice and floating white bergs. The air was very still and cold, but Teddy liked it all the better for that, for now he was an ice-fairy. He was dressed from head to foot in a suit that shone and sparkled like woven frost, and in his belt was a knife as shining as an icicle. Something kept bobbing and tickling his forehead, and when he caught hold of it he found it was the end of the long cap he wore.

As they drifted along, sometimes they saw a walrus with long tusks lying on the ice, or a soft-eyed seal. Once some strange little beings that looked like dwarfs, with goggle eyes and straggling black hair, caught hold of the block of ice, and lifting themselves out of the water made faces at Teddy, but the moment they saw the Counterpane Fairy their looked changed to one of fear, and with a queer gurgling cry they dropped from the ice and were gone.

"What were those things?" asked Teddy.

"They were ice-mermen," said the Counterpane Fairy. "Naughty, mischievous things they are. I'd like to pack them all off to the North Pole if I could."

"Oh, look! look!" cried Teddy. "Just look at those little bears playing over there."

They had drifted in quite near to the shore, and in among the blocks of ice three white bear cubs were playing together like fat little boys. They were climbing to the top of an ice-hillock and then sliding down again.

As soon as they saw Teddy and the Counterpane Fairy they began to call: "Oh, Father Bear! Father Bear! Just come look at these funny things floating in to shore on a block of ice."

In a moment from behind the ice-hill came a great white father bear galloping up as fast as he could to see what the matter was. He came over toward Teddy growling, "Gur-r-r! gur-r-r-r! Who are you, coming and frightening my little bears this way?" But as soon as he saw the Counterpane Fairy he grew quite humble. "Oh, excuse me," he said. "I didn't know it was a friend of yours."

"Yes, it is," said the fairy, "and I have brought him here to stay awhile. Will you take good care of him?"

The Counterpane Fairy

"Yes, I will," said Father Bear. "He shall sleep in the cave with us and have part of our meat if he will, and I will be as careful of him as though he were one of my own cubs."

"Very well," said the fairy; "mind you do." Then turning to Teddy she bade him step on shore.

"But aren't you coming too?" asked Teddy.

"No," said the Counterpane Fairy, "I can't come, but Father Bear will take good care of you." So Teddy stepped onto the shore, and the fairy pushed the block of ice out into the water, and waving her hand to him she drifted away across the open sea.

The Father Bear stood watching her until she was out of sight, and then he turned to Teddy. "Now, you Fairy," he said, "you may climb up onto my back, and I'll carry you to my wife; she'll take good care of you for as long as the Counterpane Fairy chooses to leave you here."

The three little bears cubs had disappeared, but as soon as the Father Bear carried Teddy around the hill of ice he saw what had become of them. They were sitting with the Mother Bear at the door of a cave. One of them was sucking its paws, and the other two were talking as fast as they could. The Mother Bear looked worried and anxious.

"What's all this Dumpy and Sprawley are telling me?" she said. "And what's that you have on your back?"

"It's an ice-fairy," growled old Father Bear, "and the Counterpane Fairy wants us to take care of it for a while. You don't mind, my dear, do you?"

"Oh dear, dear!" said the Mother Bear, "I suppose not, but what shall we give it to eat, and how shall we keep it?"

"Oh, it will do just the other cubs do, I suppose," said the Father Bear. Then turning to Teddy he said, "You eat meat, don't you?"

"Yes, sir," answered Teddy, timidly.

"Then that's all right," said the Father Bear. "Here, you children, take this fairy off and let him play with you."

Two of the little bears, Fatty (who was the one who had been sucking his paws) and Dumpy, were delighted to have a new playmate, and they told him he might come over and slide down their hill, but the third one, Sprawley, scowled and grumbled. "Another one to be eating up our meat," he said. "Just as if there weren't enough of us without."

Still he went over with them to the icehill and they all began sliding down.

After a while Sprawley said: "I know a great deal nicer hill than this one. It's just a little farther on; come on and I'll show it to you."

"Oh," said Fatty, "but suppose we should see some ice-mermen?"

"Pooh!" said Sprawley, "I ain't afraid. It's a great deal nicer than this. Come on."

So the three little bears and Teddy trotted on to another hill, and it really was much longer and steeper than the other; it went down almost to the edge of the sea.

The Counterpane Fairy

They had slidden down it only a few times when Dumpy cried out: "Oh! look! look! There are some ice-mermen and they are making faces at me."

There they were, sure enough, looking over the edge of the ice,—ugly little gray things with mouths like fishes, and they were making faces, and presently they began to sing,—

"Bear cubs! Bear cubs! Look at their toes; Look at their ears and their hair and their nose. The great big walrus will surely come To eat up the bear cubs and give us some."

Dumpy growled at them, though he was frightened, but Fatty began to cry.

Just then one of the mermen sent a piece of ice sliding across at them, and it hit Fatty's paws and upset her. She was so fat that she rolled over and over before she could get up. Dumpy ran to her, and as soon as she was on her feet again they began galloping toward home as fast as they could, followed by Sprawley and Teddy.

As they ran along Teddy saw that Sprawley was shaking all over, and he thought it was because he was afraid, until he caught up to him; then he saw that he was laughing. "What are you laughing at?" he asked, but Sprawley only showed his teeth and growled in answer.

When they reached the cave and told the Mother Bear about the mermen she scolded them well for going so near the edge of the water, and said it was time for them to go to bed. Father Bear was going on a hunt the next day, and he was going to let the cubs go part of the way with him, so they must have a good rest.

The Mother Bear gave them each their share of seal meat, and then she went into the cave.

"Oh, Fatty," said Sprawley, "just look behind you and see if you don't see a merman."

Fatty turned her head, but there was nothing there. When she looked back again she burst into a loud whine. "Ou-u-u! ou-u-u-u!" she cried, "Sprawley stole my nicest piece of meat, so he did. Ou-u-u!"

Out shuffled Mother Bear in a hurry. "You naughty cub," she cried, aiming a blow at Sprawley's ear. But quick as a wink Sprawley slipped behind Dumpy, and it was upon Dumpy that the blow fell.

And now Dumpy joined in with his sister. "Ou-u-u!" he cried.

"There, there!" cried the poor Mother Bear, "don't you cry any more and I'll give you each an extra piece of meat."

So they stopped crying and ate their suppers contentedly, and after that they all went to bed, and the little cubs had hardly lain down before they were fast asleep.

Teddy did not go to sleep, however. He lay looking at the ice-roof of the cave and thinking how strange it was to be there. Presently he heard the Mother Bear say very softly, "Husband, husband, are you awake?"

"Yes, I am," said the Father Bear. "What do you want?"

The Mother Bear sighed. "I don't know how it is, husband," she said, "but I never had a cub like Sprawley before. He is so naughty and mischievous that he keeps his little brother and sister whining all the time."

"You ought to box him," said the Father Bear.

The Counterpane Fairy

"That's all very well," said the Mother Bear, "but when I try to box him he slips behind the others and pushes them forward, and he is so quick that twice I have boxed Dumpy instead of him by mistake."

The Father Bear grunted and they were silent for a while, but presently the Mother Bear began again, more softly than ever. "Do you know, husband, sometimes I wonder whether Sprawley can really be my cub. If I could only count them I might find out. If there were only one and one I could count them, but there are more than one and one."

"Well," said Father Bear, "I should think that would be easy. Let's see. There's Dumpy, and he's one, and Fatty, and she's one, and Sprawley, and he's one. And now how many does that make?"

"Oh dear!" said the Mother Bear, "Don't ask me. My head's all of a whirl already."

"Then you'd better go to sleep, my dear," said her husband. "The next thing you know you'll be having a headache to-morrow. You think too much."

"Yes," said the Mother Bear, sighing, "That's so; I suppose I do think too much, but then I can't help it. I always was thinking ever since I was a cub. It's the way I'm made. Good-night."

"Good-night," said the Father Bear, and then they, too, went to sleep.

Teddy seemed to be the only one left awake. Dumpy kept crowding up against him and snoring with his nose close to Teddy's ear. Teddy pushed him once or twice, but it didn't seem to make any difference. Once he poked him so hard that the little bear gave a snort and stopped snoring for a while, but soon he began again.

But after all Teddy found he was not the only one in the cave who was not asleep. Sprawley, who was lying on the other side of Fatty, had begun to stir and sit up; he looked about at the sleeping bears, and then very quietly began to edge himself toward the mouth of the cave.

Once the Mother Bear gave a low growl in her sleep and Sprawley stopped still to listen, but she didn't waken.

