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Edda and the Oak

By Elia W. Peattie
Pictures by Katharine Merrill

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EDDA AND THE OAK

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Elia W. Peattie

With Illustrations by

Katharine Merrill

Rand McNally and Co.,

Chicago New York London

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EDDA AND THE OAK

CHAPTER I

EDDA lived at the very top of a building six stories high, which stood on a wide street in a city so large that if you were to start in to-day and count until the middle of next month you could not count all of the houses. The place where she lived was called a Top Flat; and with her lived her father, her mother, her cat, her story-books, and many toys.

Besides all of these, Edda had a grandmother, but as Edda never had met her grandmother since she could remember she thought less about her than she did about the cat and the toys, which were with her all day, and sometimes on her bed at night. She knew how to get along very well without her grandmother, but no one ever had asked her to go a whole day without the gray cat and the toys.

Living high up in the air as she did, and going down to earth only by means of a little cage run up and down by Toby the black boy, Edda could not play on the street,

because her mamma liked "to keep an eye on her," and no mamma, however clever, can keep an eye on a little girl who is playing six stories down below. So Edda only went on the street in the company of her mamma or papa or Fanny, the yellow-haired maid. Sometimes she went with her mamma to the shops for new shoes or a hat; or to call on friends in their large, still houses. But if she went with Fanny it was to see the animals pacing up and down in their cages at the Park—wild animals with sad eyes—or to walk by the lake, which sometimes smiled and sometimes roared at her.

Although there were many people living in the great building where Edda had her home, there was not another little girl—among them all, not one single little girl except Edda. So without Fanny with the yellow hair, Toby the black boy, Bubbles the cat, and Adelaide Alice the doll, Edda might have been very lonely. Even as it was, she had some trouble to keep herself happy all of the time. She would sit by the hour on the back porch and look at the houses, stretching away and away, crammed and jammed with people, and think to herself that surely there must be many little girls around somewhere if only she could get at them.

Once she made up her mind that she would go out by herself and look and look until she found a little girl. So she took her father's satchel out of the closet, packed it with her best clothes, helped herself to her mother's pretty white parasol, and went out in the hallway and rang the bell for the little cage. But when Toby the black boy came he stood right in the way, so that she could n't get past him, and said:

"Who all is a-goin' with you, Missie?"

"I 'm going by myself, Toby," said Edda. "I 'm going to look for a little girl."

"What little girl, Missie?"

"Any little girl will do, Toby. Please let me go! I want some one to play with so bad!"

Toby looked sorry.

"I wish I knowed whar thar was a little girl, Missie, 'deed I do!" But instead of letting her in the cage he picked her up and carried her to the kitchen, where Fanny was making pies.

"If you-all doan' watch out," he said to the maid, "you 'll hab a little runaway heah! Bettah pay some 'tention to this pore chile! She 's perishin', that 's what she is—perishin' of lonesomeness! Same as folks perishes

of hunger. Yassum! You all bettah look out! Bringin' a chile like dat up with no place to play but a back entry! Ought to be ashamed of 'emselves!"

Toby went off, scolding, and Fanny stayed in the kitchen and scolded; but Edda did not mind that, for Fanny tied a real grown-up gingham apron around her, and put her up to the baking table with some flour and milk and sugar and nutmeg, so that Edda could make a custard pie. And she did—she made one; and when it was baked, father and mother and Edda and Fanny each ate a piece. Some was offered to the cat, which seemed to like it as well as had the rest of the family.

As has been said, Edda did not know her grandmother, although Edda was six and her grandmother was sixty-six, which, of course, had given them time enough to know each other well. But grandmother lived a thousand miles away from Edda. That was why she did not know her.

It is a great pity for a grandmother and a little girl not to know each other, and so papa and mamma and Edda were glad when grandmother invited Edda to come away out to her house and live with her for three months. Grandmother wrote in her letter that a Lady-she-loved

was going to make the journey, and would bring Edda safe to the end of her trip.

So Edda's mamma made her some blue and pink and white dresses, and bought her a rose-colored cape for best and a dark blue coat for worst, and brown shoes and white shoes and sandals, and some sunbonnets and hats—one hat with rosebuds to match the cape—and told her she was to be a good and loving child, and Edda went away with the Lady-grandmother-loved. Adelaide Alice, the doll, went too. But not the cat. The cat stayed at home to keep the others company.

Edda rode and rode on the train. She rode a day and a night and part of another day, but at last she came to grandmother's town. And there was grandmother—like her picture, perfectly—and there was the little black carriage and Lily White, the horse, about which Edda often had heard. So, when the Lady-grandmother-loved had gone with her own people, grandmother and Edda stepped into the little black carriage, and sitting side by side drove along the shady streets past homes that seemed to smile out at them, until they came to a gate at which Lily White turned in of her own accord.

"This is home," said grandmother.

Edda looked around at the garden and the house with its wide porches, where the honeysuckle climbed up the trellises.

"It is ever so much nicer than a Top Flat," she said.

Grandmother said she supposed it was, but that she never had seen a Top Flat. She brought Edda a glass of cool milk and some bread and butter, and then left her for a moment sitting in the shade. It was a warm day, and Edda had looked and wondered at all she had seen on her journey until she was as tired and sleepy as only a child can be. So as soon as she was left alone she crawled into the hammock and put her head on the pillow. And then—well, it is easy to imagine what happened.

There is a sort of sleep which wraps a sleeper round like a black coat; and there is another sort of sleep that seems to float about the sleeper like a silver scarf. It was the floating, silvery kind of sleep that came to Edda, and every few moments she would almost awaken, and then she would hear the bees buzzing, or a cart rattling by, or a bird singing in the trees. All that seemed only to make her sleep sweeter, and she would curl up tighter in the hammock, and think what a fine time she would have when once she got ready to wake up.

By and by she really was ready. Her eyes popped open like snap-dragons, and she sat up and called:

"Grandmother! Grandmother!"

A voice came back from within the house.

"Edda! Edda!"

So Edda jumped out of the hammock and pulled open the screen door and went into grandmother's sitting-room. It was not at all the sort of a room to which she had been used. The windows were low and wide, and hollyhocks looked in at them. There was a fireplace with logs in it heaped high, ready and waiting to be lighted on a chilly evening. A large bowl, with little rainbows floating about in the glass, held some goldfish. Edda ran to them and laughed aloud.

"Here is a fish that looks like an automobile," she said to her grandmother. "Its eyes stare like lamps."

But just then she saw a yet funnier thing. A cat came into the room with a tail so like a bush, and with a walk so curious, that at first Edda almost thought it was not a cat.

"Is n't she made right?" Edda asked. "Her tail is all raveled out, and her feet are the wrong size."

"Pussy is a Persian," explained grandmother. "And

as you say, her feet are the wrong size. She has six toes on each foot; but you must n't talk about it, for it makes her terribly ashamed."

Before she had finished speaking, pussy, who knew very well what they were saying, dropped on her stomach and hid her feet so that no one could see them.

"You see," said grandmother, "her feelings are hurt."

"I 'll never, never say anything about her toes again. I don't want to hurt anybody's feelings. But her tail, grandmother—must n't I speak of that either?"

"Oh, that is the right kind of a tail for that sort of a cat, Edda. We think it a beautiful tail."

And at that, the cat got up and turned around three times as if she were trying to look at her splendid brush. Edda thought she got over feeling hurt quickly, for no sooner had she taken a seat in the wicker chair than the cat jumped up on the wide chair-arm to be near her. When Edda had run her fingers through the cat's thick, soft fur several times, both felt they were becoming good friends, and Carrots, for her part, was sorry to see Aunt Caroline coming to the door. For she had learned long since that when a person comes into the room a mere cat

has little chance of being noticed. This proved to be true in the present case, for no sooner had Edda been told that this was her Aunt Caroline than she pushed pussy away as if she had been so much thistle-down, and ran to throw her arms about her aunt's neck.

Although Aunt Caroline was Grandmother Pratt's daughter, she lived in a house of her own because she had married Uncle Donald Craig; but she came every day to see her mother, and when she came she always brought a little gift. Sometimes it was a pot of honey made by her own bees; and sometimes a jar of jam made from berries grown in her own garden; and sometimes a pat of butter made from the milk of her own cows. To-day it was two gooseberry tarts for Edda, set in a tiny basket with ribbons run around the edge.

Edda could not help hearing what her grandmother said to her aunt.

"She is a strange little girl, Caroline—a queer, shy little girl."

"An odd little girl, is she?" said Aunt Caroline with a laugh. "Then I know I shall like her!" And to Edda she said: "Come out into the garden and eat the tarts there."

So Edda carried the tiny basket out into the garden, and she and her aunt sat side by side on a bench underneath a tree that arched over them as if it were an umbrella.

"Look up at me, Edda," said Aunt Caroline, "so that we may know each other's faces."

So they looked straight at each other, and Edda saw that Aunt Caroline's eyes were a sort of green like the jewel in her mamma's ring, although around the edges they were gray. Her face was long and pale, and there was a look about her as if she were thinking of something she did n't take the trouble to say.

"I think, little Edda," Aunt Caroline said after they had looked long at each other, "that you are going to be One-in-a-thousand."

"What ma'am?" asked Edda shyly. She had not the least idea what her aunt meant.

"One-in-a-thousand, Edda—one little girl out of a thousand little girls to hear what I used to hear and see what I used to see in this garden."

Edda looked about her, thinking there would hardly be room for a thousand little girls in that garden, and not feeling at all sure that she would like that many play-

mates. But she saw no little girls—only hollyhocks in rows, tall red lilies in companies, lobelia bluer than the sky, lady-slippers and sweet peas in lovely colors, high hedges and great trees. Best of all the trees was an oak, larger than any tree Edda had ever seen, which shed a circle of shade and made a deep whispering as the wind rustled it.

Although her eyes rested on it for the first time, it was so beautiful that it seemed as if she had seen it every day of her life. To become acquainted with a tree certainly is a different sort of thing from becoming acquainted with a grandmother, yet this pleasant, old tree made a happy feeling come into Edda's heart very much like that she had had when she first felt her grandmother's arms around her.

Then, as she looked and smiled at the tree, she saw—and to see it made her heart beat fast as fast—that a little way below where the branches reached out, there was a face. It was a bark face, you understand, a tree-trunk face; and whether it was laughing or crying Edda could not tell. All she could make out was that it was screwed up, and had cross wrinkles around its mouth, and kind wrinkles on its forehead, and a nose that sprawled over

the cheeks, and no ears at all—an old-young, wise-silly kind of a face that made Edda feel queer all over.

She pointed to the face. "Oh, Aunt Caroline, see!"

The green in Aunt Caroline's eyes grew greener, and her voice when she spoke seemed almost like the whispering of the oak.

"It is just as I thought," she said. "You *are* One-in-a-thousand, little Edda. You 've seen the face in the oak! Many and many a person have I brought to this garden to see if they 'd notice the face, but though they looked straight at it they did not see it. But you, having seen it, shall see and hear things that you never so much as dreamed of. Listen!"

She held up her long, white finger as a sign for Edda to keep very quiet. And as Edda listened, the whispering of the tree became words, only Edda could not quite make them out; and the shadows in the little water-lily pond began to take shape, as if lovely little creatures were moving beneath the water. A squirrel sitting on a branch of the oak began laughing as if he were a mocking boy; and a sad-faced crow on the fence sighed as if he were sorrowing over the wicked squirrel. A woodpecker stopped half-way up a slender linden tree to nod at Edda three

times; and in the grass at her feet, where a fairy ring of toadstools grew, some elfish things, no bigger than a sparrow, crept out on their hands and knees and grinned at her.

A hundred little sounds she had not heard before

THE OLD OAK

were in her ears, and she could see colors on the leaves and in the grass which she had not noticed at all until then. It all was so wonderful that she could n't speak a word,

but would clasp her hands together, and sit as still as a stone, listening and looking.

Just then a bell sounded from within the house.

"The supper bell!" cried Aunt Caroline with a sharp little laugh, and at that the sounds died, the elves slunk beneath the toadstools, the woodpecker hopped into a hole in the tree, the squirrel whisked out of sight, the crow flew off, and the beautiful shapes stirring in the lily pond became mere shadows.

"They are all gone!" wailed Edda. "Aunt Caroline, they are gone!"

"Hush," whispered Aunt Caroline, taking Edda by the hand and leading her toward the house. "They will come back, little One-in-a-thousand. But, mind you, not if you tell any one what you have seen. Promise me you 'll not tell."

So Edda promised, and went with her aunt into the house to have supper with grandmother.

CHAPTER II

ALTHOUGH Edda had eaten many, many meals in her life, she never had enjoyed one as much as she did that first supper at her grandmother's house. At her city home she was not allowed at the table for the evening meal, because then it was dinner that was served, with meat and dessert, which were much too hearty for a little girl who must soon go to bed. So she had her bread and butter and milk and jam in the sitting-room with her mamma; and although she was allowed to wait up for her papa, and to sit on his knee for ten minutes at least, she had to say good-night right afterward, even though it might still be daylight.

But here at grandmother's no one was saying a word about bed. She was given white bread with raisins in it, and honey and milk, cold chicken and tea cakes, and every few minutes some one said:

"Have some more of something, Edda, child, do!"

From where Edda sat she could see the old oak, and

not far from it, the lily pond. As the sun dropped lower and lower in the west, the pond took on lovely colors—pink and soft green, then wild-drifting red, and after that blues that were almost greens. Then the light died out and the pond was like a great pearl; and at last it was dark, with a small shining light, like a fairy lantern, moving over it.

"See! See!" cried Edda. "What is that?"

Grandmother looked.

"That 's a firefly, child."

"Why does it move to and fro and to and fro?"

"It 's perched at the bow of the fairy queen's boat, and is lighting her across the pond," answered Aunt Caroline.

"My dear," grandmother said, "you must n't put nonsense in the child's head. You are so serious that she will believe you. Why should n't it fly back and forth, Edda? I dare say it likes the dampness about the pond."

"As for the fairy queen," went on Aunt Caroline, "her name is Goldheart, and she is a water fairy who lives in the house at the end of the water-lily stem. There are little stairs inside of the stem, and she goes down them to her home."

Grandmother laughed and told Edda she must n't believe all her Aunt Caroline said.

"She always was a great hand at telling fairy tales," she said.

