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FAIRY DOORS

by

VIRNA SHEARD

*And any who would unlock fairy doors
With fairy gold must pay for fairy keys.*

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BOOKS BY VIRNA SHEARD

NOVELS

THE MAN AT LONE LAKE
FORTUNE TURNS HER WHEEL

POETRY

THE BALLAD OF THE QUEST
CANDLE-FLAME

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FAIRY GOLD

*O fairy gold of youth, how much you buy
No other coin may purchase of the Fates!
Dreams, and bright memories that do not die,
Illusions that swing open heaven's gates!*

*Fancies like wild-flowers growing by the way—
Laughter as light as any thrush's song,
Smiles without bitterness, joy that flecks the day,
Love that is lasting, friendship swift and strong.*

*Of priceless things this coin will bring great store—
Moon-white enchantments, magic of the seas,—
And any who would unlock fairy doors
With fairy gold must pay for fairy keys.*

*In some safe little wallet—buckled fast,
Dear fairy people, give us of your gold,
That we may keep it till all youth is past
And hold it close—to spend when we are old.*

THE FAIRY

I'd love to find a fairy!
A pink and pearly fairy
All light and bright and airy—
Wouldn't you? Now, wouldn't you?
I'd catch her very gently,
And hold her tight—but gently,
For fairies evidently
Don't care to be on view.

I've looked beneath the hedges,
And by the rivers' edges
Where rustling reeds and sedges
And ribbon-grasses grow;
I've crept through ferny places
Where cob-webs hung like laces,
And I think I've found the traces
Of tiny feet—you know!

On beds of thyme or tansy,
Or on a purple pansy,
(Especially a pansy!)
I might find one asleep—
Then, if I didn't wake it
Or frighten it, or break it,
Why I might softly take it
And bring it home to keep!

But if it got down-hearted
To find that it was parted
From all its friends, and started
To sadly wail and cry—
I know I could not stand it!
I'd feel just like a bandit,
And so I would unhand it,
And say, "Go home, then!—Fly!"

THE YAK

For hours the princess would not play or sleep
Or take the air;
Her red mouth wore a look it meant to keep
Unmelted there;
(Each tired courtier longed to shriek, or weep,
But did not dare.)

Then one young duchess said: "I'll to the King,
And short and flat
I'll say, 'Her Highness will not play or sing
Or pet the cat;
Or feed the peacocks, or do anything—
And that is that!'"

So to the King she went, curtsied, and said,
(No whit confused):
"Your Majesty, I would go home! The court is dead.
Have me excused;
The little princess still declines,"—she tossed her head—
"To be amused."

Then to the princess stalked the King: "What Ho!" he roared,
"What may you lack!
Why do you look, my love, so dull and bored
With all this pack
Of minions?" She answered, while he waved his sword:
"I want a yak."

"A yak!" he cried (each courtier cried, "Yak? Yak?"
as at a blow)
"Is that a figure on the zodiac?"

Or horse? Or crow?"
The princess sadly said to him: "Alack
I do not know."

"We'll send the vassals far and wide, my dear!"
Then quoth the King:
"They'll make a hunt for it, then come back here
And bring the thing;—
But warily,—lest it be wild, or queer,
Or have a sting."

So off the vassals went, and well they sought
On every track,
Till by and by in old Tibet they bought
An ancient yak.
Yet when the princess saw it, she said naught
But: "Take it back!"

And what the courtiers thought they did not say
(Save soft and low),
For that is surely far the wisest way
As we all know;
While for the princess? She went back to play!

Tra-rill-a-la-lo!
Tra-rill-a-la-lo!
Tra-rill-a-la-lo!

THE POINT OF VIEW

Old William says the sun comes up
Out of the China Sea;
He says he's seen it rising there
And that's a certainty;
On this, he tells me, sailor-men
Entirely agree.

And William was a sailor-man
Though he's a fisherman now.
He says he'd be a farmer
But he cannot learn to plow;
So he fishes from his fishing-smack
And I sit in the bow.

He knows the seas where pirates sail
And do their horrid crimes;
He says he's met the worst of them
About a score of times,
And that they always call him "Bill"!
When they meet in foreign climes.

He has a mermaid on his arm
Tattooed by Lee Hong Wong;
And he often sings a chanty
Of thirty verses long;
"Blow the man down," is all I know,
But it is a charming song.

And we hardly ever argue
Except about the sun,
For I know less than William knows
When all is said and done—
So we usually fish in peace
And have a lot of fun.

And all goes very happily
Till William says to me
That every day the sun comes up
Out of the China Sea!—
Well—if it does, I know it sets
Behind our Maple Tree.

It doesn't set in China
But beyond our tree and shore!
I've seen it go a million times
Or a squillion times or more
Into the sea, and then roll on
Right through a golden door!—

So, after we have talked awhile
We let the subject drop,
And William lights his old clay pipe,
Or a fish comes up, 'Kerflop!'
"We argue noble," William says,
"But we both know when to stop."

WITH APPETITE

My guinea-pigs are funny pigs!
I give them ginger-bread and figs
And cough-drops sometimes. Now and then
I put these in their little pen;
(Though it is not a pen—but 'hutch'),
They like the cough-drops very much,
For when I ask them, they say, "Oui!
Oui, oui, oui, oui, oui, oui, oui, oui!"
They make it sound so sweet and low—
And it is French for "Yes"—you know.
Of course I do not give them pie
Or they would all curl up and die!
It's better far to feed them cheese,
And ice cream that you cannot freeze.