Teddy wondered what Sprawley was going to do, and so, as soon as the cub had disappeared through the mouth of the cave, he too crawled over to the opening.

When he looked out he saw Sprawley shuffling over the fields of ice in the distance, and already quite far away, so, led by his curiosity, Teddy, too, crept out of the cave and set off running after the bear cub.

He ran on and on until he was quite close to Sprawley, and then he saw the cub pause at the edge of a strip of open water, and turn to look behind him to make sure that he was not followed. He did not see Teddy, for the fairy had hidden quickly behind a block of ice.

Sprawley turned toward the water again and gave a long, quavering cry that sounded like a call. He listened, but everything was silent except for the rumbling and cracking of the ice in the distance. Again he called, and this time there was an answering cry, and another, and another. Sprawley stood up and waved his paws, and then Teddy saw that the open water was dotted with heads of ice-mermen; there must have been ten or twelve of them at least.

They swam over to where Sprawley stood, and climbing out on the ice they seemed to be welcoming him, hopping and sliding about, and pulling at his hair and claws. Now that Teddy saw them quite close they were uglier than ever, with goggle eyes, and rough, fishy-looking skins.

The Counterpane Fairy

They all sat on the edge of the ice, and now and then one of them would dive off, to reappear again, all wet and glistening, and then it would climb up and sit on the ice again in a row with the others. They all talked together, and their voices were so queer and husky that Teddy could not understand what they were saying at first. At last he made out that they were asking Sprawley about him,—where he had come from, and how.

"Well, I'll tell you how he came," said Sprawley, and all the mermen stopped to listen. Sprawley, too, was silent for a moment, and then he said in a low, impressive voice, "The Counterpane Fairy brought him."

There was a long, quavering cry from the mermen, and several of them dived off into the water and did not reappear again for some minutes; when they did, their faces were all wrinkled up with anxiety.

They climbed up onto the edge of the ice and sat there blinking at the sky for a while in silence; then one of them said in a trembling voice, "Well, we haven't been doing anything but just frightening the bear cubs a little."

"How about knocking Fatty down with a piece of ice?" asked Sprawley, derisively.

"Scritchy did that," cried all the mermen but one. "We didn't do it. Scritchy did that."

The merman who hadn't spoken, and who was Scritchy, still did not say a word. He looked at the others with his goggle eyes and then he tumbled off into the water and swam away as fast as he could and did not come back any more.

All the other mermen looked after him in silence until he had disappeared; then one of them said in an awe-struck voice, "It's bad for you, Sprawley, ain't it? Just think what you've been doing."

"Pooh," said Sprawley, pretending he was not frightened, "what do I care? I can fix it all right."

"How?" asked all the mermen together.

"Well, listen, and I'll tell you," said Sprawley. "To-morrow Father and Mother Bear are going hunting, and all of us little cubs are to go with them. I suppose this strange fairy cub will go with us, and when we stop to rest I'll get him away from the others and near the edge of the water. You must come under the ice and break off the piece he is standing on, and float him far, far away toward the South until he melts."

"Yes, yes! we'll do it," cried all the mermen jumping about and shouting. Then they turned to Sprawley. "Come," they cried, "let's have a game in the water before you go back."

"That I will," said Sprawley, and with that what should he do but strip off his bear-skin just as though it were a coat, and there he was, nothing more nor less than a merman who had been dressed up in an old skin, pretending to be a bear cub.

Sprawley and all the other mermen dived off into the water and began splashing and shrieking and pulling at each other and getting farther and farther away.

"All the same, I don't think you'll float me off," said Teddy to himself.

Very quietly he crept to where the bear-skin lay on the ice, and taking out his knife he cut a long slit up the back of it. Then not waiting for the mermen to come back he hurried home again over the ice to the bears' cave, and crawling in he laid himself down again between the sleeping cubs.

The Counterpane Fairy

The little bears were beginning to stir themselves and the Mother Bear was yawning and stretching when Sprawley came sneaking into the cave again.

"Why! why!" said the Mother Bear, "where have you been?"

"I ain't been anywhere," said Sprawley. "I just thought I heard a sea-lion roaring and I went out to see."

"Well, there's no use your going to sleep again," said the Father Bear, "for we have to go a long ways to-day, and it's time we were getting ready to start now."

With that he shuffled out of the cave, followed by the Mother Bear, and stood looking about him. Presently the cubs came out, too, still blinking with sleep.

"Oh, Mother!" cried Dumpy, "just look at Sprawley's back!"

"Why, what's the matter with it?" asked the Mother Bear.

"There ain't anything the matter with it," growled Sprawley, twisting his head round and trying to see.

"Yes, there is too!" cried Fatty. "Oh my! Sprawley's splitting hisself all down the back."

"Why! why!" cried the Father Bear, "what's this?" He shuffled over and looked at Sprawley's back, and then without a word he began to tear and pull at the bear-skin. In another minute he had it off, and there stood the merman shivering and blinking at them with his mouth open like a gasping fish.

"Oh dear! oh dear!" cried the Mother Bear, turning whiter than ever. "He's not my cub after all," and she sat down and began to whine and cry. But Father Bear gave a growl, and rising on his hind legs he fetched the merman a cuff that sent him tumbling head over heels across the ice.

Father Bear was after him, but before he could reach him the merman was up and running for the open strip of water in the distance. Father Bear chased him the whole way; sometimes he caught him and gave him a cuff that sent him flying, but at last the merman reached the water and dived into it. He must have had a sore head for days afterward, however.

When the Father Bear came back again, he was panting and growling. "There," said he, "I guess that's the last time any of the mermen will try to play their tricks on us. Come, come," he went on, "it's time we were off for our hunting."

But the Mother Bear only shook her head. She had been doing nothing since she saw that Sprawley was an ice-merman but sit and rock herself backward and forward and whine. "I couldn't go, my dear; I couldn't indeed," she said. "I'm all of a tremble now to think how that dreadful merman has been playing with Fatty and Dumpy day after day and I never knew it."

"Then I'll go by myself," said Father Bear, gruffly, "and leave the children home with you. But you can go, Fairy," he said to Teddy. "I'll carry you on my back if you like, and maybe you'll see me catch a young walrus. I suppose it was you who split him down the back, as the Counterpane Fairy brought you."

"Yes, sir, it was," said Teddy, timidly; "but I'm afraid I can't go with you; I'm afraid I'm going back,"—for the bears, the fields of ice, the far-off green water, were all wavering and growing misty before his sight. Faintly he heard the voices of the bear cubs: "Owie! owie! don't go away"; for they had grown fond of him the day before.

The Counterpane Fairy

Then their voices died away. He was back in the old familiar room with the Counterpane Fairy perched upon his knees, and a bunch of snowdrops in the vase beside the bed. The door opened and his mother stood holding the knob in her hand and speaking to Hannah outside, and in that moment the Counterpane Fairy was gone.

CHAPTER SIXTH. THE RUBY RING.

THE next day, in spite of the doctor's promises, Teddy was not allowed to sit up.

It was a raw, blustering day, and every feeling of spring seemed gone from the air; the wind rattled at the windows, and Hannah built up the fire until it roared.

Teddy did not feel much disappointed at not being allowed to sit up, for Harriett came over with her paint-box, and they began coloring the pictures in some old magazines that mamma gave them; the bed was littered with the pages.

After a while mamma left them and went down into the kitchen to bake a cake.

"I wish I had brought my best apron over," said Harriett, "for then I could have stayed for dinner if you wanted me to."

"Why can't you stay anyhow?" asked Teddy.

"Oh, I can't," said Harriett. "I must go to dancing-class right after dinner, and I have to wear my apron with the embroidered ruffles."

"Harriett, why don't you go home and get it, and then perhaps you could have dinner up here with me; wouldn't you like that?"

"Yes, but maybe Aunt Alice doesn't want me to stay."

"Yes, she does," said Teddy. "I know she does, because she said she was so glad to have you come and amuse me."

"Well, I'll go home and ask my mother. I don't know whether she'll let me."

"You won't stay long, will you?"

"No, I won't," promised Harriett. Then she put on her jacket and hat and ran down-stairs.

Teddy went on with his painting by himself for a while, but it seemed to him Harriett was gone a long time. He called his mother once, and she came to the foot of the stairs and told him she couldn't come up just yet.

Then Teddy began thinking of the Counterpane Fairy, and the stories she had shown him. He wondered if she wouldn't come to see him to-day. She always came when he was lonely, and he was quite sure he was getting lonely now. Yes, he knew he was.