Out of doors it was growing darker and darker, but still no one spoke the word Edda disliked more than any other in the language—the word "bed." Instead, Aunt Caroline said:

"We can see the fireflies even better from the upper windows, I think."

So the three went up the shining stairs, past the pictures on the wall, past a great window with many little panes through which the stars were shining, until they came to a room where the honeysuckle looked in at the window. There was a small bed with rose-sprigged muslin curtains in this room and a low dressing-table hung with the rose-sprigged muslin, and a desk where a little girl could write letters, and a toy cradle for Adelaide Alice the doll. No sooner did Edda see the bed with the curtains than she thought that the best thing that could happen would be to curl up in it and go to sleep. Grandmother and Aunt Caroline seemed to think so too, so before she really knew what

was happening, her day clothes were off and her long white nightgown was on, her head was on the pillow, and grandmother and Aunt Caroline were kissing her good-night.

At home she had not liked to be left alone. Sleeping as she did in the inner room of the Top Flat, the only noises she heard were other people working in their kitchens or playing pianos, or Toby's dog crying for its supper; and there was nothing to see out of the window but the whitewashed wall on the other side of the court. But here, in her new room, she could hear the whispering of the trees, the piping of a cricket, and a sort of deep, beautiful breathing as if the night itself were drawing breath.

The great oak reached up to her window and away beyond it, so that it was almost as if she were a bird and were living in a tree. She could hear the birds making sleepy noises, and she made them too, and played she was a bird.

After a time she stopped playing she was a bird, and got to thinking about her mamma—her dear mamma who was so very—far—away—so—far—dear—mam—

The little thoughts went out as bubbles go out—they

shone for a moment in Edda's brain, broke prettily, and were no more. She was asleep.

No doubt she would have slept all night had not the moon arisen. But it was so bright a moon that when once it began shining in at Edda's window her eyelids fluttered like butterfly wings, and at last flew wide open. At once she knew she was in a strange place, but for a second or two she was not quite sure what the place was. She felt around the bed with her hands, and finding nothing that would help to tell her, she sat up and looked about her. The moonshine allowed her to see the room as clear as clear.

"I remember now," she said aloud; "I remember everything."

"You remember everything!" mocked a dozen gay, naughty little voices. "How *can* you remember everything when you don't know everything?"

"Why—why—" gasped Edda, and then said no more because what she saw was so very strange.

Sitting on the window-sill in the moonlight, and gaily swinging their wee legs, were the elfish creatures she had seen that afternoon peeping from under the toadstools.

"Oh, it 's you!" she cried. "How did you get up here?"

"Climbed the honeysuckle trellis, of course," said they, speaking all together. Indeed, had they not all spoken at once Edda could hardly have heard them, so small were their voices. As it was, she had to lean forward to make out what they were saying.

"What do you want?" she asked.

"To surprise you, of course. Don't you like surprise parties?"

"I 've never had one, you funny little things. And anyway, I would n't choose to have one in the middle of the night. Why do you swing your legs so hard?"

"We 're keeping time to the cricket's music. He 's been fiddling for us all night. He wanted to get up a dance, but the fairies had the hall as usual. They 're a piggish set."

"What makes you all speak together? And how can you all say naughty things at the same time? Do you all feel naughty at once?"

"We 're everything at the same time. It keeps things from getting mixed up. It 's been so from the beginning."

"When was the beginning?"

"Oh, a long, long way back. We 're so old it wears us out to think of it. We 've seen the old oak grow from a little tree to a big tree, and the house grow from a little house to a big house, and—"

"Why, you fib-tellers! Houses don't grow like trees."

"That 's all you know about it! This house has grown and grown."

"Perhaps you mean that grandmother has built on more rooms."

"That may be the way you say it, but we say it has grown."

"Do you come in the house every night?"

"Oh, not every night. Sometimes we go to the dairy and sour the milk; sometimes we ride on the back of the six-toed cat and make her take us miles and miles; and once we got inside the clock—your grandmother had left the door open—and made it go slow so that she missed her train the next morning. Another time we got on the well-rope and they could n't haul up the bucket; and often we dance on your grandmother's counterpane and she has dreams."

"That does n't seem a very kind or polite way to treat such a dear person as my grandmother!"

Edda was not at all pleased with these kicking, squirming little creatures or with the way they talked.

But they only laughed at her and whispered among themselves. Then, the next thing she knew, they had leaped down from the window-sill and were scampering toward her bed. They swung themselves up by way of the knitted coverlid, and then took the fringe and tickled Edda's face with it. They pulled her hair and pinched her ears. She did n't know whether to laugh at them, they were so tiny and mean, or to scold them and brush them out of the way.

She tried the scolding after a time, but they only laughed and laughed with a dry, rasping sound like dead grasses blowing in the wind. Then she tried to brush them away, but that only made them swing out in the air as spiders swing from the ends of their webs. Back and forth they went, high and low, swinging and laughing in their hateful way, now and then coming close enough to tweak at Edda's turned-up nose, or tickle her chin, or poke their sharp-pointed shoes in her dimples.

"You are mean, mean little things," she cried at

length, springing out of bed, "and I 'm going to 'tend to you—so there!"

At this the elves gave a shriek of laughter, and as Edda jumped out of bed they made a dash for the window, climbed up by way of the curtain cord, scrambled over the ledge, and began to clamber down the trellis. Edda was so vexed by this time that any one seeing her might have thought one of the trixy creatures had somehow got into her heart. Her face was red, and her eyes were shining with anger.

As she saw the teasing little creatures disappear down the trellis, and knew they were going to get away from her before she had a chance to get back at them for the way they had acted, she took her shoes and threw them, one after the other, at the flying elves. A faint gust of laughter came back to her, by which she knew she had not hit them. So, without waiting to think, and angrier than ever, she followed them out of the window.

Fortunately the trellis was a strong one, and the honeysuckle vine was old and tough, so it was no very hard task to let herself down, hand below hand. Being with bare feet made it all the easier, for her stout little toes clung hard to wires and vines.

The moon was shining wonderfully, and once, when Edda, half-way down the trellis, looked over her shoulder, she saw the garden lying in shimmering blue, as if soft veils had been dropped from the sky to where the dew-drops glistened in the grass.

At the sight of all that loveliness Edda forgot about being angry.

"What a silly I am!" she said aloud. "I ought to be ashamed of myself. But I 'll go on down and find my shoes, now I 'm started, and then go back to bed."

"If you don't go to bed until you get back your shoes, miss, you 'll be up some time, I can tell you that."

The voice came from the oak tree, and looking over at it Edda saw the same squirrel she had noticed in the afternoon. He was stroking his whiskers and smiling in a way that showed his pointed teeth.

"I thought squirrels slept at night," Edda said, not meaning to be rude, but speaking out the first thought that came to her mind.

"And I thought that little girls slept at night," retorted Bushy Tail.

"If you mean me," Edda replied, "I always have slept at night until now."

"I dare say you 've done a deal of sleeping in your time, miss. I noticed to-day when I saw you in the garden that you were a sleepy-looking child."

He said this in such a disagreeable tone of voice that Edda, to get as far away from him as possible, scrambled down the rest of the trellis. She gave a little shiver as her feet sank in the chilly, dew-covered grass, and wailed, "Oh, oh, I want my shoes!"

"I say it 's a cruel thing, the way that child is being treated," exclaimed a queer voice above her head. "She 's fallen out of the nest, that 's evident! Why does n't some one teach her how to fly back?"

Edda looked up and saw that the trunk-face of the oak tree was just above her head, and that the friendly woodpecker who had nodded at her so pleasantly that afternoon was looking out of the mouth of the face.

"Oh, is that where you live?" Edda called up.

"It 's my summer home, child," answered the woodpecker kindly. "My winter home is in an oleander tree on the banks of the Indian River. And where is your winter home, if I may ask?"

"In the Top Flat," Edda told him.

"Well, I 'm sorry about your accident. Won't you

try to fly up here and spend the rest of the night with my wife and the babies and myself? It 's odd your mother does n't come, but I suppose she has n't noticed that you 've fallen out of the nest. She 'll be looking for you the first thing in the morning when she goes worming."

"Worming?" repeated Edda wonderingly.

"Why yes, child, looking for worms, of course. You did n't think the worms came and crawled into the nest, begging to be eaten, did you?"

"We don't eat worms," protested Edda.

"You don't!" cried Red Top in astonishment. "What do you eat, then?"

"Ever so many kinds of things. I could n't begin to think of all of them—currant jelly, and oatmeal porridge, and baked sweet potatoes with sugar, and pudding with whipped cream, and—and other things."

"Well! And where does she pick up all those things, please?"

"She does n't pick them up. She orders them at the market."

"And has n't she taught you to fly?"

"We don't fly in our family," Edna said, rather ashamed of the fact.

"Well, that 's too bad," said Red Top sympathetically. "I 've often said to my wife, 'My dear, what would we do if we could n't fly?' And she never has been able to answer my question. And so, poor little girl, you really can't see your way to getting up here?"

"I 'm afraid not, thank you. And anyway, I 've got to look for my shoes."

"Those are the things you wear on your feet, are n't they? I 've noticed human beings wearing those clumsy things. It must be a great nuisance to have them come off. Mine are made right on me, and I find it very convenient."

"Well, I 've lost mine," sighed Edda, "though it 's my own fault. I was naughty and cross and threw them after those bad, bad—"

"There they go now!" shrilled the woodpecker. "Oh, why, why did n't they invite me?"

A cloud of dust arose in the garden path, and Edda heard the shouting of many little voices.

"Get out of the road, child," warned the woodpecker, "or you 'll be run over."

Two bright lights like the eyes of a wild beast shone through the dust, and as they drew nearer, Edda saw that

they were headlights on one of her shoes, which had been turned into an automobile by the clever elves. It was now ripping down the garden path at such a rate that as it swept around the corner it tipped up so that it ran on two wheels. The tonneau was overflowing with the little creatures who had caused Edda all her trouble.

She had just stepped out in the path to look after the vanishing machine when once more the woodpecker shrieked to her to look out. Edda had only time to jump in the pansy patch when the second shoe, which had also been made into a touring car and was loaded down with rowdy elves, went whirling by after the first machine.

Red Top had come out of his doorway and clung to the tree-trunk and, striking his beak angrily against the tree, complained:

"I ought to have been asked, I certainly ought! I have a dull time, that's what I do! Grubbing for worms early and late for the family is n't as funny as it sounds."

"And are you dreadfully tired?" asked Edda, feeling very sorry for him.

"Tired? Yes, I'm tired of working and having no fun. What I need is fun. I want to go off for a good

time. Come along, little girl, and go with me. It 's no use trying to have a good time alone."

"You 're very kind to ask me," Edda said, bowing, "but we 're so different. You have wings and I have n't. I 'm a hundred times bigger than you—"

The woodpecker interrupted her. "I promise solemnly not to use my wings, human child, if you 'll get yourself down into some sort of a sensible size—about my size, say."

"That would be fun, dear woodpecker, but please tell me how I can do it. I 've grown up to be this big and I can't ungrow, can I?"

"Indeed you can, child. I know a magician who is wiser and more powerful than any other magician that ever lived. Will you come with me to see him?"

"Is he very far away, woodpecker? I 'm not used to walking with bare feet; and I don't think it nice to go about in my nightdress. Besides, I 'm getting cold, you know. There are little cold feelings running up and down my back."

"I should seriously advise you to wear feathers," said Red Top. "But come! We shall see what the wisest of magicians can do for us."

At that he hopped down on to the ground, and remembering his promise that he would not use his wings, merrily bobbed up and down the garden paths before Edda, until they came to a grape arbor. The grape flowers were in bloom, and a delicious odor came floating out; within, all was moonshine, but it was several moments before Edda could see clearly enough to make out that a throne stood at the far end, and on it was the crow she had seen the day before. He had one wing thrown out in such a way that it looked as if he were wrapped in a black coat, and he wore a frown which gave him a look of great wisdom. The woodpecker bowed until his top-knot brushed the dust.

"Help, master!" he cried.

"Who asks for my help?" demanded the crow in a deep voice.

"I, Red Top the woodpecker, always your faithful servant."

"Speak, woodpecker. What is thy desire?"

"This human child, O Black Master, wishes to become the size of the garden creatures."

"Is this true, human child?" demanded the crow. He turned his eyes upon her, and it seemed as if he were

trying to look her through. Edda knew in her heart of hearts that she rather liked herself the way she was, but she hated to disappoint the woodpecker, so she said:

"Please, Black Master, make me the size of Red Top, the good woodpecker."

"Your deed be upon your head!" cried the crow. And at that he arose and spread out his wings until he looked—at least to Edda—almost as large as an eagle. Then, flapping his wings back and forth and making a great noise and a darkness, he shouted:

"Willo, wallo, wello, wink,
Shrivel, mortal child, and shrink
Faster than a cat can wink.
Willo, wallo, wello, wink!"

After he had gone through this once he cried, "And now, once more, all together." So Edda and the woodpecker joined their voices with his.

"Yet a third time," he commanded.

At that, the squirrel, who had suddenly appeared, and who seemed to think the whole thing very amusing, joined in with his sharp, disagreeable voice.

While all this was going on, Edda had the strangest

sort of feelings. She found herself growing smaller and smaller until, by the time they were all quiet again, she was no taller than the woodpecker. Indeed, she had to look up to see the end of his beautiful top-knot.

"I 'm just as cold as ever," she whispered to the woodpecker. "You 'd think I 'd be warmer, now there is n't so much of me to be cold."

"Shall it be feathers?" the woodpecker whispered back. "While we 're asking for something, we may as well get the best."

"Oh, no, no, dear Red Top, not feathers! I could n't change them, and I 'm used to making changes, you know."

"Just as you please, of course, but I will say this for feathers—"

"Don't!" Edda said, shaking her head. "No feathers for me."

"Very well, then." And once more bowing before the crow he said, "O Black Master, one more wish have I."

"Speak, then, and freely."

"Cover this human child with clothes after the fashion of her kind, I pray you."

"Thou makest it hard for me, O woodpecker, for have not her kind countless fashions? Which one does she choose?"

Edda was about to ask for a pink dress and a hat with rosebuds, such as her mamma had made for her, when the woodpecker broke in with "Dress her like a brown leaf, so that the hunters won't shoot her."