"Well," said a little voice just back of the counterpane hill, "it's not quite so steep to-day, and that's a comfort." There was the little fairy just appearing above the tops of his knees,—brown hood, brown cloak, brown staff, and all. She sat down with her staff in her hand and nodded to him, smiling. "Good-morning," she said.

The Counterpane Fairy

"Good-morning," said Teddy. "Mrs. Fairy, I was wondering whether you wouldn't like it if I kept my knees down, and then there wouldn't be any hill."

"No," said the fairy, "I like to be up high so that I can look about me, only it's hard climbing sometimes. Now, how about a story? Would you like to see one to-day?"

"Oh, yes!" cried Teddy. "Indeed, I would."

"Then which square will you choose? Make haste, for I haven't much time."

"I think I'll take that red one," said Teddy.

"Very good," said the fairy, and then she began to count.

As she counted, the red square spread and glowed until it seemed to Teddy that he was wrapped in a mist of ruddy light. Through it he heard the voice of the Counterpane Fairy counting on and on, and as she counted he heard, with her voice, another sound,—at first very faintly, then more and more clearly: clink-clank! clink-clank! clink-clank! It reminded him a little of the ticking of the clock on the mantle, only it was more metallic.

"FORTY-NINE!" cried the Counterpane Fairy, clapping her hands.

* * * * *

And now the sound rang loud and clear in Teddy's ears; it was the beating of hammers upon anvils.

When Teddy looked about him he was standing on a road that ran along the side of a mountain. All along this road were openings that looked like the mouths of caverns, and from these openings poured the ceaseless sound of beating, and a ruddy glow that reddened all the air and sky.

It all seemed very familiar to Teddy, and he had a feeling that he had seen it before.

Stepping to the nearest cavern he looked in, and there he saw the whole inside of the mountain was hollowed out into forges that opened into each other by means of rocky arches. In every forge were little dwarfs dressed in leather and hammering at pieces of red-hot iron that lay on the anvils.

As Teddy stood looking in he was so tall that his head almost touched the top of the doorway. He was dressed in a long red cloak, and under that he wore a robe fastened about the waist with a girdle of rubies that shone and sparkled in the light; upon his hand was a ruby ring. The stone of the ring was turned inward toward the palm, but it was so bright that the light shone through his fingers, and he drew his cloak over his hand that the dwarfs might not see it, for it was not yet time for them to know that he was King Fireheart.

After a while the iron that the little men were beating had to be put in the fire again to heat, and then they turned and looked at Teddy.

"Good-day," said he.

"Good-day," answered the dwarfs, staring hard at him.

"What are you making there?" asked Teddy.

"A link," answered the dwarfs.

The Counterpane Fairy

"A link!" said Teddy. "What for?"

"For a chain," answered the dwarfs, and then the iron was hot and they took it out again and laid it on the anvil. Clink-clank! clink-clank! clink-clank! went their hammers.

Teddy watched them at their work for a while, and then he went on to the next forge, and there it was the same thing—more little dwarfs hammering away at their anvils as if their lives depended on it.

"Good-day," said Teddy, as soon as they paused to heat the iron.

"Good-day," said the dwarfs.

"What are you making there?" asked Teddy.

"A link," answered the dwarfs.

"What for?" said Teddy.

"For a chain," answered the dwarfs, and then they set to work again.

Teddy went on and on through the forges, and in every one of them were little dwarfs hammering away on links.

When he came to the last forge of all, they were just finishing a link, and as they threw it into a tank of water a cloud of steam rose, almost hiding them from view. They were so busy that they paid no attention to Teddy when he spoke. "Make haste! Make haste!" they cried to each other. "It is growing late and she will soon be here."

In a great hurry the dwarfs caught up the link from the water and laid it on the anvil again, and then they all stood back from it. Every noise has ceased through all the forges, and the dwarfs were waiting in breathless stillness as though for something to happen.

Suddenly, in the silence, Teddy heard a faint tinkling as though of icicles struck lightly together, and at the same moment he saw that a woman all in white had entered the forge down at the other end. Her dress shone with all different colors, just as icicles do when they hang in the sunlight, and as the light of the fire caught it here and there, it almost looked as though it were on fire. Her hair was very black, and she wore a crown.

She stepped up to the anvil that was in the forge and laid her hand upon it. She was too far away for Teddy to see what she did, but there was a clink as of something breaking, and a low wail arose from the dwarfs that stood near by. Then she passed on to the next anvil, and to the next, and to the next, and at each one she paused and touched the link that lay upon it, and always at that there was a clink, and a wail arose from the dwarfs.

At last she came to the very forge where Teddy was, but he had drawn back behind the stone archway and she did not see him. Gliding to the anvil, she stretched out her white finger and laid it upon the link that the dwarfs had made, and instantly, as soon as she touched it, the iron flew into pieces with a clink.

The dwarfs burst into a low wail, but the woman with the crown struck her hands together and stamped her foot in a rage. "Fools! fools!" she cried. "Not yet one link that will not fly into pieces at a touch. But you shall make the chain, though it should take your very hearts to do it."

Then, still scowling until her beautiful face was like a thunder-cloud, and without a single glance at the trembling dwarfs, she glided from the forge and was gone.

The Counterpane Fairy

The dwarf who held the pincers drew his arm across his forehead to wipe off the sweat. "Come," said he, "let us set to work, for now it's all to be done over again."

"But tell me first," said Teddy, "what does this all mean, and who is this woman with a crown who comes and breaks your links with a touch as soon as you have finished them?"

"Ah! that is a long, sad story," said the dwarf who held the pincers.

"Yes, it is a long, sad story," echoed the others. "You tell him, Leatherkin," they added.

"Well," said Leatherkin, sitting down on a rock that lay close by, "it's this way. This mountain where we live is only one of many that are called the Fire Mountains, because their rocks are so red, and because they are all full of forges. Here we dwarfs used to live happily enough, for our good King Fireheart was so rich and strong that no one dared to make war on us, and we were left in peace to do what we would.

"King Fireheart, however, was not contented, for he wanted to see the world, so one day he set out on a journey, no one knew whither, leaving the country in the charge of his foster-brother.

"While he was away the Ice-Queen came with all her white spearmen and attacked the country and conquered it. Then she set us all to work, for she knew that in all the world there were no such smiths as the dwarfs of the Fire King's country, and not until we have forged her the magic chain that binds all but one's self will she set us free to go about our own affairs again.

"That is why we are all working to forge the links, and if we could but make one that would stand so much as a touch of her finger we would have hopes of making it, but so far not one has been made but what flies into pieces at her lightest touch.

"But there," he added; "we must set to work, for the days are all too short for what we have to do."

"Wait a bit," said Teddy, "I should like to have a stroke at that chain myself. Will you lend me a hammer and let me try?"

"No, no," cried the dwarfs, shaking their heads. "We have no time to waste in lending out hammers and anvil."

"Look!" said Teddy, taking off his ruby girdle and holding it out to them. "You shall have this if you will let me try."

The dwarfs' eyes glittered, and they took the girdle and all crowded around to look and handle it, for they had never seen such fine rubies before, not even down in the middle of the earth; and at last they told Teddy that they would lend him their hammers awhile in exchange for the ruby girdle. "Though what can you do with them?" they said, "for look at your hands; they are white and smooth, and not hairy and strong like ours."

"Never you mind," said Teddy, "for sometimes white, smooth hands can do the work that others can't," and he took one of their hammers in his hand as he spoke.

"What will you have to work with?" they asked.

"Oh, anything at all," said Teddy, "if it is no more than an old nail, so that it is something to begin with."

The dwarfs laughed, and picking up an old nail that was on the floor they laid it upon the anvil.

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Then Teddy raised the hammer, and the ruby of the ring he wore throbbled and burned until his hand was hot, and his arm was so strong that the hammer was like a feather in his grasp.

As he beat and turned the nail he sang, and it seemed to him that the fire sang with him, clear and thin, and sounding like the voice of the Counterpane Fairy,—

"Hammer and turn! The fire must burn, The coals must glow, The bellows blow. Beat, good hammer, loud and fast; So the chain will be made at last.

"Clankety—clink! We forge the link. My hammer bold, This chain must hold. The snow shall melt, the ice fly fast, For the magic chain is wrought at last."

With these words Teddy threw down the hammer and lifted the chain he had made, and it was as thin as a hair, as light as a breath, and yet so strong that no power on earth could break it.

The dwarfs sprang forward with a shout and caught the chain in their crooked fingers. "Wonderful! wonderful!" they cried. "It is indeed the magic chain that we have been trying to make for all these years. Who are you, wonderful stranger, for there is no smith among all the dwarfs who can do what you have done?"