And at that the crow once more spread his wings and sang:

"Uppery, duppery, dippery, down,
Clothe this human child in brown,—
Shoes and hat and coat and gown.
Uppery, duppery, dippery, down."

And the next moment there she stood, warmly and well clad from her pointed russet shoes to the little round leather cap above her curls.

"Have I a third wish, Black Master?" inquired the woodpecker, evidently having something in mind which he desired for himself.

"Thou knowest, O woodpecker, that each garden creature may ask of me three favors a month. Speak then—but it is the last wish to be granted until next full moon."

But at that Edda cried:

"Oh, please, please, dear woodpecker, do not use up your last wish!"

"And why not, pray?" asked the woodpecker, reprovingly.

"Keep it to wish me back with," the little girl begged. "I shan't want to stay this size always. My mamma never would know me the way I am now. Please, please, dear Red Top!"

The woodpecker nodded his head kindly.

"You really are such a very dear child," he responded, "that I can refuse you nothing. Black Master, I hold my third wish for the future."

And he and Edda, with many thanks, backed from the arbor. Now that she was smaller than the squirrel he seemed to be rather a terrible beast, but Edda tried not to be afraid of him. He had nothing to say to her, but he looked at her from the corner of his eye, meantime stroking his whiskers and acting as if he were thinking of something very disagreeable.

She was on the point of asking him what the matter really was, and why he did not like her, when a great clamor arose, made by the returning automobiles. As

they came racing back they looked so huge to Edda, tiny as she now was, that it seemed impossible thev had once been her shoes.

She hoped the elves would drive by without seeing her; but this was not to be. All in brown though she was, they caught sight of her, and brought the machines to a standstill, while the chauffeurs took off their glasses to take a closer look at her.

"Come," they all called, beckoning to her, "come, Edda and Red Top! Have a ride! We 're off for a race around the garden, and we 're to call on the fairy queen."

The woodpecker accepted the invitation without a moment's delay.

"Come along," he said to Edda, pulling at her sleeve with his beak. "It 's your only chance! You may never have an automobile ride again."

"Pooh!" said Edda, "I 've had many of them already."

"Not in an automobile like these," he insisted, which was, of course, quite true.

She still held back, but no one paid any attention to that. They hustled and bustled her, and the first thing she knew she was packed in with the noisy little elves,

with the woodpecker on one side, and, to her disgust, with the squirrel on the other.

"To the fairy queen's!" the others shouted, while Edda, shy and ashamed, sat among them, holding her breath as the machine ripped through ant hills, plunged around the corners, and brought up at last by the water-lily pond.

CHAPTER III

AS the shoe-automobile swung up to the edge of Water-Lily Pond the fireflies that had kindly acted as lamps jumped down to help the company find its way to the flatboats which lay moored beneath the sedges. To be sure, the moon was shining brightly, but the elves and their friends were creeping along beneath the shrubbery, and it was shadowy there.

One of the elves—a long, thin fellow named Whist—led the way, crying to them in his dry little voice, "Come on, come on!"

Red Top offered a wing to help Edda along, and he handed her into one of the boats. Edda thought it was stretching a point to call them boats. They were really rafts, made of great mullen leaves, without so much as a thread to hold to.

"I 'll be slipping off if I 'm not careful," thought the little girl, "and then no one ever would know what became of me. If I drowned and my body was washed

ashore, probably no one would ever see it—I 'm so small. They 'd think it was a sparrow that had been killed in a thunder storm."

But no one had any intention of letting her fall into the water, it appeared. The elves sat all about her, the woodpecker spread one wing in back of her in a protecting way, and the squirrel hunched up against her, now and then poking her disagreeably in the ribs. The moon shone so wonderfully that as Edda looked up it almost seemed as if clouds of brightness were tumbling down, one after the other, like scarfs of silver. A few stars managed to make themselves seen above all the shine and glory, but they had hard work to attract any attention in such moonlight as that.

"Night seems to be even nicer than day," said Edda to Whist. "I believe you have more sense than I have. It 's really better to sleep daytimes and play at night."

But if there was anything in which the elves did not believe it was "sense," and at the word they so laughed, and fell against each other, and poked at little Edda's ribs, and tickled her with feathery grasses, that she almost cried.

"I don't see how you can bear to be so bad!" she said, hating to speak out like that to their faces, but not knowing what else to do.

At this they began singing at the top of their voices:

"We like to be bad, ho hay, ho hay!
We 're glad we are bad, alway, alway!
We are glad and bad and mad all day!
Ho hay, ho hay, he ho hay!"

All this made Edda feel very lonely. Being by herself in the Top Flat with only Bubbles and Adelaide Alice was nothing to being in a crowd of creatures who jeered and mocked her, and put her off to one side as if she were a silly goose! But for the wing of the woodpecker, who now crept a bit closer, she would have wept into her handkerchief. It was a mercy, when one came to think of it, that the crow had not forgotten to give her a handkerchief when he was fitting her out so quickly in her present clothes. She had wondered if he had remembered, and had put her hand in the pocket of her blouse to see. There it was, sure enough. Edda decided that the crow must be a grown-up being, for grown-ups always were in a state of mind about handkerchiefs. It seemed

to Edda that she never started to go anywhere, but some one called after her:

"Have you a clean pocket handkerchief?"

Well, she had one, and so she was at liberty to cry if she thought best. Yet how much good could a wee rag of that size do, she wondered. She was almost tempted to cry to see what size her tears would be, and she thought it odd that things should still look so dreadfully small to her, when her eyes, as well as the rest of her body, had been made as tiny as possible.

"I suppose my eyes are about the size of pin points," she thought; and remembered with a sigh that she used to feel pleased when she heard folks say:

"What large eyes that little girl has!"

While she was doing all this thinking the elves, who found that she was not so easy to tease as they had thought she would be, were chattering away among themselves. She tried to make out what they were saying, but they seemed not to be talking English at all, but to be speaking some other tongue that grumbled and growled deep in their throats, almost like the croaking of frogs.

"It 's the old tongue," whispered Red Top to her. "They are as old as the Earth, and they speak words no

bird or human can understand. I think it sounds as if they were choking on worms."

"Here we are!" cried Whist. "We 're at the water-gate of the palace."

Edda sat still for a moment, with little thrills running all over her. They really were at the palace of the fairy queen! Many a time she had dreamed of hearing such words as these, and something in her heart told her that all little girls dreamed of such things. But here she really was, she, Edda, at the very gate, and she was not asleep at all, but was wide, wide awake, though it was the middle of the night!

They all began to get off the boats, and Edda crowded along with the others. Two grasshoppers, with glittering chains about their necks, held the planks on which they walked. Edda expected, of course, to step on land, but when she could look about her she saw that she was walking on to the white leaf of a great water-lily. She had noticed the beautiful odor that filled the air, but had not taken time to think what it meant. All was so wonderful this night that the scent might indeed have been the scent of the moonshine itself. But now she knew that it was the water-lily, and as she put her tiny feet on

the white petal she seemed to tread on perfumed white velvet. Above her rose the other leaves of the great flower, reaching up and up, and Edda could see little veins of pink and purple running through them, and with her tiny eyes, which saw so much more than her larger human eyes had been able to see, she noticed that the whiteness shone almost like crystal. The elves seemed to fumble into the heart of the flower, like bees, and Edda did as they did. In a moment or two she found herself at the top of a flight of pale green stairs, made of something that looked like glass. The stairs twisted and turned and turned and twisted, and she remembered what she had heard said about the fairy queen living down in the pond at the foot of a water-lily stem. Her little heart beat like a watch—whizzed and tripped and pounded—as she ran down the stairs with all the others.

She found herself in a long green hall of glass, and through the walls she could see out into the pond, where queer little animals were floating, and grasses with bell-shaped flowers were nodding, and little soft things, that might have been living creatures or might have been weeds, swayed back and forth. Edda was so full of wonder she could not keep her mouth shut. She knew it

was not nice to go around with her mouth open, and she tried to press her lips together, but they kept flying apart in spite of all she could do.

The elves were behaving better than Edda had thought possible. It seemed now that they had come upon some sort of an errand. They were pushing Whist forward and telling him that he was the one who must do the talking, and were telling Bushy Tail the squirrel and Red Top the woodpecker that they must go with Whist to give him their help. There were rows of beetles, dressed in shining green, with stars in their coats, standing in solemn line along each side of the hall, and they told the elves to make themselves into a proper procession. This they did, and two by two all of them marched along, Edda following with Red Top, behind Whist and Bushy Tail, until they came into a great chamber with an arching roof, where, at the far end, on a little glittering throne of glass, with candles burning all about her and wee golden flowers at her feet, sat Goldheart, queen of all the fairies.

Whist went forward and knelt before her throne. The queen raised a little golden wand and said:

"Speak, elf!"

Whist stammered and choked with embarrassment, but the queen smiled upon him kindly, and after a time he made bold to say that he had come to her with a complaint from all the elves.

"O queen," he said, "you know that when the garden creatures built the Moonlight Dancing Hall that it was agreed that we should have it turn and turn about."

"True, elf."

"And last night you were dancing in it, O queen, and now again to-night it is to be yours! And this, surely, is the finest night of the whole summer. We are the old, old people, but never have we seen a finer night. We are moved to dance. Our heels are tickling. Moreover, we have with us a human child made down into convenient size, and we wish to dance with her."

"Indeed, honored elf," said the queen in a voice which sounded to Edda like the chiming of little bells, "there is some mistake here. We fairies were not at the Moonlight Dancing Hall last night. We knew that it was your night, and we busied ourselves with a regatta upon the pond. Our fleet of rose-leaf boats was hurriedly finished for the occasion. Ourselves rode alone, drawn by fireflies, and followed by barges bearing our maids of

honor. About us were our royal guard of goldfish, and our makers of songs. We did not go near the dance hall."

Up to this moment the elves, as has been said, behaved themselves very well. But now they forgot all

QUEEN GOLDHEART IN HER ROSE-LEAF BOAT

about being in the royal presence and broke into a shocking clamor and chattering. The queen rose on her throne to command silence, and her green beetles, who acted as men-at-arms, rushed in with staves and dashed about among the elves, trying to restore order. Edda thought

they all seemed foolish enough, but the scene grew a thousand times more confused when out of little jeweled doors leading to other chambers rushed a whole tribe of fairy folk. Glittering and swift as humming birds, they spun round and round, making such a noise that if a thousand crickets and as many more grasshoppers had all joined together it could not have been worse. Edda had to put her hands to the side of her head, for all these sharp little high noises made pains come into her human ears, which were made for hearing sounds of a different sort. Indeed, some of the noises were so fine and high that if she had not been made over by the crow she never could have heard them at all.

Moreover, something was rising in her heart. She could not have given it a name. She did not know what it was. But it was a sort of power—and a knowing that she had the power—to make both elves and fairies obey her. So at last, when she could endure the confusion no longer, she sprang upon the steps of the throne and at the top of her voice cried:

"Silence!"

It was a word her mamma had sometimes used when Edda grew too boisterous.

There was something in the human tone of her voice which made every creature in the room listen.

"Her Majesty wishes to speak," said Edda with great dignity. And turning to the queen, and bowing low, she said: "Speak, O queen!"

The queen swept forward to the very edge of the dais, and her sweet voice seemed to trickle down the hall as water trickles over pebbles.

"Something very strange has happened," she said, "and we must all be patient until we have learned what it is. I had supposed there was no creature in all the garden whom I did not know, from the kind woman with the green eyes to the horned snail behind the garden house. Yet it seems that not one but many strangers are among us. They have taken our hall; they have danced and made merry there; they have masqueraded as the Little People. But fear not, I shall find out these intruders and learn by what right they come where they are not invited. Meantime, elves, I bid you and your guests to our ball to-night. As for the guest of honor, that shall be this human child."

She motioned for Edda to approach, and Edda knelt at her feet.

"How comes it, O child, that you are of so agreeable a size? Fairies have stolen human children before now, but they always were in a terrible fume about their being so large and clumsy. You, however, are as small and neat as any fairy of us all."

"I 'm only made small for a very little while, dear queen," Edda replied. "I should n't like to stay this way very long, so if you are really going to have a ball I hope it may be soon, for I shall soon be going back into my own self again."

The queen raised a pair of gold lorgnettes and looked at Edda long and hard.

"Come," she said, "you seem an interesting child. Are you?"

"I don't know," said Edda in rather a silly way. There were hundreds of little creatures listening, and she could hear the elves giggling at the question.

"Don't you interest yourself?" asked the queen.

Edda nodded, and felt herself blushing redder and redder.

"Then you 'll probably interest me. Come, child, walk with me, and tell me all the story of your life."

"Oh, are we going on a *very* long walk?"

"Only into the next room; but there 'll be plenty of time for you to tell me everything, I dare say. I must see you properly clothed, you know."

She held out her hand to Edda and led the way from the room. Behind them came the maids of honor, and before them stalked two shining beetles, who swung wide the shining doors. They had entered Goldheart's bedroom, and Edda saw, standing on a platform in the center of the room, a tiny bed of green glass with four high bed posts and a canopy of changeable blue and green silk.

"And now," said the queen kindly, "choose your own frock, human child, and while you are being dressed you must tell me everything you know."

It seemed quite too bad that Edda should have to answer questions when she was burning to ask them, but though there never had been any fairy queens at the Top Flat she had been told enough about them to know that they must be obeyed. Besides, she really was one of the best-meaning children in the world, and was in the habit of obeying. So she talked as hard and as fast as she could, and it 's really a fact that, by talking so fast that her tongue ached, she was able, by the time the maids had clothed her in a moonlight-blue satin, hung over with

threads of silver delicate as cobwebs, to tell Goldheart almost everything there was to tell about herself.

"You are both good and beautiful," said the queen, as if that settled it forever, "and if I have my way you shall always live with me here in my Palace-beneath-the-Pond, and be my friend."

At this a great fear came up in Edda's heart. Beautiful as the fairies were she knew they could never take the place of her own dear people, and she was about to say so when there came a terrible outcry from the throne room.

The doors were thrown open violently and a beetle put in his head.

"The strangers, your Majesty!" he shrieked. "They are at the water-gate! There is an attack!"

"Arm yourself! Arm yourself, O queen!" cried the maids of honor as they ran to bring breastplate and helmet. But the queen waved them aside and with Edda hastened to the outer room.