Then without a word Teddy raised his hand, and held it up with the palm turned toward them so that they saw the ruby in his ring, and when they saw it they shouted again in their wonder and joy. "It is King Fireheart himself come back to rule the country!"

Then all the dwarfs, even from the farthest forges, came running up and gathered about the archway of the forge where Teddy stood, and when they saw that it was indeed King Fireheart they shouted and leaped and threw their caps up into the air.

When they had grown quieter Teddy bade them take him to the Ice—Queen, so all the dwarfs led him out, and up the mountain, on and on, until they came to a great castle built of ice, but ruddy with the cold light of the aurora borealis that shone behind it.

They went into the hall, past the rows of white spearsmen, and when the spearsmen would have stopped them the dwarfs told them that they were carrying the magic chain that binds all but one's self to the Queen, and so they let the little men pass on, but all the while Teddy kept the ruby ring hidden under his cloak.

At last they came to the great chamber, where the Queen sat on a magnificent throne of ice, and when she saw the crowd she started to her feet. "Have you brought it? Have you brought it?" she cried eagerly. "Have you brought me the magic chain?"

"Yes," shouted the dwarfs all together, "we have brought it."

Then they stood still, and Teddy went on up the steps along.

"Where is it?" asked the Queen, and she stretched out her hands.

"It is here," said Teddy. Very slowly he drew it out from under his cloak, and then suddenly he threw it over her. "And now take it!" he cried.

It was in vain that the Queen struggled and cried; the more she strove, the closer the chain drew about her, for it was a magic chain. At last she stood still, panting. "Who are you?" she asked.

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Then Teddy raised his hand, holding it open so that she could see the ruby. "I am King Fireheart," he cried; "and now take your own real shape, wicked enchantress that you are."

At these words the black-browed Queen gave a cry that changed, even as she uttered it, to a croak, and a moment after she was nothing but a great black raven that spread its wings, and flew away over the heads of the dwarfs, out of the window and on out of sight.

Then Teddy turned and walked out of the great ice-chamber and down the hall, followed in silence by the dwarfs. As he went, the spearsmen started forward to lay hands upon him, but as soon as they saw the ruby ring they stood, every man stiffened just as he was, some leaning forward with outstretched arm, some with their spears lifted, some with their mouths open, but all of them turned to ice.

When Teddy and the dwarfs had reached the mountain road again they turned and looked back toward the castle.

A warm south wind was blowing, and the aurora borealis had faded away. Already the castle was beginning to melt; the spires and turrets were softening and dripping down. There was a warm red light over everything, like the light of the rising sun.

"And now," cried the dwarfs, "will your Majesty come up to your own royal castle?"

"Yes," answered Teddy, "I will come."

* * * * *

"Quick! quick!" cried the Counterpane Fairy. "It's time to come back."

Teddy was at home once more. There was the flowered furniture, and the fire burning red upon the hearth. "Tick-tock! tick-tock! tick-tock!" said the clock.

"I must go," cried the fairy, hastily, "for I heard your little cousin opening and shutting the side door."

"Oh, wait!" cried Teddy. "Won't you wait and let her see you too?" But the fairy was already disappearing behind the counterpane hill. All he could see was the top of her pointed hood. Then that too disappeared. The door was thrown open and Harriett came running in bringing a breath of fresh out-of-doors air with her. Her cheeks were red, and she looked very pretty in her embroidered apron and pink ribbons.

CHAPTER SEVENTH. THE RAINBOW CHILDREN.

IT was Sunday afternoon, and everything was very still.

Teddy had been allowed to sit up that morning for the first time since he had been ill. He had put on the little blue dressing-gown that mamma had made for him, and she was so funny about getting him into it, and wheeling the chair over to the window, that Teddy had laughed and laughed.

After that he sat at the window looking out and watching the chickens in the yard below, and the people going along the street.

Teddy's mamma was going to church, but his father stayed home with the little boy, and told him stories, and drew pictures with a blue pencil on a writing-pad; pictures of "David Killing Goliath," and of "Daniel in the Lions' Den."

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Then he drew a picture of the house in the real country where he and mamma and Teddy were going to live some time—a house with a barn, and horses, and cows, and pigs, and a pony that Teddy could ride when he came in to town to school.

The morning flew by so quickly that the little boy was surprised when mamma came back from church, and said it was almost time for luncheon.

She looked at the pictures that papa had drawn, and smiled when Teddy told her about them; but very soon she began to talk seriously with papa. She told him she had stopped in at Mrs. McFinney's on her way home, and that she had been wondering whether something couldn't be done for little Ellen McFinney's lameness. She felt so sorry for her.

Papa said the child ought to be sent to a hospital, and he thought that if that were done she could be cured. Mamma said that she thought so too; but that someone had been talking to little Ellen, and frightened her so that she cried whenever the hospital was talked of, and her mother would not send her unless she felt willing to go.

Then mamma spoke of how lonely it must be for the little girl there in the house by herself all the day, while her mother was out at work, with so little to amuse her.

"Mamma," said Teddy, "why can't little Ellen have some of my books to amuse her—some I had when I was sick? Because, you know, I'm well now, and don't need them any more."

"That's a very good idea," said mamma, looking pleased. "You may choose the ones you will give her, and perhaps papa will leave them with her when he goes out for a walk this afternoon."

"Well," cried Teddy, eagerly, "I think I'll give her the Ali Baba book and Robinson Crusoe, and I think, maybe, I'll give her Little Golden Locks too."

Mamma brought the books, and they tied them up in a neat package, and just as they finished there was a little rattle of china outside the door, and in came Hannah with Teddy's luncheon, and a great yellow orange that Aunt Pauline had sent him.

After luncheon mamma made Teddy lie down for a while to rest. The Venetian shutters were drawn, so that all the room was dimly green, and then mamma and papa went out and left him alone.

Teddy lay there for what seemed to him a long time. The house was very still, and the afternoon sun shone in through the slats of the shutters in golden chinks and lines.

Teddy wondered where mamma was, and why she didn't come back, for it seemed to him that he had been alone almost all the afternoon, though really it had not been for long.

Presently he heard someone humming cheerfully back of the counterpane hill, and as soon as he heard it he felt sure that the Counterpane Fairy must be coming.

Sure enough in a few minutes she appeared at the top and stood looking down at him with a pleasant smile. "Oh, Mrs. Fairy, I knew that was you!" cried Teddy.

"Did you?" said the fairy, sitting down on top of his knees. "And then did you think, 'Now I shall see another story'?"

"Oh, yes!" cried Teddy, eagerly. "I hoped you would show me one."

The Counterpane Fairy

"Then I suppose I'll have to," said the fairy. "And what square shall it be this time?"

"There's one close by you," said Teddy, "and it's most every color, like a rainbow. Will you show me that story?"

"Yes," said the fairy, "I'll show you that. Now fix your eyes on it." Then she began to count.

"FORTY-NINE!" she cried.

* * * * *

Teddy and little Ellen McFinney were running along, hand in hand, over a rainbow that stretched across the shining sky like a bridge. The clouds above them shone like opals, and far, far below was the green world, with shining rivers, and houses that looked no larger than walnuts.

"Can't we run fast?" said Teddy. "I think we go as fast as an express train; don't you, Ellen?"

"I know a faster way to go than this," said the little girl.

"Do you?"

"Yes, I do. Let go of my hand, and I'll show you." She drew her hand away from Teddy, and very slowly she leaned back against the air as though it were a pillow, then she gave herself a little push with her feet, and away she floated so lightly and easily that Teddy could hardly keep up with her.

"Oh, Ellen!" cried Teddy, "will you teach me to do that?"

"Yes, I will," said Ellen. So she stood up and showed Teddy how to take a long breath, and how to push himself, and then he found he could do it quite well, and when Ellen began to float too, they could go along together hand in hand just as they had before.

Suddenly a thought crossed Teddy's mind, and he cried, "Why, Ellen, I thought you were lame!"

"So I am," said the little girl.

"But you can run and float."

"Yes, I know, but that's because I'm dreaming."

"Why, no, Ellen, you can't be dreaming," said Teddy, "for I'm here too."

"Well, I don't know," said Ellen, "but I think I'm dreaming, because I've often dreamed this way before."

Teddy thought of this for a little while, but it was not pleasant to think that he was in a dream. After a while he said: "Ellen, don't you know, if you're lame you ought to go to a hospital? My mamma says so, and my papa says so too."