The sight Edda saw there was not soon to be forgotten. Both elves and fairies were moving back against the walls of the hall as a great company of little creatures marched in. They were somewhat taller than either the

water fairies or the elves, and were clad in gray and green. Some of them were so old their whiskers hung to their knees, but all looked strong and fierce and proud. At their head was a young fairy prince, slender and beautiful.

Goldheart went forward, hand in hand with Edda.

"Speak, O strangers!" she cried. "I would know your errand and your name. If you are guests, you are welcome; if you are foes, let me know why."

The prince bowed low.

"Goldheart, queen of the water fairies," he said, "I am prince of the rock fairies; and I have journeyed far to do you honor."

"But was it you, sir, who, without our permission, danced last night in Moonlight Hall?"

"Indeed, queen, no offense was meant. We are twilight people, and we know little of the delight of dancing by the rays of the moon. Always for us, in all the ages, the twilight has been our only time for going abroad. As I told you, we have come far—how we came is a story you must hear some other time—but we walked later than was our custom that we might reach this garden and rest. By merest accident we came upon your hall, beautifully lighted, trimmed with flowers, and flooded

with music. Before we knew it we were within. We waited for the true guests to arrive, but they did not come. So we danced the night away. And by that token a marvelous thing has happened to us. We have fallen under the spell of the moonlight, too, and because of that we are all the more your friends. No longer shall folk hear us crying in sedges and lone places at close of day—we who have been the sad people among the fairies. Now we mean to dance and laugh with you—that is, if your Majesty will give your consent."

"We all shall go to the dancing hall," said the queen. "There we shall pass the night away with dancing, and singing, and telling tales. And the first tale, prince of the rock fairies, shall be yours. To the hall!"

She raised her scepter, and with one accord all of the company turned toward the stairway. Mounting it, they came out from the heart of the lily, and plunged among flowers and leaves. Then, passing over little bridges and along paths, laughing and twirling in the moonlight, they came to a place beneath the oak with the strange face in its rough bark.

Here Edda saw something which she never was able to quite explain, even to Aunt Caroline. It was a

palace made of moonbeams. The high-spanned roof, the painted walls, the seats for the musicians, the floor upon which they danced, were each and every one of pale blue moonbeams. She put out her hand to touch them, and they felt solid and sure.

"It 's a dream," she sighed. "It can't be true."

"Nothing is too beautiful to be true," answered Goldheart. "If you believe in it, Edda, it is true. Listen!"

Then Edda, for the first time, heard fairy music, which you must know is like the winding of silver horns and the blowing of golden trumpets and the falling of crystal chains. She was to scent again the fairy odors; she was to look at everything through the mystic fairy light. Thrice they all marched about the glowing hall, and then the prince of the strangers gave his hand to Goldheart. An old, old stranger led Edda out into the dance.

He had eyes so old and so kind that they might have been little stars set in his head, and when he laughed it sounded as if joy were the oldest thing in the world, and when he spoke it seemed as if Edda never had done anything else but listen to him.

CHAPTER IV

GOLDHEART took her place on the throne and with an imperial gesture begged Prince Pietro to seat himself upon her right. Then with the loveliest smile imaginable she begged Edda to sit upon her left. As for the old, old stranger, whose name, Edda had learned, was Flint-spark, he sank down on the steps of the throne. The water fairies, the rock fairies, and the elves, as many as could, threw themselves upon the cushioned benches which ran around the walls of the hall, and when these all were occupied, the remainder crowded the little flower-hung galleries, or swarmed about the rim of the fountain that babbled in the center of the hall.

With a smile the queen raised her wand, and instantly the softest and most delicate music came from the pipes of the musicians. It was a melody the like of which Edda never had heard, and it seemed to be made of little low sounds like the growing of grass and the

breathing of bees, the sighs of ladybugs who had lost their way home, and the falling of dew on the petals of roses. As it went on, Edda felt herself caring less and less about turning back into a little girl and more and more content to stay in a condition where such things could be seen and heard as she now was seeing and hearing.

When the music had ceased the queen rose and said, smilingly:

"We fairies are a people who love the telling of tales as well as we love dancing. Since before man wrote we have told our tales, and when man began to write he had, for a long time, no better ideas than those we put into his head. Indeed, had he kept to our ideas he might have been much happier than he is, and laughed much oftener, for I and others have noticed that since he stopped listening to us, and telling stories of us, he has grown sad, and heavy of foot, and he sits into the night holding his head in his hands and thinking thoughts which bring wrinkles into his face. All day he runs here and there, and worries and sweats and rasps, carrying out ideas about work and duty. But we are wiser, and the tales we love are still tales of joy. To-night we have with us Prince Pietro. who has brought hither, from very far, the Twilight

People of the Rocks. He has promised to tell us a tale of adventure. Dear Prince Pietro, speak, and we listen."

The prince rose and bowed low before her; nay, he lifted her jeweled hand and kissed it with worship. Then he spoke, and his words were those of a great prince.

"O queen of the water fays," he said, "it is not the custom of our royal house to incur the fatigue of telling our own tales. Flint-spark, who sits at your feet, is our minstrel, skilled in his art, and weighted with the tale of all the things that ever we knew or did. Condescend to have a harp brought, and we 'll listen while he sings."

At these proud words the face of Goldheart flushed slightly, for she felt that she was in the presence of a prince loftier and haughtier than herself, but she said nothing beyond commanding one of the beetles to bring a harp. So with all speed he brought a harp of gold, with emeralds shining from its head. When the old minstrel had taken it in his hands he lifted up his wrinkled face, with his gray hair and beard falling all about him, and stood as still as stone until all the creatures in the hall were silent. He struck some low, sweet notes upon the strings, which made the elves and fays quiver as if a wind had blown over them, and began:

"Deep in the heart of old gray rocks we dwell,
We who were old a thousand years ago;
And we have played about the paths of man,
And in the twilight filled his heart with dreams.
Were I to sing until the cruel cock
Cries out to bring our pleasures to a close,
I could not tell you all our history;
Therefore I only sing to tell you how
We came to leave our rock-home by the sea,
And 'mong the homes of men a thousand miles
Go creeping, till we found this guarded spot.
It chanced one day, the lady of this place,
The one with emerald eyes and fairy heart,
Went journeying as far as the green sea,
And with her went one of your company,
Your little Fire-in-mist, a restless fay.
In Mistress Cara's chatelaine she hid,
And went with her half-way across the world."

"And so," broke in the queen, quite forgetting herself, "that 's where that little witch went, was it? Not a thing have I seen of her from that day to this, and I must say it would be a little awkward if she were to come back now, for I 've given her clothes away to Robin, who is a regular rag-picker, and her shoes went to the centipede—though of course she had n't enough to fit him out

completely. He 's nearly crazy, poor thing—ten children to provide for, and they with a hundred feet apiece! He actually likes them to be sick sometimes to save shoe leather."

Prince Pietro was not pleased to have the chief minstrel of his royal house interrupted in this manner, and he arose with dignity and said:

"O queen, the minstrel has failed to please you. Command your musicians to play, and we will dance."

But Goldheart, who, though her ideas sometimes ran this way and that, brightly, like water, came of a family as high as the clouds and as old as the sea, and she arose and asked the prince to pardon her. Then she caused a cup of mead brewed by her fays to be brought to the old musician. When he had drunk it, he again began to sing.

"Once on the sands, your Fire-in-mist escaped,
And to the oysters ran to beg some pearls;
Went sailing on the Spanish men-of-war,
And yachted with a reckless nautilus.
Then one still day when slow rain fell at sea,
And all the shallows lay in calm and sighed,
She found our place among the tumbled rocks,
Took off her things, and said she 'd come to stay."

"Well," broke in the queen, eager to defend her lady-in-waiting, "I don't see that that was such a liberty! She naturally counted on being made welcome!"

"Since she was there," muttered Whist, "she might as well take off her things."

"I 'm afraid he is n't very much of a minstrel, after all," whispered Red Top to Edda. He had been creeping closer and closer to the little girl, and now he hung his beak over her shoulder in a sentimental manner.

The old minstrel was deeply offended at all this chattering. He wagged his beard and struck a really terrific blow upon his harp, so that the waves of sound rolling out from it shook the fairy palace as if an earthquake had come.

"How these people startle one!" thought the fairy queen, and because she was a water fairy all her thoughts shone through her as if she had been crystal, and the prince, reading this thought, grew somewhat offended too and drew his gray robe, which was embroidered with the most exquisite fairy lichen, closer about his shoulders.

The minstrel went on with his story, singing it in a voice that rose and fell like the sound of the sea in rocky caverns.

"A babbling thing this water fairy seemed,
Who, talking ever, still was never done;
But since her hair was golden in the sun,
Her eyes like pebbles shining in a pool,
Her two feet made for dancing all the day,
We listened to her and we were bewitched."

At this the queen shot a sidelong glance at the prince. It came to her mind that he might have traveled all this way for no other purpose than to ask the hand of her lady-in-waiting, Fire-in-mist, in marriage. For some reason this thought made her unhappy, and she was glad when the minstrel took up his song again and thus saved her the need of speaking.

"She told us of this garden 'neath the oak,
And how the summer seemed to linger here.
She said the flowers gave perfume all the night,
And in the oak a kindly dryad dwelt.
And hence, because we were so very tired
Of cold gray rocks and ever-sounding sea,
We begged your fay to bring us to this place:
She gave her word, and all our tribe set out."

At this point the prince, who really was very young though indeed he did n't like to admit it, sprang

from his seat and began talking rapidly to the queen.

"Really, my Lady Goldheart," he cried, "you should have seen us! We were *such* a company! The shoemaker was so old we had literally to pry him away from the rock. He had grown to it like moss. The court embroiderer, who worked this lichen on my robe, refused to come unless we could bring along all his patterns, and it took us days and days selecting the samples and pealing it off the rocks. Then there was such a to-do about leaving some sea-urchin friends of ours, and a number of soft-shell crabs came in a body to protest! The only person who really was glad was old Jimson, the lighthouse keeper. We had tormented him enough, he said, flying around his lamp like moths and when he was lighting it, taking advantage to get in under the glass; for you can't burn rock fairies, you know, any more than you can drown water fays. When we 'd see him walking on the sands we 'd whisper things in his ears, and he 'd think he was losing his senses; and we 'd dance about at twilight in the bushes, and he 'd think he saw us, and then he 'd think he did n't. You can't do much when you get a number of human beings together, but if you can get one off alone like that you can lead him quite a life."

At this, two old rock fairies, twin sisters and the court dressmakers, who had been rocking back and forth slowly, with their hands clasped before them, looked up and said mournfully:

"You can so."

"Prince," implored the old minstrel, "am I not to finish my song?"

"Well, Tetro, I suppose you must—for the glory of our house. My father always used to tell me I was to be very careful of the glory of our house," he said to the queen.

"Why is he not here, prince? Do the fairies of your tribe die?"

"Oh, no, no," cried the prince, violently, "I would n't go so far as to say that!"

And tens and dozens of the rock fairies joined their voices, and said that none of them would go so far as to say that.

"But father went off one day on a sea horse—many and many of the old people went along with him. It was an adventure. But they never returned."

"Why, then," demanded Goldheart, "do you not call yourself the king, since your father has not returned?"

The prince looked distressed.

"Well, there," he said, "do you know, I forgot all about that? I 'm always overlooking things, and that 's simply one of the things that slipped my mind."

"But master, royal master—" implored the minstrel.

"Now see here, Tetro, don't worry any more about that old song of yours, that 's a good fellow! Just put in your time composing a coronation ode for me. Does n't it seem to you, Queen Goldheart, that this palace would be a fine place for my coronation? The preparations will be just the thing for my work people. Trade is terribly slack just now, and we can set every one at work making costumes and shoes and jewels."

"But, royal master—"

"You can't do a thing with Tetro once you get him started. He feels you must know the rest of the history of our hegira. Ahem—hegira! Fine word, is n't it? But really, I can tell it much quicker. We came through forests—"

"Beneath the shadows of the solemn pines—"

broke in Tetro, twanging his harp so that it sounded like a rising storm.

"And along hundreds of miles of dusty road and the awfullest field-stubble—"

"With bleeding feet and tears that flecked the dust—"

bawled the old minstrel, shaking his forked beard.

"Nothing of the sort, Tetro!" cried the prince angrily. "No one's feet bled, and no one wept, so far as I know. We only walked at twilight, and there was always something new to see. It was very entertaining. But when we got to the public drinking fountain at a little town in the western foothills of the Alleghenies, a shocking thing happened."

At this the two dressmakers threw up their hands and hissed:

"Sh—sh—sh-h-h!"

"Those two are the easiest shocked of any of us," explained the prince, "though all of us are easily shocked."

"What shocked you, please?" inquired Edda, speaking out for the first time. The prince turned to Goldheart.

"Ought we to tell the child?" he asked.

"Do get on, noble prince," pleaded Goldheart.

"Edda will soon be a little girl again, and then she will forget all she has heard to-night, so you can't do her any harm."

"Well, at that common drinking fountain," went on the prince, "was a little low-born imp of a water fairy—a mere underling paid to tickle the horses' noses when they came to drink, and to sit on the edge of the drinking cup and make the children choke—and if you please, your waiting lady, Fire-in-mist, fell in love with him, married him, and lives there by the fountain. There are a couple of cotton-wood trees there, and a few ferns, and she makes out with those. I believe she 's got in with a set of river fays near at hand, and has them to keep her from getting lonesome."

"She was a little spoiled, I 'm afraid," murmured Goldheart apologetically. "A public fountain! But I dare say it 's a merry enough life!"

"Upon a peasant lad she fixed her heart,"

sang Tetro, letting out a line of the poetry that was all coiled up in him like a spider's web.

"Well, and so," continued the prince, "we had to come on alone. If it had n't been for Ahasuerus, our

astrologer, we never should have found the way. He took nightly observations."

Again the twin court dressmakers sat up and said: "He did so."

"So, by hook and crook, we got here."

"By field and fen, by gorge and mountain height,"

wailed Tetro.