An ugly expression came into Ellen's face. "That's all you know about it," she cried. "You don't catch me going to a hospital. Why, I heard of a girl that went to a hospital and—"

She was interrupted by a soft burst of laughter, and looking about Teddy saw that he and she had floated right into midst of a group of little children, who were running along the rainbow bridge. They were all such pretty little

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children, with soft shining faces and bare feet, but they did not quite look like any children that Teddy had ever seen before.

Each little child carried in its hand a bunch of flowers, and they were such flowers as the little boy had never dreamed of. Some of them moved on their stalks, opening and closing their petals softly like the wings of butterflies, some shone like jewels, and some seemed to change and throb as if with a hidden pulse of life.

Ellen, who had stopped floating, caught Teddy by the coat and hung back timidly when she saw the children, but Teddy spoke to the one nearest to him. "Where did you get your flowers?" he asked.

"From the garden at the other end of the rainbow," said the little child, smiling at him.

"Give me one?"

"Oh, no, I can't!" answered the child, staring at him with big eyes. "They're for someone else."

"Whom are they for?"

"You can come along and see."

"Oh, say," whispered Ellen to Teddy, "let's go back!" But Teddy answered: "No, no! Come on and see where they're going." So Ellen reluctantly followed him, and they joined the other little children journeying along the rainbow.

The strange little children seemed very happy, and they laughed and talked together in their soft, clear voices, though Teddy could not always understand what they said. He could understand best the little boy to whom he had spoken first. Teddy asked him again where they were going, and this time the little boy (he seemed to be the captain of the band) told him that they were going down to the earth. He said that every week they had a holiday, and then they crossed the rainbow bridge, and carried the flowers from their flower-beds down to the little earth children.

"But what little children?" asked Teddy, curiously.

"Oh, you'll see!" answered the little boy, laughing, and then he began to talk with the others, and Teddy could no longer understand him.

It was not long after this that Teddy saw before him the end of the rainbow, and where should it go but right through the window of a great square yellow house, set back of a high wall and in the middle of a lawn.

"Oh dear! we can't get to the end of it after all," cried Teddy, and the next thing he knew the little children were walking through the window just as if nothing were there, and he and Ellen were following them.

"Where are we?" asked Ellen, looking about her, half frightened and yet curious.

"I can't think," said Teddy. "Seems as if I knew, but I can't think."

They were in a long, bare, clean room, and on each side of it were rows of little white beds, and in each bed lay or sat a little child. A few of the children were asleep, most of them were awake, but all looked pale and thin. Here and there at the sides of the beds grown-up people were sitting, sometimes showing the children pictures or books, and sometimes reading to them.

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The children from the rainbow walked slowly up the aisle between the row of beds, and, strangely enough, no one seemed to look at them or pay the least attention, any more than if they had not been there, and at last Teddy began to believe that they could not see them.

Often the little strange children stopped to smooth a pillow or to softly stroke the cheek or hand of one of the little earth children.

Here and there one would linger behind the others, by some bed, and after a moment would lay its bunch of flowers on the pillow. Then the little child in the bed would turn its head and smile, even if it were asleep, and its face would shine as if with some inward happiness. The whole room seemed filled with the perfume of flowers, and Teddy wondered that no one paid any attention to it.

At last they came to a bed where a little child was lying fast asleep, and a woman was sitting beside the child and fanning it. Suddenly its eyes opened, and the moment they turned toward the rainbow children, Teddy knew that it saw them.

It lay looking for a moment and then it smiled and feebly tried to wave its hand. "What is it, dear?" asked the woman, bending over the child, but it paid no attention to her, for it was gazing at the rainbow children.

"Oh, he sees us! he sees us!" they cried, clapping their hands joyfully. "He'll be coming across the rainbow soon."

Then the rainbow children gathered about the bed and began talking to the child, but Teddy could not understand what they said to it. The little child on the bed seemed to understand them though, and it smiled and tried to nod its head.

"Come soon! Come soon!" cried the little children, waving their hands to it as they moved away, and the eyes of the child on the bed followed them wistfully, as though it were eager to follow.

Teddy and Ellen still went with the other little children, and a moment after they were out on the rainbow bridge again, high up above the world, but they were alone, for the little strange children were gone.

Ellen stood still and drew a long breath. "Oh! wasn't that lovely?" she sighed. "I wonder where it was!"

"I know where it was!" cried Teddy suddenly. "I remember now, for I saw a picture of it in one of papa's magazines. That was a hospital, Ellen."

"A hospital!" cried the little girl.

"Yes, a hospital."

Ellen did not say anything for some time, but at last she drew another deep breath. "Well, if that's a hospital I shouldn't mind going to a place like that," she said.

The rainbow had faded away, and Teddy was back in the great high-post bedstead again, with the silk coverlet drawn up over his knees, and the Counterpane Fairy still sitting on top of the hill. Teddy lay looking at her for a while in silence. "Mrs. Fairy, was that a true story like the others?" he asked her at last.

"How should I know?" asked the fairy. "Do I look as though I knew anything about rainbow children? You'd better ask Ellen McFinney; maybe she can tell you."

"Well, I will," said Teddy. "I mean to ask her just as soon as ever I'm well."

The Counterpane Fairy

He did not have to wait for that, however, for the very next day his mother told him that little Ellen had at last consented to be taken to the hospital, and that perhaps when he saw the little girl again she would be able to walk and run about almost like other children.

CHAPTER EIGHTH. HARRIETT'S DREAM.

TEDDY had begged mamma to ask Harriett to come over and play with him after school, but not to tell her that now he was no longer in bed, so when the little girl came running in she was very much surprised. "Why, Teddy, you're well again, aren't you?" she cried.

"Yes, now I'm well again," said Teddy "and mamma says we may each have a little sponge-cake, and she's going to let us blow soap-bubbles. Would you like to blow soap-bubbles, Harriett?"

"Yes, I guess so," said Harriett.

So mamma made them a bowl of strong suds, and brought out two pipes, and the children played together very happily for quite a time. Sometimes they threw the bubbles into the air and tried to blow them up to the ceiling; sometimes the children put their pipes close together, so that the bubbles they blew were joined in one lopsided globe.

Last of all they set the bowl on a chair, and kneeling beside it put their pipes into the suds, and blew and blew until quite a soap-bubble castle rose up and touched their noses with wet suds.

Teddy felt a little tired and soapy by that time, so mamma put all the things away, and read them some stories from Grimm's Fairy Tales.

After that Harriett said she must go home, and indeed it was almost supper-time, so mamma helped her put on her little hat and coat and kissed her good-bye.

Teddy was very tired by the time supper was over; he felt quite willing to be put to bed, and as soon as he was there he sank into a doze.

When he awoke again he was alone; it was quite dark outside, but mamma had set a lamp behind the screen. By its dim light Teddy saw the Counterpane Fairy's brown hood appearing above the hill, and he heard her sighing to herself: "Oh dear! oh dear!"

"Oh, Mrs. Fairy!" cried the little boy, almost before she had reached the top of the hill, "I'm so glad you've come, for I don't know when mamma will be here. Won't you show me a story?"

"In a minute! in a minute!" said the fairy. "As soon as I can catch my breath."

Teddy was so afraid that mamma would come in that he could hardly wait, and when the Counterpane Fairy told him that she was ready and that he might choose a square, he made haste and pointed out a silvery gray one. Then the fairy began to count. "FORTY-NINE!" she cried.

* * * * *

Teddy was walking down a long, smooth, gray road. There was a silvery mist all about him, so that it was almost as though he were walking through the sky, and the road seemed to begin and end in grayness.

The Counterpane Fairy

He knew that somewhere behind him lay his home, and that in front was the place where he was going, but he did not know what that place was.

At last he reached the edge of a wide gray lake as smooth and as shining as glass. Beside him on the beach a little gray bird was crouching. "Peet—weet! peet—weet!" cried the little gray bird.

It was so close to Teddy's feet that it seemed to him that with a single movement he could stoop and catch it. Very softly he reached out his hand and the little bird did not stir. "Peet—weet! peet—weet!" it cried. Suddenly with a quick movement he clutched it. For a moment he thought that he felt it in his fingers, all feathery and soft and warm, and then the voice of the Counterpane Fairy cried, "Take care! you're rumpling my cloak!"

Teddy dropped the bird as though it had burned him, and there it was not a bird at all, but the Counterpane Fairy, who stood smoothing down her cloak and frowning. "Oh! I didn't know that was you; I thought it was a bird," cried Teddy.

"A bird!" cried the fairy. "Do I look like a bird?"