"Do be quiet, Tetro," cried the prince, completely out of patience. Seeing that they would not be chidden, dozens and dozens of reckless young fairies dashed upon Tetro, took the harp from him, and laughingly pushed him down on the steps of the throne. One pleasant-faced young rock fairy brought the old minstrel a pipe filled with a sort of seaweed, and soon Tetro was as contented as he could be. The two dressmakers, who loved a smoke but dared not take it, came over and sat by him—one on each side—where they could sniff his pipe, and the three old people rocked back and forth in perfect contentment.

Every one else was impatient to dance, and seeing this, the queen commanded her musicians to play. Edda would have liked to dance with the fairy prince, but he took out Queen Goldheart. All the other handsome

young fairies had chosen beautiful partners, and Edda sat alone on the throne, feeling as if she were not really in the party at all. By and by partners began to present themselves, but they were the minstrel, the astrologer, and the court shoemaker, all so old that they were almost bent double, and all having long white beards and claw-like hands. As they had presented themselves at precisely the same moment Edda said to each in turn, politely:

"I 'd love to dance with you if these other gentlemen had not asked me."

"Dear me," said the astrologer, "how unfortunate it all is! At this rate Edda 'll have no dances at all. Can't we think of some kind of a dance in which we four can take part?" And before she could say a word, the court shoemaker cried out, "There 's ring-around-a-rosy!"

They seized on the idea—though it seemed to Edda only a very small idea—with great joy, and the next thing she knew she and the three old men were whirling around and around the hall almost as fast as a potter's wheel, the long gray beards lashing against Edda's face and the bony fingers holding her so tightly she could n't get away.

The band was playing a piece called "Thistle-

Down," and indeed, all the dancers seemed to drift and float like the white seeds of the dandelion in a summer wind. They were in the very midst of this, dancing so swiftly and madly that Edda felt as if she were herself turning into down, when a shrill, horrid sound broke upon the company. At once the instruments began to quaver, the dancers to move more slowly, and the wonderful blue-moonlight palace to grow whiter.

Again the shocking sounds struck their ears and shuddered through them, and the fairies put up their hands to shut them out. Then every one stood still, staring, for the palace was growing paler every moment. The walls seemed to be melting away; the throne wavered like a candle in the wind; the queen was trembling where she stood. Edda alone did not tremble. She seemed to be growing warmer and larger, and a feeling which can only be described as "at homeness" began to steal over her.

Then once again the sound—"Cock-a-doo-da-loo!" It was grandmother's rooster, Jack Pheasant.

Edda laughed—and then the next moment gasped, for the fairies were hurrying from the palace as fast as they could fly—all tribes, ages, conditions—the queen

leaning on her ladies-in-waiting, the prince supporting the court dressmakers, Red Top and Bushy Tail holding their sides with laughter.

"Come, come," they cried to Edda. "The night is over. You must run to the crow and be made over again."

"Oh, yes, yes," Edda said, suddenly caring nothing for fairies, and having only one desire—to be a little girl again in her dear grandmother's house. So the three ran out of the palace just as the last beautiful moonshimmer died out of its walls, and as they left the door they saw a slender green creature, with a beautiful, shy, wild face, leaping from one of the window-sills of the palace.

"It 's the dryad of the oak tree," said Red Top. "She 's been listening. She ought to have sent in her card and been properly presented."

The three of them ran down the path as fast as they could, and they were immensely surprised to meet the crow, hurrying along with Edda's shoes in his hand and her nightdress over his arm.

"Here, child!" he screamed. "Get into these, quick! Here, behind this hazel bush with you!"

Edda ran behind the hazel bush, wondering what she, at her present size, was to do with shoes of that size

and a nightdress. But as the crow, the woodpecker, and the squirrel all stood without, yelling, "Get them on quick, Edda, do!" she did as she was told, and the wonder was to find that she fitted into the nightgown, and was perfectly comfortable in the shoes. She stepped from behind the hazel bush, expecting to see her friends waiting for her, but instead, she stepped into her own bedroom, and there was Aunt Caroline with a little tray of fruit in her hand coming into the room.

"Eat these, Edda," she said, "before you get up. It 's such fun to do things like that when you 're visiting. I 'm over very early, for your uncle had to leave on the six-thirty train, quite unexpectedly. I think I 'll stay here with you and mother for the next few days. Did you have a pleasant night, dear?"

Edda looked straight in Aunt Caroline's gray-green eyes.

"Did you know the rock fairies had come to visit the water fairies?" she asked.

Just then the voice of grandmother was heard outside the door, asking for Edda.

Aunt Caroline raised her finger.

"Sh-sh-sh!" said she.

CHAPTER V

NEVER had Edda passed such a day as she was to pass this day. The truth is, very few things had happened back in the Top Flat. It was, perhaps, as dull a place as a little girl could find, and the whole trouble lay in the fact that there was no work there for Edda to do, and that she really did not know how to play.

At grandmother's house, however, there was something to do all the time. Of course one could stop to rest, but to rest after one is tired is as interesting as it can be. There was a maid to help grandmother, but she was busy in the dairy and in the kitchen, which left the beautiful living-room, and the dining-room with its old china and silver, and all the bedrooms, and the garden for the others to look after. Edda stood on one side of the beds and Aunt Caroline on the other, and they made them so carefully there was not a wrinkle to be seen. Then there was the dainty, busy process which grandmother called

"brushing up," and "tidying." At this Edda and Aunt Caroline helped, and it took quite a while, because when Edda got to dusting she found such charming things that she could not bring herself to pass them by. She had to lift off the cover of the rose jar and smell the potpourri; she asked permission to open the doors of the little cabinet and to look at the treasures inside—at the little old man carved in ivory, sitting under a peple tree; at the string of little ivory elephants; at the blown ostrich egg in a nest of seaweed; at the fan with butterflies painted on it; and at the gold snuffbox that had belonged to Great-great-grandfather Bartlett, who knew LaFayette.

Grandmother had many stories to tell Edda about her kinfolk, and about the time when she was a little girl, and about the things she meant to give Edda sometime. At last, however, everything was attended to inside the house, and then they put on sun hats and went out into the garden. Grandmother gave Edda a basket with a pair of blunt scissors in it and told her that she was to help Aunt Caroline select the flowers to put in the vases—the tall Chinese vases, and the little Bohemian-glass vases, and the earthen vases grandfather had seen a man make in Cuba.

All through breakfast and while they were working in the house, Edda had half forgotten about the things that had happened to her the night before. She almost thought they were dreams, only brighter and wilder and more interesting than most dreams, but the first thing Aunt Caroline said when they were out in the garden was:

"Why, mother, whatever can have happened to that honeysuckle that runs up to Edda's window? It seems to be torn from the trellis here and there as if a cat, or something even larger—and very much clumsier—had been climbing up it."

Edda laughed and wrinkled up her little nose.

"I slid down it in the night," she said, "when the elves ran away with my shoes. They used them for automobiles, and it was only just before morning that I got them back again."

Grandmother laughed and said nothing. She thought Edda was telling her stories to amuse her. Aunt Caroline was busy looking at the gravel by the water-lily pond.

"It looks very much mussed up around here," she said. "I shall have to get the rake and smooth it over."

"Oh, that," cried Edda, "is where the elves got in

the boat to go to the water fairies' palace. I went with them, you know; and afterward they took me to the Moonlight Palace."

"You will be writing books, next, my dear," said grandmother kindly. "I used to think when your Aunt Caroline was little that she would write books. But she has been so busy doing other things—looking after her old mother and other folk—that she has n't had time for anything else."

"Well, I 've had plenty of time to *tell* stories, even if I have n't had time to write them," Aunt Caroline said. She sighed, too, but as if she had n't meant to, and Edda looked up at her and read in her eyes that it was a sorrow to her that she had n't made those story-books. There always seemed to be something back of what Aunt Caroline said. Her mind was like a pleasant road that kept winding on and on, and as you made your way along it you never knew where you were going to stop. Edda was very young, but she was not too young to feel that Aunt Caroline was somehow different from any one else she had known. Although "the lady with green eyes" lived in the world about her, she knew of certain secret doors that opened into other worlds.

"It does seem to me," said grandmother as they passed under the oak, "that the old tree is not looking as well as usual this year. There are yellow leaves on it here and there, and it seems to be drooping as if it were sick in some way."

"Do trees get sick, grandmother?"

"Indeed they do, Edda. I am something of a tree doctor, I think, but really, I don't know what to do with my old oak. Have you noticed, Caroline, that the oak is drooping?"

It must have been imagination, but at that moment it seemed to Edda that the little green creature with the shy, wild face looked out of a cleft in the oak and motioned anxiously for them to come on. Edda dragged her Aunt Caroline up nearer to the tree, but when they reached the place where Edda thought she had seen the dryad there was nothing but the rent in the tree-trunk. Something heaved a deep sigh, but that might have been nothing more than the wind in the branches.

At this moment Edda chanced to look down, and at her feet she saw a fairy ring of mushrooms, with tender, wonderfully green grass within the circle. She dropped down beside it, and felt the grass with her fingers. She

EDDA DISCOVERS THE FAIRY RING OF MUSHROOMS

knew at once—though she could not tell how she knew it —that it was here that the fairy ball had been given the night before.

But where now was the Moonlight Palace? What were the fairies doing? Where were all her friends of the night before? As she was asking these questions of herself she heard a great chattering above her head, and then a hard tapping, and when she looked up there were Red Top and Bushy Tail up above her, both looking quite sleepy and tired. She understood from their manner that she was not to act as if she knew them, so she said never a word, but followed her aunt to the far end of the garden, where the hollyhocks grew against the stone wall. Round about the feet of the tall, soldier-like flowers were many beautiful and sweet-smelling things—rosemary, larkspur, sweet-william, bachelor buttons, London pride, Canterbury bells, sweet peas, and nasturtiums.

"While you are cutting the flowers for the vases," said Aunt Caroline, "I shall busy myself about something else."

There was something sweet and strange in Aunt Caroline's voice, as, indeed, there often was. She sat down on the grass as if she had been a little girl, and began to make flower dolls. She told Edda to bring her some long, slender grass blades, and some red, flaunting poppies. When the little girl had brought them, Aunt

Caroline took a poppy and with a blade of grass tied down all the petals save two, which, being exactly opposite each other, stood out like the arms of a little doll. The grass blade became a green sash, and the petals of the poppy that had been tied down looked like scarlet silken skirts. The pistil made a yellow head for the little creature and the stamens clustering round about looked like a fine neck-ruff. After Aunt Caroline had made a number of these dainty little dolls she sent Edda to pick hollyhocks, and out of these she made grand hollyhock ladies. They had white and pink and red skirts, and green heads with larkspur or nasturtium hats; then these doll mothers were given some little white poppy babies with capes of pink poppy petals. Bold flower gentlemen were fashioned out of green leaves, with pansy faces. These were the fathers.

After whole families of these little creatures had been made, Edda carried them to the garden bench, and set before them little cups and plates of acorns, which Aunt Caroline showed her how to make. These she filled with beautiful food, made of grasses and flowers.

"It 's a very pretty world," said Aunt Caroline, "and just made for you and me and the other folks."

"Well," said grandmother, who had come rustling down the path in her clean linen frock, and with a face as kind as the summer sky, "although it is such a very fine place we have to work if we are to stay in it. It is almost time for dinner, and in a little while it will be time for supper, and there is n't a thing in the house to eat."

Edda grew almost pale at these words. She wondered how you got things to eat when you were out in the country. In the Top Flat you telephoned, but grandmother had no telephone. She said she did n't like them because they were so interrupting. It appeared that at grandmother's house, in order to get things to eat, it was necessary to hitch up Lily White and go driving to this neighbor's and that, and to this market and that, and to tuck things away in the back of the cart. It also was necessary to look for fresh eggs all about the chicken-house and barnyard and haymow; and to go into the cool dairy to see about the cream and the buttermilk, and to see what milk could be used for cottage cheese, and what would be good for clabber. And one had to go to the kitchen and see how many tarts there were left from yesterday, and whether the making of the beaten biscuit could be put

off until to-morrow, and to ask about the drop cakes, and advise Anna to make caramel syrup for the baked custard. Besides, one had to look out all the time to see about "putting up" things. Now one put up strawberries, and now peaches, and now blackberries, and now one made marmalade. It really was a thousand times more fun than just telephoning to the grocer, who sent the boy, who delivered things to the maid, who served them to the family—and no questions asked.

Edda would not have believed it possible there were so many nice things to do in the world. She had been so busy, and she was so delightfully hungry and tired, that when they sat down to dinner together and she saw the baked ham with cunning little cloves sticking in it, and the brown French fried potatoes she had watched Anna cooking; and the red radishes she had picked; and the amber jelly she had chosen out of the preserve closet; and the fresh crullers she had sprinkled sugar over; and the strawberries she had seen grandmother hulling—her eyes almost stood out of her head and her mouth watered.

"It 's great fun eating," said Aunt Caroline. "And it 's fun to breathe, and to look around, and to talk to Eddas!"

She spoke as if there were thousands and thousands of Eddas.

"I declare, Caroline, my dear," said grandmother, "I

"SHE TOLD EDDA TO BRING HER . . . SOME RED FLAUNTING POPPIES"

don't believe you will ever grow up! You are such a child!"

If making everything seem charming even when it was something that really *had* to be done was being a

child, then, certainly, Aunt Caroline was childish. She had said that Edda's city dresses were not the sort that she could have fun in, and so in the morning she had bought some dark blue cotton at the store, and with a large pair of sharp scissors, and singing all the while, she cut two frocks and two pairs of bloomers for Edda, and sewed them up on the machine almost as fast as lightning. Edda was given a thimble and taught to overcast the seams, and shown how to pull out bastings. And then, about three o'clock, she was tumbled into a clean nightgown, put on the sofa in her room, and fell so sound asleep that she never so much as thought of a fairy.

When she woke it was time to bathe and to dress for the afternoon ride. They went through lanes where the trees met above their heads, and past the common where the cattle browsed, and where a pool lay among rushes; they drove out past the Home for the Deaf, where the children who could hear none of all the sounds in the world were playing about the yard; they drove on to the Old Soldiers' Home, where three old, old men in blue clothes sat and blinked at the sun; and they went to the little stone church, which stood on the top of a hill. It no longer had any windows or doors, but was open wide to

all the winds and the rains of heaven; and round about it lay the dead, who had lain there long. All their names were French, and near by Aunt Caroline showed Edda where some of their homes had been; the lilac and rose bushes told where their gardens once had bloomed, and their broken chimneys told where they once had sat about their fires.