Teddy thought that she did, for her nose was long and thin, and her eyes were bright like those of a sparrow, but he did not like to say so. All he said was, "I wonder why I came here?" for now he knew that this was the place that he had been coming to.

"I suppose you came to see the dreams go by," said the Counterpane Fairy. "I often come for that myself."

"The dreams go by!" said Teddy. "I don't know what you mean."

"Do you see that castle over yonder?" asked the fairy, pointing out across the lake. Teddy looked as hard as he could, and after a while he thought he did see the shadowy roofs and turrets of a great gray castle through the mist.

"I think I do," he said.

"Well," said the fairy, "that is where the dreams live, and every evening they go sailing past here, on their way to the people who are asleep, and I generally come down to see them go by. Look! look! There goes one now."

A little boat, as pale and light as a bubble, was gliding through the mist; in it was seated a gray figure, and as it passed the island it turned its face toward them and waved a shadowy hand. Presently two more boats slid silently by, and then another. "Oh, I know that dream!" cried Teddy; "I dreamed that dream once myself."

Now there was a little pause, and then the dreams began to go past so fast that Teddy lost count of them.

At last one of the boats gilded out of the line of the rest, and over toward where Teddy was standing, running up smoothly onto the gray beach, and out of it hopped a queer, ugly little dream, with pop eyes and big hands and feet. As soon as he found himself on shore he cut a caper and cracked his shadowy fingers.

"Who are you?" asked Teddy, curiously.

"Oh, I'm just a dream," said the little figure.

"Well, what are you coming here for?" asked Teddy; "I'm not asleep."

"I know you're not," said the dream, "and I'm not coming to you. I'm going to a little girl named Harriett."

The Counterpane Fairy

"Oh, I know her!" cried Teddy. "She's my cousin. But why are you her dream? You're not pretty."

"I know I'm not pretty," answered the dream, "and that's why I'm going to her. She was to have had such a pretty dream to-night, but she ate a piece of plum-cake before she went to bed, so now I'm going to her instead of the other one."

"What was the other one like?" asked Teddy.

"There it is," said the dream, pointing toward the boat. And now Teddy saw that another gray figure was in it. As he looked, it slowly and sorrowfully stepped from the boat and came up the beach toward them. It was very beautiful, and in its hand it carried a great bunch of shining bubbles, fastened to a stick by parti-colored ribbons, just as Teddy had seen Italians carrying balloons, only these bubble-balloons were growing and shrinking and changing every moment, just as though they were alive.

As she came toward them the ugly dream frowned and shook his hands at her. "Go away! Go away!" he cried. "There's no use your following me around this way. You sha'n't be dreamed to-night."

"I think you might let me go into her dream with you," said the pretty dream, sorrowfully. "She didn't know she oughtn't to eat the plum-cake."

"Well, you sha'n't," said the ugly dream. "She ain't going to have any dream but me, and I'm going to look just as ugly as I can. I'm going to do this way," and the naughty little dream put his thumbs in the corners of his mouth, drawing it wide, and at the same time drew down the outside corners of his eyes with his forefingers, just as Teddy had seen the boys at school do sometimes. Then the dream hopped up into the air and cut a caper. "Ho, ho!" he cried, "won't it be fun? You can come along and see me frighten her, if you want to." This last he said to Teddy.

Teddy thought him a very naughty, ugly-tempered little dream, but still he went with him, wondering all the time how he could induce him to let the pretty dream go to Harriett, and as they walked up the road together the pretty dream still followed them, carrying her bunch of bubbles.

They went on and on, until they came to a place where the ground was rough, and broken up with a number of black holes. The ugly dream went from one to another of these, pausing, and laying his ear to their edges.

"What are you doing?" asked Teddy.

"Hush! can't you see I'm listening?" said the dream crossly.

At last, after pausing at one of them, he turned to Teddy and nodded his head. "This is it," he said; "this is where Harriett lives."

"Why, it isn't at all!" cried Teddy, indignantly. "My cousin Harriett doesn't live in a hole! She lives in a great big house with doors and windows."

"Well, anyway, this is her chimney," said the dream, "and it's the only way to get into her house from here. If you want to come, come; and if you don't want to, why, stay," and the dream sat down on the edge of the hole.

Teddy hesitated. "If I went down that way, I think I'd fall and hurt myself," he said at last.

"Pooh! No, you wouldn't if you took my hand," said the dream. "I always go this way, and it's as easy as anything."

The Counterpane Fairy

So Teddy sat down on the edge of the hole, and grasped the dream's shadowy fingers in his. Then they pushed themselves off the edge, and down they went through the darkness.

Teddy felt so frightened for a minute that he quite lost his breath, but he held on tight to the dream's fingers, and soon they landed, as softly and lightly as a feather, right in the nursery of Aunt Paulina's house, and the pretty dream was still following them.

"And now begins the fun," whispered the dream.

The house was very still, for everyone was fast asleep. The moon shone in through the window, making the room bright, and beyond the open closet door Teddy could see the toys all arranged in order just as Harriett had left them, (for she was a tidy little girl), and Harriett herself was tucked into her little white bed in the room beyond.

Teddy felt so sorry to think of her having such an ugly dream that he stood still. "You won't frighten her very much, will you?" he asked.

"Yes, I shall!" said the ugly dream. "I'll frighten her just as much as ever I can; I'll make her cry."

"No, you mustn't," said Teddy, almost crying himself. "I won't let you."

"You can't help it," cried the dream, tauntingly.

Suddenly a bright thought came into Teddy's mind. "Anyway, you're not so very ugly," he said. "Harriet has a Jack-in-the-box that's a great deal—oh! ever so much uglier than you."

"I don't believe it," said the dream.

"Yes, she has," said Teddy; "and it's right there in the closet."

"Then I'll get it, and make myself look like it." With that the dream crawled into the closet, and pushed back the hook of the box where Jack lived, and pop! up shot the most hideous little man that ever was seen, with a bright red face and white whiskers. "Hi! he is ugly!" cried the dream with delight, and sitting down before the box he began to make his face like the Jack's.

Then softly and quickly Teddy closed the closet door, and turned the key in the lock, fastening the dream in. "Hi there! let me out! let me out!" cried the dream, beating softly on the door with its shadowy hands.

"No, I won't," cried Teddy. "You can just stay in there, you ugly dream, for the pretty dream is going to Harriett now." Then he turned to the pretty dream and took her by the hand, and her face shone as brightly as one of her own bubbles.

Together they ran into Harriett's room, and there she lay in her little white bed, with her eyes closed and her curls spread out over the pillow, and when they came in she smiled in her sleep.

The dream shook the bubbles above the bed, and the dimples came into Harriett's cheeks. "Oh! pretty, pretty!" she whispered with her eyes still closed. "Oh, Teddy? isn't it pretty?"

"Yes, it is pretty!" cried Teddy.

* * * * *

The Counterpane Fairy

"Did you call me, dear?" asked mamma, opening the door.

Teddy was back in his own room, and all he could see of the Counterpane Fairy was the tip of her brown hood disappearing behind the counterpane hill, and that was gone in an instant.

"Oh, Mamma! it was such a pretty dream," cried Teddy.

"Was it, darling?" said mamma. "Try to go to sleep again, dear, for it is very late, and you can tell me all about it to-morrow. Good-night, my little boy."

CHAPTER NINTH. DOWN THE RAT-HOLE.

THE next day Teddy was allowed to go about and follow mamma into the sewing-room, where he had the little cutting-table drawn out and his toys put on it, and played for a long time.

In the afternoon Harriett stopped for a little while, and as soon as Teddy saw her his thoughts went back to the Counterpane Fairy and the story, and he cried out: "Oh, Harriett! I know what you dreamed last night."

"What did I dream?" asked Harriett.

"Why, you dreamed about the soap-bubbles and me; didn't you?"

"How did you know I dreamed that?" asked Harriett.

Then Teddy told her all about standing by the lake and seeing the dreams go past, and how he had shut the ugly one up in the toy-closet.

Harriett listened with great interest. "Wasn't that a funny dream?" she cried when he had ended.

"A dream!" said Teddy. "Why, that wasn't a dream, Harriett. That's the story the Counterpane Fairy showed me. And don't you know you did dream about the bubbles?"

Harriet was silent awhile as if pondering it, and then she said, "My canary-bird flew away this morning."

"Who let it out?" asked Teddy, with interest. "Did you?"

Harriett hesitated. "Well, I didn't exactly let it out," she said. "I guess I forgot to close the door after I cleaned its cage." Then she added hastily: "But mamma hung the cage outside the window, and she says she thinks maybe it'll come back unless someone has caught it."

Teddy wanted to hear a great deal more about the canary, but Harriett said she must go now, so he was left alone again to play with his toys.

After dinner his mother went down-town to buy a present for Harriett, for the next day was to be the little girl's birthday. Teddy wanted to get her a bag of marbles, but she thought perhaps she would be able to find something Harriett would like better than that. She would look about and see.

Before she went she made Teddy lie down on the bed, and covered him over with the silk quilt, so that he might rest for a while. Then she kissed him and told him to try to take a nap, and promised to be back soon.

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After she had gone Teddy dozed comfortably for a while. Then he grew wide awake again, and turning over on his back he raised his knees into a hill, and lay looking out of the window, and wondering when mamma would come home, and what she would bring with her.

"You're not asleep, are you?" asked a little voice from his knees.

"Oh, Counterpane Fairy, I'm so glad you've come," cried Teddy, "for mamma has gone down-town, and I was just beginning to get lonely."

There was the familiar little figure in the brown cloak and hood, seated on top of the counterpane hill, and as he spoke she looked down on him smilingly. "I suppose the next thing will be a story," she said.

"Oh! will you show me one?" cried Teddy. "I wish you would, for I don't know when mamma will be home."

"Very well," said the fairy. "Perhaps I can show you one before she comes back. Which square shall it be this time?"

"I've had the red, and the yellow, and the green, and ever so many: I wonder if that brown one has a good story to it."

"You might choose it and see," said the fairy. So Teddy chose that one, and then the fairy began to count. "One, two, three, four, five," she counted, and so on and on until she reached "FORTY-NINE!"

* * * * *

"Why, how funny!" cried Teddy.

He was nowhere at all but on the back door-step, and he sat there just as naturally as though he were not in a story at all. Then the back gate opened, and in through it came a little withered old woman, wearing a brown cloak, and a brown hood drawn over her head. "Why, Counterpane Fairy!" cried Teddy, but when she raised her head and looked at him he saw that it was not the Counterpane Fairy after all, but an old Italian woman carrying a basket on her arm.

"You buy something, leetle boy?" she said.

"I can't," said Teddy. "I haven't any money except what's in my bank, but I'll ask Hannah and maybe she will."

So saying he ran into the kitchen. The clock was ticking on the wall, and the room smelled of fresh-baked bread, but it was empty. Opening the door of the stairway, Teddy called, "Hannah! Hannah!" There was no answer; it all seemed strangely still upstairs. "She must have gone out," Teddy said to himself.

When he went back to the outside door the old Italian had put down her basket and was sitting on the step beside it. She did not seem at all surprised when he told her he could not find anyone. "You not find anyone, and you not have money," she said. "Then I tell you what I do; you put your hand in dis baskit, and I give you what you take; I make what you call 'present.'"

"Will you really?" cried Teddy.

"Yis," said the little old woman, smiling, and her smile was just like the smile of the Counterpane Fairy.

"And you'll give me whatever I take?"

The Counterpane Fairy

"Yis," said the little old woman again.

Teddy put his hand in under the cover and caught hold of something hard and cold. He pulled and pulled at it, and out it came; it was a little iron shovel.

"You take something more," said the little old woman. Teddy hesitated, but when he looked at her again he saw that she really meant it, so he put his hand in and this time he pulled out a large iron key.

"Now try once more," said the little old woman, and this third time it was a rat-trap baited with cheese, that Teddy drew from the basket.

"But what shall I do with them?" he asked.

"You keep dem," said the old Italian, "and you find you need dem by and by." Then she rose, and pulling her cloak over the basket she took her staff in her other hand and hobbled down the pathway.

Teddy slipped the key into his pocket, and holding the shovel and the trap he ran down to the gate to open it for her. He stood looking after her as she went on down the street, her staff striking the bricks sharply, tap! tap! tap! Her back was certainly exactly like the Counterpane Fairy's.

As he walked slowly up the path swinging his shovel by the handle, he noticed that there was a rat-hole just back of the rain-butt, and he thought what fun it would be to dig it out, so he put the cage down on the ground and set to work with his shovel.

The earth broke away from the rat-hole in great clods, and he found it so easy to dig that very soon he had made quite a big hole.

Then he saw that down in this hole there was a flight of stone steps leading into the earth. "Why, isn't that funny!" said Teddy. "Right in the back yard, too. I wonder where they go!"

Tucking the shovel under his arm and taking the trap in his hand, Teddy stepped into the rat-hole and began to go down the stairs.

He went on down and down and down, and at last he came to an iron door, and it was locked. Teddy tried it and knocked, but there was no answer. He listened with his ear against it, but he heard nothing, and he was just about to turn and go up the stairs again, when he remembered the key the little old woman had given him.

He pulled it out of his pocket, and when he tried it in the keyhole it fitted exactly. He turned it, the door flew open, and Teddy stepped through.

Beyond was a cave, just such as he had often wished he could live in, with a rough table and chair, old kegs, and a heap of rubbish in one corner. On each side of the cave was a heavy door studded with iron nails. "I will just see where these doors lead to," said Teddy to himself, laying his trap and his shovel behind one of the kegs.

As he reached the first door and put his hand on it he heard someone singing the other side of it as sweetly and clearly as a bird, and this is what the voice sang:

"In field and meadow the grasses grow;
The clouds are white and the winds they blow.
Out in the world there is
much to see, If I were but free! If I were but free!"

The Counterpane Fairy

"My wings were bright and my wings were strong; I plumed myself and I sang a song: Where is the hero to rescue me, And set me free? And set me free?"

The song ended and Teddy opened the door.

Within was another room that looked almost like the first, only there was a fireplace in it, and in front of this fireplace a young girl was sitting.

As soon as Teddy opened the door she looked over her shoulder, and when she saw him she sprang to her feet with a glad cry and clasped her hands. "Oh!" she cried, "have you come to rescue me?"

"Who are you?" asked Teddy, wondering at her.

She was very beautiful. Her eyes were as bright and black as a sloe, her hair shone like threads of pure gold, and she wore a long cloak of golden feathers over her shoulders.

When Teddy spoke she answered him, "I am Avis, the Bird-maiden."

"And how did you come here?" asked Teddy.

Then the Bird-maiden told him how she used to live in a golden castle that was all her own; how she ate from crystal dishes and bathed every morning in a little marble bath-tub, and had nothing to do all day but swing in her golden swing and sing for her own pleasure. But after a while she grew tired of all this and began to wonder what the outside world was like, and one the day the sun was so bright and the air so sweet that she left her home and flew out into the wide, wide world.

That was all very pleasant until she grew tired and sat down on a stone to rest. Then a great brown robber came and caught her and carried her down into his den, and there he kept her a prisoner in spite of her tears and prayers, and there she must wait on him and keep his house in order; every day he went out and left her along, coming back loaded down with food or golden treasure that he had stolen.

"But why don't you run away?" asked Teddy. "I would."

"Alas! I can't," said the Bird-maiden, "for whenever the robber-magician goes out he locks the door after him, and I have no key to open it."

Then Teddy told her that he had a key that would unlock the door and that he would save her.

The Bird-maiden was very glad, but she said they must make haste, for it was almost time for the robber to come home; so she wrapped her cloak around her, and Teddy took her by the hand and together they ran to the door.

They had hardly reached the outer cave, however, when Teddy heard a loud bang that echoed and re-echoed from the walls.

"Alas! Alas!" cried the Bird-maiden, shrinking back and beginning to wring her hands, "we are too late. There comes the robber, and now we will never escape."

She had scarcely said this when in marched the robber-magician sure enough. He wore a great soft hat pulled down over his face, and he had a long brown nose and little black beads of eyes. His mustache stuck out on each side like swords, and he carried a great sack over his shoulder.

The Counterpane Fairy

The robber-magician threw the sack down on the floor and frowned at Teddy from under his hat. "How now!" he cried. "Who's this who has come down into my cavern without even so much as a 'by your leave'?"

Teddy felt rather frightened, but he spoke up bravely. "I'm Teddy," he said, "and I didn't know this was your cave. I thought it was just a rat-hole."

"A rat-hole!" cried the robber-magician, bursting into a roar of laughter. "A rat-hole! My cave a rat-hole! Ho! ho! ho!"

"Yes, I did," said Teddy, "and I didn't know it was yours, but if you want me to go I will."

"Not so fast," said the robber. "Sometimes it is easier to come into my cave than to go out, and you must sit down and have some supper with me now that you are here."