"Does it make you sad?" asked Edda of Aunt Caroline.

"Oh, no," said Aunt Caroline. "It 's so good to live that it must be beautiful to go on to what comes afterward. Never be afraid of things, Edda—they are so much lovelier and sweeter when they come than we ever could imagine they would be."

It was after supper, when they were again walking in the garden, that grandmother and Aunt Caroline once more spoke about the oak.

"There really is something the matter with it, Caroline," said grandmother. "What can it be?"

"I don't know," mused Aunt Caroline. "I shall have to speak to the dryad about it. Very likely she is growing lazy."

When Aunt Caroline said anything like this she

always spoke as if she were joking, and even her own mother could not tell whether she meant what she said or not.

Grandmother and Aunt Caroline sat down on a seat to talk the matter over. Edda, looking down the walk, saw the basket she had carried out in the morning lying forgotten on the grass. She knew that both grandmother and Aunt Caroline loved to have each thing in its proper place, and so she ran to pick up the basket. That brought her almost to the stone wall, where the hollyhocks stood together in a tall row. They were rustling together in a very human sort of way, and as Edda stopped to smile at them she was amazed to hear them talking.

"I heard from the dryad," said a tall purple hollyhock, "that she really was growing very much frightened about the health of the old oak tree. She has been thinking of going to the fairy queen for help."

"That woman with green eyes is all very well," remarked a pink hollyhock, "but she does n't know what to do for trees. I 'm not sure that she always knows what to do for us. Sometimes when she rakes and scrapes around my roots she makes me dreadfully nervous, and she picks a flower here and leaves one there in a very

partial manner. You 'd have thought that I deserved some attention this morning, when she was making some of our family into flower dolls for that strange little city child who has come here. I 'm sure I looked as well as any one in the border. But never a word did she say of me, and I was passed by as if I were the commonest sort of a hollyhock, whereas you know that the lady with white hair sent away Down East to get seeds for me from an old school friend of hers. If I 've heard her tell of that once, I have twenty times. The lady with white hair says the same thing over and over again, I 've noticed. The oak says that 's because she 's old."

"The oak ought to know," said a sweet white hollyhock. "Never have I seen anything so old as the oak."

"Except the crow," said the purple hollyhock.

The mention of the crow seemed to bring back to Edda all that had happened the night before, and which, all through her busy day, had been as faint and dim in her mind as if it had been floating gray mist. But now it all came back—the squirrel that talked, the woodpecker that was her friend, the teasing elves, the babbling water fairies, the tough little rock fairies and their long journey. Her heart beat fast and she ran down the walk,

her basket on her arm, to look at the face in the oak. It seemed more twisted than ever, as if the great tree were in pain. Aunt Caroline and grandmother had gone into the house, it seemed, for the garden was very still, except for the noises among the trees, and the faint, faint whispering of the pond.

As Edda looked, dark clouds began to rush over the clear air of the evening. The sun had set, but a soft light, the color of pale daffodils, spread over all the sky and in the far west deepened to orange. Now wild blackness came rolling along, and out of the cloud bellowed a loud wind. If a hundred trumpeters had been blowing their horns they could not have made a noise that would have reached like that down from the sky to where Edda stood.

All of the trees and flowers began to twist and bend before the storm, and the oak roared like an angry giant. One of its branches fell at Edda's feet, and hundreds of leaves blew from it. Then out of the rent in the side of the oak slipped the creature which Edda had seen twice before. It must be the dryad, Edda knew—the dryad, with her dark hair blown about her, her green garments torn by the wind, and her thin arms lifted and tossing above her head.

"Oh, kind, beautiful oak," she cried, "do not break! Do not fall! I, your dryad, who love you, beg you to be brave! A thousand thousand winds have blown over you and have not broken you. Do not yield now, oak, brave oak! Listen, take heart! It is I, your dryad, who speaks!"

Edda was so blown about by the storm that she had to cling hard to the little silver-leaved poplar, which had turned as white as a ghost with fear. She longed to run to the poor dryad and comfort her, but while she was looking the dryad seemed to be lifted by the wind and borne up among the tossing limbs of the oak, and just then Aunt Caroline's voice was heard calling:

"Child, child, where are you? Edda, little Edda! Come in out of the storm!"

Edda could see Aunt Caroline standing on the porch. The wind had loosened her hair and tumbled her green dress, and as she held out her arms for Edda to run into them she looked so much like the dryad that Edda hardly could tell which one it was that carried her in and set her before the bright little fire of apple-tree boughs.

CHAPTER VI

AFTER the first of the storm had passed it grew very quiet. The soft rain falling outside looked like a curtain of silver beads as it dropped in little continuous drops, which fell straight to the ground through the gray, windless air. Then grandmother and Aunt Caroline and Edda sang together, while Aunt Caroline played on the old organ very sweetly; and when Edda had been put in her bed and had fallen asleep, with her aunt's kisses warm on her lips, the old tunes they had been singing ran over and over in her head. They ran even into the land of dreams, and floated along on happy waves of music, until, suddenly, something sharp and worried broke through these memories. She opened her eyes, to see Red Top sitting on the foot of her bed.

"Oh, Edda," he cried, "there you lie sleeping as comfortably as can be, but not one of my poor family has had a wink of sleep this night."

"But what is the matter?" asked Edda sleepily.

"It 's the dryad—the oak dryad! We can't do a thing with her, she 's so unhappy. She says the oak is crying and groaning all the time, and she knows that it is dying. You should see her running round and round out there in the rain, weeping and wringing her hands. It 's enough to break the heart of any one who is n't a philosopher. And it 's hard, even on a philosopher. Every one said I was to come to you. Just listen to that, now!"

Edda sat up in bed to listen, and heard a wild, sad sound which rose and fell, and then rose again in a way to make the tears come to any little girl's eyes.

"I must go to her," Edda said. "I must go at once. But oh, dear, look at the size of me! I ought to settle down to be either a fairy or a little girl. This changing about all the time is a great deal of trouble."

"No trouble at all, when you know how," said a teasing voice from the window-sill. The room was nearly dark, but Edda could make out Bushy Tail, sitting there with something in his paws, his eyes gleaming like tiny lamps.

"*Nothing* is hard when you know how," answered Edda, repeating something she often had heard her

mother say. "If you know how I 'm to be made over into the right size to talk with a dryad, I wish you 'd tell me, please, Bushy Tail."

It was not easy to tease Edda, for she spoke gently and really had no thought but to be happy and good all of the time—or at least, almost all of the time. But the squirrel was born to tease.

"I have something here in my paws that will do the work," he said. "The crow sent it. It 's a pill. But I suppose you don't like pills?"

"I 'm not thinking about what I like or don't like," Edda said. "Give me the pill, Bushy Tail, and you 'll see how quickly I 'll swallow it!"

She came close to the squirrel, and he dropped the pill on her little tongue. It was down her throat in a second, and even while she stood swallowing she felt herself beginning to shrink.

"There you are," said the squirrel, "made over while you wait! Though what you are to do about the oak, I can't imagine. You don't look to me like a person who knows much about trees."

Edda knew nothing about trees, but it was not very pleasant to have the squirrel say so, while he sat twirling

his whiskers and looking at her as if she were an amusing little thing. But the sound of the dryad's crying was in her ears, and without waiting for anything more she scrambled down the honeysuckle trellis and ran down the walk, taking hundreds and hundreds of her short fairy-like steps, to where the dryad wailed at the foot of the tree.

The rain had passed, and the moon shone out from behind clouds, so that Edda could see where the poor thing lay, her arms outstretched, and her hair streaming over her shoulders. Edda put her arms about her, and then was almost frightened, for the dryad seemed very different from any one she ever had touched before. Not only was she unlike a human being, but she was different from the fairies. About her was an odor as sweet as leaves wet with rain, and her sighs sounded like the wind among trees. Her eyes, when they were lifted to Edda, were like little pools of water left by the rain. They reflected all that was round about them, just as a pool reflects the trees and sky.

"You must tell me everything," said Edda. "I 'm terribly young, and I 've not been to school—only learned at home—so I 'm not very wise. I 've heard it said that I

knew a great deal that most children don't know, but whether I know anything that will help you, I can't tell. But first, what is your name?"

"My name, dear child," said the dryad, "is Verda. I am old, yet always young. I was born when the oak was born, and I have no life apart from it. For a long time the oak has been losing strength and joy. I hear it sobbing in the night; sometimes it is afraid of storms, though it used to glory in them. Some great trouble has come to my tree—my own, beautiful tree—and I cannot find out what it is."

"Have n't you any father or mother?" asked Edda, wondering how it was possible for any one to live without parents.

"I have no one but the oak," sighed Verda. "I am not even acquainted with these happy creatures here in the garden. I am not of their kind, and besides I am very, very shy. I might have run away from even you, dear child, if I had seen you coming. No one ever has touched me before. It is my nature to be as wild as the clouds, as free as the wind, as faithful as the sun. Now that you have touched me, and with such kindness, I shall be your friend forever."

"Thank you, Verda," said Edda. "Thank you very, very much. I have n't any one to play with at home, and I have n't met any children here yet. Can we play together, do you think?"

"Not in the daytime, I fear, child. Human beings would be frightened—all save one-in-a-thousand—were they to see me going about in the daytime and talking with one of their kind. They would say the oak was haunted, and very likely it would be cut down and burned."

"Are n't you even acquainted with Goldheart, the queen of the water fairies?" asked Edda.

"Not even with her, though we have lived together in this garden a long, long time. But she is so rich and powerful, and has so many creatures about her all willing to serve her, that I thought she would n't care to know a mere dryad like me, who has no power at all, even over her own tree. My pleasures have been to sing with the oak in storms, to bask with it in sunshine, to listen with it to the strange earth secrets which are told to us. I have thought only of the oak and myself, and now that I am in trouble I am being punished for my selfishness."

"Please don't say that," whispered Edda, brushing the dryad's wild hair back from her face. "But come

with me to Goldheart. You really can't think how kind she is."

The dryad got to her feet and, first throwing kisses from the ends of her slender fingers to the drooping oak, she walked down the path with Edda. They went on until they came to the boat landing, the woodpecker and the squirrel following them at a little distance. Edda's idea was to go to the boat landing and take one of the mullen skiffs and row over to the Water-Lily Palace. Fortunately, Whist was sleeping on the wharf. He at once got out a boat for them and called two of the elves to row them over. It was decided that it would be better for Red Top and Bushy Tail not to go, and Edda was glad to leave the squirrel, at least, behind her. He kept showing his teeth at her in a strange way, and she could not tell whether he was laughing at her or trying to frighten her.

It took them but a short time to cross the pond, and once at the palace they were taken by a grand green beetle down the stairs in the water-lily stem to a large reception-room—the dryad making her way very timidly—and told to wait. As they sat there silently, Verda wrapped up in her trouble and Edda saying

nothing because she saw how badly the dryad was feeling, they heard voices. Goldheart was speaking to some one.

"No, dear prince," she was saying, "I cannot marry you yet. You and yours are strangers to me. You have come without invitation into the domain that has belonged to the water fairies for longer than I should care to say. Do something to show me that you are worthy; better still, cause your people to do something that will prove them to be as useful and as wise as my own people."

"But what can I do, O queen? Ask what you will, if it lies within my power I will do it. I no longer care for life unless you are to be my queen. Nor would it be my happiness alone, or, as I hope, yours, which would result from our marriage; our union would unite the two most powerful branches of fairies, and bring peace and contentment to all our kind. Do not send me from you, kind and beautiful Goldheart. You are rightly named; you have a heart of gold, and are forever looking about you to see what good you can do. Let me have that heart of gold for my own. Be kinder than ever you have been before, and become my queen."

At this moment Prince Pietro drew back the shimmering curtain of spun glass, and Queen Goldheart came into the room. When she saw Edda there she put from her the queenly manner, and, as she often did, spoke out like a happy and common person.

"Dear me, Edda," she said, "I had no idea you were here! Where is my door beetle? Why didn't he announce you?"

But Edda gave her no time to reprove the careless servant. Rising, she led the dryad to her.

"O queen," she said, "this is the dryad, Verda, who has lived in the oak since the beginning. She is in trouble and I have brought her to you."

Goldheart seated herself, with Verda and Edda before her, and asked to hear all of the tale. Meanwhile Prince Pietro walked about the room, watching the goldfish that darted about, keeping guard over the queen, and to be seen easily enough through the glass walls of the palace. Water flowers and grasses nodded without; odd, shining little water bugs floated in the green water; and once a long black eel swam by.

Between them, Edda and the dryad told all the story to Goldheart. The prince had been listening as he moved

VERDA DESCENDING THE WATER-LILY STEM TO THE QUEEN'S PALACE

about the room, and now that the story was finished he came forward.

"Queen," he said, stopping before her, "I have heard what the dryad has said and I can see that she needs help, and at once. Tell me, if I can save this oak which makes beautiful the garden and gives a home to your friends, will you give me your hand in marriage?"

Goldheart arose, trembling slightly, and stood with her hand on Edda's shoulder. Then she smiled very sweetly.

"Prince Pietro," she said, "I will." And again Edda thought her voice was like silver bells.

At that, Prince Pietro glowed with new life, like a flower after rain, or a star when the sky clears. He turned to the dryad.

"Say that you trust me, madam," he begged. Verda smiled upon him too.

"Yes, yes," she said, "believe me, prince, I do."

"There is much to do," said the prince. "I go into great danger, it may be. If I never see you again, dear queen, farewell."

"Danger, Pietro?" cried the queen. "What do you mean by that?"

"We, the rock fairies," he answered, "are underground workers. We are miners, engineers, tunnel-makers, bridge-builders. We burrow, we delve, we change the course of water, we tear down the rocks. You may have thought me proud and idle because I would n't tell my own tales, but caused my minstrel to do that for me. But you understand, that is a custom merely. Besides, Flint, my poor old minstrel, is my best and most faithful friend and it would break his heart if I took his place in story-telling. When it comes to real work, however, no one is more industrious than we rock fairies. Nor may we of royal blood rest idle while the others toil. I am myself at the head of my corps of engineers, and with your permission I will summon my assistants. It is evident from what the dryad tells us that the trouble with the noble oak lies deep in the earth, among its very roots. It will be my business to search underground until I find what is wrong and remedy it."

"Oh, Pietro!" gasped Goldheart.

"Come, come," he said, "this is work for men. Do not distress yourselves. Believe me, all will be well."

He left them, and Goldheart, seeing how restless and how miserable the poor dryad was, proposed that they

should float about the pond on her magic shallops made of rose leaves. So three of them were brought, and Goldheart, Verda, and Edda drifted about the pond in the moonlight. They did not care to talk; they were better pleased to be apart and silent. The fireflies lighted their way, and they passed a long time in this manner, each wondering what was going on in those deep chambers of the palace where the prince of the rock fairies talked with his trusty laborers.

Could Queen Goldheart have seen Prince Pietro then, as, clad in brown, he stood among his clever miners and blasters, his builders of waterways, and his makers of bridges, she would not have known him, hung about as he was with the tools which he found necessary to carry with him underground.

They left the Water-Lily Palace by its deepest chamber, and closing behind them the doors which kept the ooze and lowest mire of the pond from the shining house of the queen, they made their way with great difficulty, tunneling like beavers, to the shorter roots of the oak. Here they found nothing amiss.

"The trouble lies deeper," said the prince to his engineers. "We must go on."

So they went on, digging along the great roots, careful of the fibers, until they had gone to the end of the roots which reached toward the pond. Here, too, all was well. Strong as steel, fine as lacework, the roots and rootlets were meshed in the earth.

"We must still go on," said the prince.

So weary were his men by this time that their backs were bowed and their feet almost refused to bear them. But when the prince said, "Shall we rest?" they cried with one accord, "No, no!"

They understood very well what was at stake. If they could discover what was the matter with the oak, and if they could save it, they might dwell forever in this pleasant place. They could take to wife the laughing water fairies; they could give their maidens to the bright young men of the other tribe; and they could make this peaceful place their home—after many wanderings and dangers they at last could rest.

The next labor was to follow the roots that ran away from the pond, and here they had yet harder labor, for on this side the great oak had gripped the earth with all its strength, clamping about the bowlders and bracing itself against the storms.

When the little engineers had tunneled on yet farther they came to a great wall of sandstone, against which the roots had flattened themselves. Here no water moistened them; no further reach was possible to them. They lost their strength and life, and were almost as if dead.

"In the old time," said the chief of engineers, "there were fairies of our tribe who could crumble a rock like that."

"In the old time," said a bowed miner, "there were men of our tribe who could have brought the water here in conduits and watered these roots until they lived again."

"In the old time," sang out a young man, "we would have beaten upon this rock with a thousand hammers until it made way for us!" And he began to beat upon the rock.

"In the present time," said the prince, "we can do all that has been done before, and more too."

He commanded his men to rest, and after they had had their cuts bound up, and had eaten and slept, they returned to their task. Nor did they cease until all was done that would insure the future health and happiness

of the oak. It was a great moment when the chief of engineers bowed before his prince and said:

"I have the honor to report, O prince, that all is done."

"Wealth awaits you, my engineer," cried the prince, "and Queen Goldheart is mine!"

Already the great branches of the oak breathed with relief, and tossed themselves in fresh joy. It sang a beautiful song that day, and mingled with it was the wild, clear voice of Verda the dryad, chanting praises.

CHAPTER VII

IT would not be worth while to tell how Edda got back into her natural size the night when the rock fairies saved the oak if her experience had not been such a strange one.

She had been floated safe ashore in her rose-leaf shallop, and, very tired and sleepy, was making her way toward her window when she suddenly remembered, with a shock, that she still was a mere fairy in size.

"Oh, dear," she cried, "what shall I do? I had forgotten all about myself."

"That, my child, is the very best thing you can do," said a hoarse voice at her side. Edda at once knew it for the voice of the crow, and turned to him, expecting that he would help her out in the old way. But instead of that he said, "Climb, Edda, climb!" So she put her tiny hands to the honeysuckle vines and was soon slipping down the curtain cord to the floor of her own room. No

sooner had she landed there than a little wind began to stir. At first it only rustled the leaves of the honeysuckle, but it grew fiercer and fiercer until it blew Edda round and round the room. She could see no sense in it all until she began to notice that while she was being whirled around she really was winding up and up like a corkscrew, and in a few minutes was her own right and proper size. At that the wind went down, the crow flew away, and creeping into her bed she fell fast asleep.

It would be pleasant, too, to tell all that happened to her that day, for it was a delightful day, in which Edda made some friends and saw some fine sights, but what came to her in the night was yet more marvelous, and so it will be best to go at once to the night adventures.

Edda had gone early to bed, and had been sleeping quite a long time, when she was awakened by many high, shrill little voices.

"I say she ought to know!"

"Something is going to happen, and the child should be there!"

"Has no one brought her an invitation?"

"Has n't Goldheart sent an invitation?"

"You don't suppose the dryad has forgotten her!"

"You don't get a coronation and a wedding every night."

"I say we ought to awaken the child! There 's going to be more fun than ever before, and she likes fun. She told me so."

"I know it. She 's like us. She likes fun."

"And she 's not too good."

"Not *too* good!"

"Well, then here we go!"

At that, a company of elves swarmed off the footboard and began tweaking Edda's nose, tickling her chin, pulling her hair and ears, and dragging open her eyelids.

She laughed so she could hardly speak, but at last she managed to shake them off good-naturedly and to sit up in bed.

"Whose wedding is it?" she asked. "Who is going to be coronated?"

"Coronated, indeed!" they cried. "Who ever heard such an expression! Excuse us, Edda, but really you ought to go to school."

Then they fell to giggling and tittering until Edda's ears actually itched, and she shouted:

"Hush, you silly little things!"

At this moment Red Top appeared, with his coat shining as Edda never had seen it shine before, and his top-knot dressed in the highest form of the art.

"Edda," he cried, "I come with a loving invitation from Goldheart for you to attend her wedding ceremonies. She begs that you and the dryad will be her maids-in-waiting. Prince Pietro sends his respects, and requests particularly that you will be near him at the great moment when he is made king. For these beautiful ceremonies the Black Master has presented you with a fitting costume, which I have here."

With that he set near her a tiny box of carved ivory, which could have contained, perhaps, a handkerchief and a pair of gloves for the real Edda.

"How kind they all are!" cried Edda. "And you are kind and good too, Red Top. But of what use will all this be unless I can be made over once again into the little size?"

"Edda," said the woodpecker, and his voice trembled. "I have with me here a shrinking pill, sent by the crow with his love. But before you take it, I 'm to tell you this,—never, never again can you be made down into

a playmate of the garden creatures. True, you may, sometimes, when you have been happy and good, hear what we are saying, or catch glimpses of the elves or the fairies, but never more will you be one of us. Thrice only in a lifetime does it come to mortals to share our lives with us. Will you come with us to-night—make this your last fairy night—or will you wait until another time?"

"Red Top," said Edda gravely, not caring at all that the squirrel had joined them and was sitting on the top of her mirror, stroking his whiskers and watching her with his teasing smile, "I will take the shrinking pill now. The time might never come again when I could go to a wedding and a cor—"

"—Onation," finished the woodpecker.

"—Onation again. As for being a fairy, that is really not what I was born for. I 'm a little girl, and all the people I love expect me to stay a little girl. So it 's all right, dear Red Top. Please give me the shrinking pill."

"Yes, do, do!" cried the elves.

In a moment Edda was the size of a fairy, and taking her carved ivory box with her she withdrew behind a hassock and soon was clothed in the charming garments

which the crow had sent her. The frock was the color of wild-rose leaves, the cape like the woven leaves of violets, the necklace was of tiny pearls, and the tiara of fire opals. As for the fan, it was the painted wing of a pink and gray moth, and on the pink slippers were buckles with opals set in them. When, by standing on her dressing-table, she was able to see herself in the looking-glass she could not at first believe this exquisite little creature was herself. She was so pleased with what she saw that she might have stayed there a long time—for Edda could be vain, like some other little girls—if it had not been that suddenly she was taken off her feet by twenty elves, that caught hold of her and threw her on to the squirrel's back. Now Edda really, in her heart of hearts, did not like the squirrel, and she knew he knew it, so she was much mortified when she was obliged to hold tight to his neck in order not to be thrown off. He was a frisky steed, and took about twice as many steps as were necessary. It seemed impossible for him to go straight ahead in a reasonable way. He would stop and perk his head and show his teeth, then dash forward, and then again suddenly stop, so that Edda was all but thrown over his head.

But in spite of all, he finally reached the garden with

her. Here there was the greatest excitement. Rock fairies were dashing along with their arms laden with flowers and vines, water fairies were tripping about with wedding garments and gifts in their arms, and an army of flower dolls was preparing a banquet. Musicians sat about on knolls practising the wedding music; heralds were blowing their trumpets, going over their salutations; and the prime minister was rehearsing the speech he was to make at the coronation. Nowhere was there any peace or quiet. Not that Edda wished for peace or quiet; this was her last fairy night, and her heart beat with excitement, and her feet tripped along the path as if she had been born a member of these happy tribes.

Red Top walked by her—for the squirrel had gone away on other business—until they came to the dryad's house. The crowds were gathering about the oak, and here, indeed, the wedding procession of Goldheart was formed.

Although this was the greatest occasion of her life, the queen did not forget her friends, or neglect to say those kind things which came so naturally to her.

"Dear Edda," she said in her silvery voice, "walk at my right; and you, Verda, at my left." This she uttered

in a queenly tone, but afterward she whispered, "Girls, how do I look?"

There was no denying that she looked just the way a fairy queen ought to look on her wedding night. Her garments shimmered silver and blue like moonbeams on water, her jewels were diamonds, her veil was like moon-mist.

When the procession was formed, beetles marched before her as heralds, and other beetles as an escort; then came her sailors, her wise men, her musicians, and last, her own friendly people, of whom there was a great number. As the procession marched along, the flowers nodded to them, the birds, waking in their nests, called out good wishes, little furred creatures, the ridiculous old owl, care-free insects in the grass, all gave them good wishes after their fashion.

To Edda's surprise they went on to the hollyhocks, and past them, then through a break in the great stone wall, and out into the wild. Walking between fringed grasses, wild poppies, and daisies, they came at last to a little green dell. At the end of it, clad in yellow silk, stood a dignified figure beneath a beautiful canopy of striped velvet.

"Jack-in-tne-Pulpit," whispered the queen. "He is to perform the ceremonies."

The rock fairies, gleaming as seaweed glimmers in browns and greens, dull pinks, and splendid purples, were already there, awaiting them. Prince Pietro was in purple, with amethysts and peridots for his jewels. As Goldheart's procession advanced, his musicians played welcoming music so rarely beautiful that it sounded like the summer song of the sea on the beach. The feet of all the little creatures gathered there hardly touched the earth, so happy were they.

It was difficult for Edda to see and understand all that happened, for before she had become used to the beauty of the scene and the music, Prince Pietro, between his minister and his chamberlain, was advancing to take his oath as king before the lofty figure beneath the canopy. And when that was done, music burst from all the trumpets and the people shouted until the heads of the flowers quivered on their stems.

Then Edda was pushed gently forward, and found herself assisting Goldheart to the altar, where King Pietro awaited her, and where, after the solemn words spoken by the priest, a marriage ring was put upon Gold-

heart's finger, and she was made the wife of Pietro, ruler over all fays from this day on.

It had been next to impossible to keep Flint from twanging his harp at the wrong places, so eager had he been to sing of the greatness of his master and of the beauty and goodness of his bride, and now they could keep him quiet no longer. Moreover, the elves, who had behaved badly, and who had been threatened with punishment by the beetles more than once for the manner in which they giggled and pushed and tittered and sneezed, now made such a noise that it was as if all the tree-toads in the neighborhood had set up a clamor. Edda was dreadfully ashamed of them. She knew they had made up their minds to have fun, but she thought this a poor sort of fun. They threw elfin shoes and flower pollen at the royal bride and groom, and blew on grasses, and made sudden noises by pulling off the heads of the snapdragons.

However, every one laughed and shouted, and the king and queen said to Edda:

"But for you, our happiness might never have come about!"

Every one shook hands with Verda and Edda as well

as with the king and queen, and told them they were very beautiful.

It was a delightful hour, for not only were these many, many little creatures as gay and proud as they could be, but the summer moon seemed to have such pleasure in shedding its tender light, the soft wind was so glad to blow among the trees, the perfumes of the flowers were so charmed to creep in and out of the green alleys of the grass, and the fireflies so eager to swing their shining lanterns, that nothing was left to be desired.

The bluebells had been ringing a carillon for the bride and groom, but this music now gave place to the clanging of the morning-glories, which announced that the banquet awaited them. So back they filed into the garden and along the paths until they came to the oak, around which the table ran. Though the oak was so large that if grandmother and Aunt Caroline and Edda had reached out their arms, only touching the tips of their fingers, they could not have reached quite around the trunk, yet when all the wedding guests were seated there was not a vacant place. Their dishes were of acorn cups, and the waiters were flower dolls—dozens upon dozens of them.

"Where could they all have come from?" asked Edda of the dryad. "Aunt Caroline made me a few flower dolls and acorn dishes the other day, but here are more than I can count."

"Oh," answered the dryad, "these are the spirits of all the flower dolls and all the dishes that ever were made in the garden from the time your Aunt Caroline was a little girl. In the daytime they go to the Never-Never land, and human beings think they are lost and wilted. But things once done in fairyland are done forever. The fairies take charge of them, and on fairy nights they come to life and into use."

After the feast there were toasts drunk and speeches made, and Flint sang a long song. At length the dryad was bidden to speak, and in a voice like a silver horn she said:

"Greatly have I been honored this night by the king and queen of the fairies—"

"May they live forever!" cried the people.

"And I shall not forget this day though I live five hundred years more."

"I should n't like to have to give her birthday presents," whispered the squirrel, who, too restless to sit still,

had been running about here and there, making free with his betters.

"I," went on Verda, "who am the spirit of the oak, am full of gratitude for the great service that has been done me, and I should think it the greatest honor of my life if the king and queen and all their guests would end this happy night by paying a visit to my home. I have dwelt there too long alone, without guests or merrymaking, but from this time I mean to change my mode of life. For years you have danced beneath the shade of the oak. To-night I bid you climb the steps to my home and share with me all that I have."