Teddy was quite willing to do that, for he was really hungry, so he and the robber drew chairs up to the table, and the Bird-maiden, at a gesture from the robber, picked up the sack that he had thrown upon the ground, and out from it she drew some pieces of bread and some bits of cold meat. It did not look particularly good, but it seemed to be all there was, so when the robber began to eat Teddy helped himself too.

The robber-magician did not take off his hat, and he ate very fast; after a while he leaned back in his chair and began to tell Teddy what a great magician he was, and about his treasure chamber.

"There," he said, "is where I keep my gold. I have gold, and gold, and gold, great bars and lumps and crusts of gold, all piled up in my treasure chamber." At last he rose, pushed back his chair, and bade Teddy follow him and he should see how great and rich he was.

Leading the way across the cave, he unlocked the third door, and flinging it open stepped back so that Teddy might look in. As he opened it a very curious smell came out.

Teddy stared and stared about the treasure chamber. "But where is the gold?" he said.

"There, right before your eyes," said the robber. "Don't you see it?"

"Why, that isn't gold. That's nothing but cheese," cried Teddy.

"Cheese! cheese!" cried the robber-magician, stamping his foot in a rage; "I tell you it's gold."

"It isn't! it's cheese!" said Teddy. "Look! I have some just like it; I'll show you," and running to the keg where he had left his trap he pulled it out and held it up for the robber to see.

As soon as the robber-magician saw the cheese in the trap his fingers began to work and his mouth to water. "Oh, what a fine rich piece of gold!" he cried. "How do you get it out?"

"I don't know," said Teddy. "I don't think it comes out."

"There must be some way," cried the robber. "Let me see," and taking the trap from Teddy he put it down on the floor and began to pick and pry at the bars, but he could not get the cheese out, and the more he tried the more eager he grew. "There's one way," he muttered to himself, looking up at Teddy suspiciously from under his slouch hat.

"How is that?" asked Teddy.

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"If one were only a rat one could get at it fast enough," said the robber-magician.

"Yes, but you're not," said Teddy.

"All the same it might be managed," said the magician. Again he tore and tore at the bars, and he grew so eager that he seemed to forget about everything but the cheese. "I'll do it," he cried, "yes, I will." Then he laid off his great soft hat, and crossing his forefingers he cried:

"Innocent me! Innocent me! As I was once again I will be."

And now the magician's nose grew longer, his mustache grew thin and stiff like whiskers, his sword changed to a long tail, and in a minute he was nothing at all but a great brown rat that ran into the trap.

"Click!" went the trap, and there he was fastened in with the cheese.

It was in vain that he shook the bars and squeaked.

"Quick! quick!" cried the Bird-maiden. "let us escape before he can use his spells." She caught Teddy by the hand, and together they ran to the door that led to the stairway. "Your key! Oh, make haste!" cried the Bird-maiden, breathlessly.

In a moment Teddy had unlocked the door they had passed through, and it had swung to behind them. Up the stairs they ran, and there they were standing in the sunlight near the rain-butts.

"I am free! I am free!" cried the Bird-maiden, joyously. "Oh! thank you, little boy. And now for home." She caught the edges of her cloak and spread it wide, and as she did so it changed to wings, her head grew round and covered with feathers, and with a glad cry she sprang from the earth and flew up and away and out of sight through the sunlight.

"Why, it's Harriett's canary!" cried Teddy.

* * * * *

"And now I must go," said the Counterpane Fairy.

Teddy was back in the India-room. The sun was low, and a broad band of pale sunlight lay across the foot of the bed. The fairy was just starting down the counterpane hill.

"Was it really Harriett's canary?" asked Teddy.

"I haven't time to talk of that now," cried the Counterpane Fairy, "for I hear your mother coming. Good-bye! good-bye!"

And sure enough she had scarcely disappeared behind the counterpane hill when his mamma came in.

"Oh, Mamma!" cried Teddy, "do you think Harriett's canary came back?"

"I don't know, dear," said his mother. Then she put a little package into his hand. "Do you think Harriett will like that?" she asked.

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When Teddy opened the bundle he saw a cunning little bisque doll that sat in a little tin bath-tub. You could take the doll out and dress it, or you could really bathe it in the tub.

"Oh! isn't that cute!" cried Teddy, with delight. "Won't little Cousin Harriett be pleased!"

"I hope she will," said mamma.

CHAPTER TENTH. THE COUNTERPANE FAIRY SAYS GOOD-BYE.

TEDDY was to go out-doors the next day if it was mild and pleasant. The doctor had come in that morning for the last time to see him. "Well, my little man," he had said, giving Teddy's cheek a pinch, "can't be pretending you're a sick boy any longer with cheeks and eye like these. Now we'll have you back at school in no time, and then I suppose you'll be up to all your old tricks again."

Later on the little boy had gone downstairs for dinner, for the first time since he had been ill. Everything there had looked very strange to him, and as if he had not seen it for years.

He had felt just as well as ever until he tried to chase the cat, Muggins, down the hall, and then his legs had given way in a funny, weak fashion that made him laugh.

After dinner Muggins followed him upstairs, and curling down under a chair went fast asleep. Teddy took his blocks and built them about the chair, so that when the cat woke he found himself built up inside a little house.

However, a door had been left, and he poked his nose and his paw through it, and then the whole front wall went down with a noisy clatter, and Muggins scampered down to the kitchen with his tail on end. Teddy had to laugh; he looked so funny.

Papa came home from his office earlier than usual that afternoon, bringing with him a bundle of long, smooth sticks and a roll of tissue papers, and spent all the rest of the time between that and supper in making a great kite for Teddy. He told the little boy that if the next day were fine he would fly it for him, and that he might ask some of the boys to come and help.

Teddy had never seen such a large kite before. When papa stood it up it was a great deal taller than the little boy himself. The gold star that was pasted on where the sticks crossed was just on a level with his eyes.

So much seemed to have happened that day that very soon after supper Teddy felt tired and was quite willing to let mamma undress him and put him to bed.

It felt very good to lie down between the cool sheets again, and very soon Teddy's eyelids began to blink heavily, and he was already drifting off into that blissful feeling that comes just as one is going to sleep, when he became dimly conscious of a faint sound of music.

At first, half asleep as he was, he thought that it must be little Cousin Harriett winding up the music-box in the room, and then he suddenly started into consciousness with the remembrance that he was alone and that it couldn't be Cousin Harriett. She was at home; in bed perhaps, already.

The music seemed to sound quite near him, and it was very sweet and soft. Now that he was awake it sounded more like the voice of the singing garden than anything else.

Suddenly a faint rosy light appeared at the foot of the bed, and standing in it was the most beautiful lady that

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Teddy had ever seen. She was quite tall,—as tall as his own mother, and not even the fairy Rosine, or the Bird-maiden,—no, nor the Princess Aureline herself, had been half as beautiful.

But though the lady was so lovely there was something very familiar about her face. "Why, Counterpane Fairy!" cried Teddy.

The Counterpane Fairy, for it was indeed she, did not speak, but smiling at Teddy she moved softly and smoothly, as though swept along by the music to the side of the bed, and, still smiling, she bent above the little boy.

As he looked up into the face that leaned above him, it seemed to change in some strange way, and now it was the old Italian woman who had given him the presents from her basket; a moment after it was the face of the little child who had talked with him upon the rainbow; no, it was not; it was really the Counterpane Fairy herself, and no one else.

Closer and closer she leaned above him, seeming to enfold him with faint music and light and perfume. "Good-bye," she whispered softly. "Good-bye! little boy."

"Oh, Counterpane Fairy! where are you going? Don't go away!" cried Teddy.

"I'm not going away," said the fairy. "I shall be beside you still just as often as ever, only you won't see me."

"But won't there be any more stories?" cried Teddy, in dismay.

"Sometime, perhaps," said the Counterpane Fairy, "but not now, for to-morrow you'll be out and playing with the other boys, and after that it will be your school and your games that you'll be thinking of."

"Oh, Counterpane Fairy, don't go!" cried Teddy again, reaching out his arms toward her; but they touched nothing but empty air. Waving her hand to him and still smiling, the Counterpane Fairy slowly, slowly faded away. With her too, faded the rosy light and the perfume that had filled the room; only the faint sound of music was left. Then it too died away.

Teddy sat up and looked about him. The room was very still and dim. He heard nothing but the ticking of the clock. The half-moon had sailed up above the dark tops of the pine-trees on the lawn outside, and by its light he saw the great kite that papa had made him, as it stood propped up on the mantle. The gilt star in the middle of it shone.

It was true that he was no longer a little sick child. To-morrow he would be out-of-doors again, and shouting and playing with all the other boys.