King Pietro and Queen Goldheart were graciously pleased to accept this invitation, and with a shout all of the people followed them to a lofty flight of stairs, which until then had been invisible but which was now seen to wind round and about the tree until it reached the great cleft in the oak. Edda was about to take her place in the procession with Verda when a whisper from Red Top made her stop.

"Wait, child," he said in a fatherly tone. "I 'll tell you this, they are likely to stay in there dancing and eating and drinking until morning. Now I tell you for

your own good, as a tried and trusty friend should, if you go with them you are likely to get caught out after cockcrow. If that were to happen, not all the king's horses or all the king's men could change you back into the real Edda again. You 'd be a fairy without a chance

"THEIR DISHES WERE OF ACORN CUPS, AND THE WAITERS WERE FLOWER DOLLS"

of turning back for a thousand years and a day, and your absence would be likely to be noticed."

"So it would," said Edda, with her usual sweetness. "You are good to warn me, woodpecker, but don't you suppose I 'd dare run the risk? It is very hard to leave just now when every one is having such a good time."

While they talked the procession had been passing

almost as fast as running water, and though it really seemed impossible that even in fairyland anything could have happened so quickly, yet when Edda looked up all of her companions had vanished except the squirrel, who seemed to be more amused at her than ever.

"You see," said the woodpecker, "already it is too late! Bushy Tail, kindly see this lady home. I have other duties to which I must attend. Edda," he bowed low before her, "it has been a pleasure to meet you." And he flew up into the open mouth of the strange old bark face in the oak.

"Good-by!" exclaimed Edda, opening her mouth till it stretched almost as wide as that of the tree-face. "You don't mean—"

"Yes he does," said the squirrel, laughing in his disagreeable way. "Come." He stooped for her to mount, but without being quite able to tell why, she so disliked him that she would not have his help.

"Oh, very well," he said angrily, "stay where you are and how you are, if you like. But I 'll tell you this, you are a funny kind of a fairy, Edda. Why, if you 're a real fairy, don't you ride on snails and on butterflies, rock on twigs, drink the dew of flowers, sleep in the

fern? I have almost split my sides watching you, but I've had enough of you. You no longer amuse me. Good-by, Edda," and he too was lost in the branches of the oak.

"Well!" said Edda, and sat down to think. Little drops of rain began to fall, but as they splashed about the tiny, tiny Edda they seemed so large she feared she would be drowned. It was as if buckets of water were being poured upon her. It took only a moment to ruin her fairy clothes, and she began to shiver in a chill. At this moment, when she was as sad as ever she had been in her life, the crow, Black Master of all dark garden arts, came walking slowly down the path. When he saw Edda he guessed the whole truth.

"Human feet cannot follow where fairy feet lead," he said in a solemn voice.

"I 'm ready to be a little girl for good and all, master," sighed Edda, mopping the tears from her eyes with her wee lace handkerchief. "I 've had ever so much fun, and I thank you and thank you, but I 'd like to go home."

"You shall," said the crow, who, though so solemn, always was kind. He gave a strange call, and out of a near-by tree fluttered a wild-looking moth with a head

like a skull and crossbones upon his wings. He was black and white and huge, and his wings made a great flapping as he flew. Edda was really afraid of him, but she dared not disobey the crow, and when he told her to seat herself between these dreadful wings, she did so.

"Good-by, Edda," said the crow as the others had done.

The moth rose slowly and Edda clung to his back, trying hard not to cry. He dropped her on her own bed, put a growing pill between her lips—he had carried it daintily in his "feelers"—and as she curled up and felt the warmth from her eider-down quilt creeping over her cold little body, she knew that she was lengthening out to the size of the true and real Edda, and that never again would she be allowed to visit fairyland.

CHAPTER VIII

BEFORE dawn the rain had ceased, so that when the sun shone out on the world it found it fresh and newly washed. Drops of crystal lay in every flower, the leaves of the oak shone with a richer glow, and the sky was as free from clouds as Edda's face.

She lay in bed for at least half an hour after her eyes had opened, looking about her at the pretty, neat little room, and thinking how she would miss it, with its scent of the honeysuckle and its glimpses of the sky between the tree branches, when she had gone back to the Top Flat, where there was nothing to see from her bedroom window except the whitewashed court. She had been so busy and so happy that she really had not thought about her mother and father and the others at home, except now and then, in between other thoughts. The memory of them had slipped into the cracks of her thought, so to speak. But now, when she was not expecting it at all, a great dark genie called Homesickness spread out before

her, and for a little while hid everything else. She remembered hearing her mamma say that her poor daddy was tired almost to death, working there in the city, and she knew that her mamma was not really happy in the Top Flat.

"We were people who grew up in yards," she often had heard her mamma say. "We hardly know how to behave in a flat."

What a pity it was that they could not all three, with Bubbles the cat, and Adelaide Alice the doll, and even that nice Toby, the black boy who ran the elevator, get together somewhere in the country and be happy evermore! There must be places, Edda thought, where daddies were not too tired, and where mammas who liked yards could have them.

A pleasant Chinese gong sounded from below stairs, saying as plainly as a gong could that it was time to get up and dress.

"Your bath is drawn for you, Edda, dear," Aunt Caroline's voice called from without, and Edda fluttered to the dainty bathroom and splashed in the tub, singing at the top of her lungs. In the Top Flat she could not have done that for fear of disturbing others. Nor could she, in

the Top Flat, have danced as she dressed, or shouted out of the window to grandmother, who was gathering fresh red strawberries for breakfast; or turned on the little music box so that it could play "When Johnny Comes Marching Home" while they were eating.

There seemed to be some sort of a secret in the air, for Edda heard her grandmother whisper to Aunt Caroline, "Have you told her yet?" and Aunt Caroline say, "Not yet." In fact, a secret seemed to be hanging just above her head, and she felt as if she would only have to reach up and pick it off some sort of a tree of knowledge. But perhaps the secret was not quite ripe yet; she had learned that fruit must be left on the tree until it was ripe. How many things had she not learned since she came into the country? When she looked back on the stupid, dull little thing she had been a few days before when she knew nothing except Top Flat facts, she was ashamed of herself. And the wonderful part of it all was that she could go right on learning and playing and finding out things and doing them. She knew that after this she always would find something to do. She need never again have such long, long days—and all alike—as she had had back at home.

She helped with the work as usual, but she did not go driving with grandmother and Aunt Caroline, because they had a special reason for wishing to go without her. They had, they said, so many things to bring home in the cart that they would rather Edda stayed at home.

"Shall you be lonesome, Edda?" asked Aunt Caroline.

Lonesome? A few days before, if Edda had been left alone for a morning, she would have been most terribly lonesome. But now she smiled back into Aunt Caroline's green eyes and shook her head.

"I know plenty and plenty of things to do," she said.

Aunt Caroline nodded several times, and smiled in a way which said that she and Edda understood each other perfectly. Edda saw her aunt and grandmother off in the phaëton, and then looked about to amuse herself. First she tied a blue ribbon around the neck of the six-toed cat; then she picked some poppies for the blue vase that sat on the taboret, then she went up to see if her room was as tidy as such a pretty room ought to be. And after that she went walking.

As she went down the garden path and thought of all

that had come to her during her fairy nights, she wondered that she was not sad because she had used up all of her fairy rights. But she found she did not mind at all. It had been sweet as sweet, but no doubt, Edda thought to herself, what was coming next would be sweeter. That was the wonder of it, after one had learned how to be happy one need n't care because certain pleasant times were past. Plenty more would be coming on.

So, singing to herself, she went on down the path, past the oak, on to the hollyhocks, and then turned along a narrow path where she had not yet been. Passing by the raspberry and currant bushes, she came to a little low gateway. The latch lifted without trouble, and she found herself in an orchard of apple trees. The kind wide branches spread above her head like green umbrellas, and beneath her feet the grass lay long and soft.

She walked on for a way beneath these trees, and then came to a place where a sunny little hill raised itself, and where the grasses smelled hot and sweet. She went to the very top of this, and looked off to where a row of Lombardy poplars lay against the sky, and far away she could see the river winding through the fields,

and the little homes standing about among the gardens and the meadows.

"I wish," said Edda aloud, "that I could live here always and always. Oh, how I wish papa and mamma could come here, and that I need never, never go back to the Top Flat."

She sat down to think the matter over, and somehow, without at all dreaming that such a thing was going to happen, her eyes closed, and she sank back among the sun-warmed grasses and clovers and slept. But not for long. Some little, little noise awoke her, and turning over so that she could rest on her elbow, she saw Goldheart, no longer in her splendid garments but dressed like a queen who had her own work to do in the world.

She was talking to Bushy Tail, who, with paws crossed meekly upon his breast, was listening to her as if he were the politest and kindest of creatures.

"It is not my nature," Goldheart was saying in her gentlest way, "to find fault with any of the garden folk, but really, my dear Bushy Tail, word has come to me that you are not showing your best side to your friends."

Edda could hear the squirrel making some sort of a regretful murmur.

"Woodpecker says you suck eggs—"

A flash of Bushy Tail's sharp white teeth showed him to be not so meek as he looked, and Goldheart almost turned from him; then, because she could not bear to think badly of any one, she spoke again.

"But, Bushy Tail, other and more serious reports have come to me. It has been whispered to me that you sneer and fleer. I would rather you did wrong outright, my dear friend, than that you should sneer and fleer. You are not winning friends for yourself, but making enemies, and knowing your real nature—"

But at this moment, looking up, the gentle Goldheart saw Bushy Tail darting one of his sidelong glances at her in such a reckless and impudent manner that she turned from him in anger and walked proudly away. She had turned her back on him for good and all, and Edda could not help feeling sorry for him, bad as he was. Yet she was delighted to have caught one more glimpse of the fairy queen. She had feared that such happiness might never again be hers, although, now she came to think of it, the crow had said that at moments

QUEEN GOLDHEART AND BUSHY TAIL

when she was happy and good she still might catch glimpses of the fairy world, although she could no longer take part in it.

After all, what did it matter? There were things she wanted much, much more than to be a playmate of fairies. If she could just see her mamma—

But she must not spoil her visit by growing homesick, that was certain. That would show her to be a stupid child. It was much better to be grateful for all

QUEEN GOLDHEART TURNS HER BACK ON BUSHY TAIL

the pleasures and joys that were coming to her. She thought very hard about these matters as she made her way back through the orchard and into the garden again. It was so still there that it seemed impossible that only the night before it had rung to the sound of hundreds of little voices, and been the scene of the great coronation and wedding pageant. Edda sank on to a seat to think about it. Had it been a dream? She wished she might ask the question of the tall, friendly looking lilies that

grew about the garden seat, or coax some answer from the sweet-william. But in broad daylight it would not do to ask questions of flowers.

"Child," said a voice above her head, "are you happy here?"

Edda stopped swinging her feet and looked up. There sat the crow, the Black Master among the birds, who could talk as if he were the little brother of man, who knew the fairies, and who held many secrets in his ancient heart.

"Happy?" repeated Edda. "Of course I 'm happy."

"And not fretting because you 're not a fairy?"

" I 'm not fretting about anything," said Edda, and then hesitated because she remembered how homesick she had been. Besides, the crow was smiling as if he knew her thoughts as well as she did herself.

"It is a place to be happy in," went on the crow. "I myself am happy here, and I have seen your grandmother playing around this garden when she was no older than you. Your father played here, too, when he was a little boy, and your Aunt Caroline was the happiest and gayest child of all. Indeed, she liked so well to be a child that she has kept the heart of a child, although she has

grown to be a woman. And now you, Edda, are to grow up here."

"I? Oh, no, crow. You 're mistaken. I 'm here only for a little while—just a tiny while. Then I must go back to the Top Flat."

The Black Master flapped his wings and gave forth a hoarse laugh.

"What 's coming is coming," he said in a mysterious tone. "Speak to me sometimes, Edda, and remember, when you wish to find out a secret, come to me!"

He lifted himself slowly, circled three times above her head, and then flew up and up into the blue sky.

"Only think," said Edda, "how fine it would be to have wings like that!"

But as she had no wings, only legs and feet, she made use of what she had and walked slowly toward the house. She expected to find it silent and empty, but there were Aunt Caroline and grandmother and Lily White the horse, all home again, and there were packages and bundles of all sorts being carried in, and a great air of excitement.

"Oh, little Edda, child," cried Aunt Caroline, "there you are! Are you happy here, Edda?"

THE CROW TELLING THE SECRET TO EDDA

It was the same question the crow had asked.

Edda ran and threw her arms about her aunt's neck.

"I 'm happy up to my eyes!" she said. "Only—"

"Yes?" said Aunt Caroline. "Only—"

"If mamma—"

"I 've simply got to tell the child," said Aunt Caroline to her mother.

Grandmother smoothed her silver hair with her white hand.

"Why not?" she asked, with her sweet smile.

"Well, then," said Aunt Caroline, "you are to live here, little One-in-a-thousand, as long as you please. You are to be the little girl in the garden as I used to be. It 's the truth I 'm telling you, and you need n't look as if you did n't believe your own, own aunt. Your father and your mother will be here in a week—and Bubbles the cat —and Toby the black boy, to help with the chores. And your papa is to run the sixty-acre farm for your grandmother."

"And I 'll never have to go back to the Top Flat?"

"Never, little girl! When you came here it was n't quite decided, but now it 's all arranged. Your grandmother got a letter last night telling us it was to be, and I tried to keep it a secret from you and surprise you, but I could n't do it. I 'm a great tattle-tale, Edda, particularly when I have something pleasant to tell."

"You don't seem so wonderfully surprised, child," said grandmother kindly.

Edda shook her head.

"The crow told me," she said simply, "but I did n't know whether to believe him or not."

"What an odd little child you are, Edda!" said grandmother. "So like your Aunt Caroline."

Edda felt a little warm wave of happiness run over her. She looked about the room with its shining old furniture, and through the open windows at the garden. It was more beautiful, sweeter, dearer than anything she ever had dreamed.

"I love you so!" she cried, and kissed her little grandmother, and her Aunt Caroline. Then she threw a kiss out of the window.

"And to whom is that kiss going?" asked grandmother.

"Oh, that 's for the oak!" cried Edda, and smiled at her Aunt Caroline.

THE END

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