They've no idea when dinner's done
But keep on dining just for fun—
Though one's a long-haired 'ristocrat
And fussy about this and that;
He won't take taffy; not a bit!
(He gets too tangled up in it.)
But he's the one that just loves figs—
O guinea-pigs are funny pigs!

GREETINGS

In Summer time when we all go
 Away down to the sea,
There's one old sailor I don't know
 Who always speaks to me!

He only seems to stand and wait—
 For when I'm running by,
I see him standing by his gate
 With a spy-glass at his eye.

But then he takes it down awhile—
 And I—I sort of stop,
And he calls, with a little smile,
 "O hello—curly-top!"

I wore my middy suit one day—
 The cap says, "Ship a-hoy!"—
And so I thought that he might say,
 "O hello—sailor-boy!"

He didn't. He just said the same;
 And when I went by with May,
I said, "He doesn't know my name—
 But I know what he will say."

May is my sister, and so small
 She's just past baby size—
And he said to her—(not me at all),
 "O hello—blue-bell eyes!"

One day my father looked at him
 Then gave a little nod—
And said, "Now there's a sailor, Jim,
 As sea-sweet as a cod."

MEDITATION

The world is full of interest
If a boy takes time to see
That all around him there are things
Of much variety.
He then observes a guinea-pig
Is nothing like a bee.

He sees the caterpillar
With its legs and fuzzy coat
Is altogether different
From a shaggy mountain goat;
And that a hop-toad sort of sings
While giraffes can't sing a note!

But when a boy thinks of the fish
That live where billows roll,—
The millions and the millions
That swim from pole to pole,
The small ones and the big ones
That eat the small ones whole.

Yes, when a boy thinks of the fish
That swim the sea to-day—
The round ones and the square ones
And the flat ones, like a tray—
He feels that he has thought enough—
And better go and play.

THE OWL

I wonder what the white owl thinks
Up in our old pine tree
When he calls, "Whoo-oo!" and softly winks
And stares straight down at me.

The garden grows so quiet then
There's no sound but his cry;
My father says the owl thinks, "When—
Will a little mouse come by?"

My father says he thinks, "O where—
Have the young grey squirrels run?
There's not a weazel—not a hare
Beneath this setting sun!"

Well, probably that's what he thinks
Up in the dark pine tree,
When he calls, "Who-oo!" and softly winks
And watches silently.

He's just a pirate, made with wings,

And he dotes on pirate deeds—
But I wish he only wanted things
Like beans——or sunflower seeds.

APPLES

Apples taste of sunshine,—
Apples taste of dew,—
You may take a bite of mine
And find that this is true.

Apples have the same scent
As honey in the comb;
The wind left it when he went,
Or the bees brought it home.

Apples are rose-red outside
And snow-white within
But some like little jesters, pied—
Go tumbling down the bin!—

When rosy apples on a tree
Shine in October's sun
I understand entirely
How much Eve wanted one.

THE ORGAN GRINDER

The organ-grinder always comes in Spring;—
About the time that crocuses are here,
And we are thinking of the garden swing
And little girls with skipping-ropes appear.

He has a brownish greenish velvet coat,
And tips his faded hat back on his head;
His face is sun-burned, and around his throat
Is tied a handkerchief of blue and red.

We like his little battered box of tunes;
Some notes are cracked, but most are high and sweet,
And with the boy who sells the toy balloons
We follow after him along the street.

Because he has a monkey small and grey
That sits up on his shoulder, dressed in plaid
And lifts its cap to us the funniest way!
(Although he doesn't seem exactly glad.)

The organ-grinder's smile just flashes white!
So while he turns the tunes out, we reach up
And smile back at his face so brown and bright
And drop our pennies in the monkey's cup.

But afterwards, when all the tunes are done
He swings his little box up with a sigh—
Almost as though it were a heavy one—
And then he waves to us and nods goodbye.

At home I heard my own grandmother say:
"That hand-organ has never changed at all!
It plays the lovely airs it used to play—
One waltz—we danced to it at my first ball."

EXILE

Ben-Arabie was the Camel,
Belonging to the Zoo.
He lived there through a dozen years,
With nothing much to do,
But chew, and chew, and chew, and chew,
And chew, and chew, and chew.

He wondered when he might go home,—
And what they kept him for;
Because he hated Zooish sounds
And perfumes—more and more;—
Decidedly he hated them
Much more, and more, and more.

And why the world turned white and cold
He did not understand.
He only wanted lots of sun
And lots and lots of sand;
Just sand, and sand, and sand, and sand,
And sand, and sand, and sand.

He longed to see an Arab Sheik,
And Arab girls and boys;
The kind of noise he yearned for most
Was plain Arabian noise;
(The sound of little drums and flutes
And all that sort of noise.)

He leant against the wind to hear
The sound of harness bells;
He sniffed the air for scent of spice
The nomad merchant sells;
He dreamed of pleasant tinkling bells
Of spice, and tinkling bells.

The keepers said that he grew queer.

They wondered why he sighed;
They called him supercilious
And crabbed and sun-dried;
(Indeed he was quite crabbed and
Exceedingly sun-dried.)

But ere his woolly fur was gone
They put him on a train—
For a rich old Arab bought him
And sent him home again;—
O joyous day! He sent him home;
He sent him home again!

MAMMY SETS A TRAP

Der's a sort o' light scratchin'
All around dis house;—
Ah hears it in de night watch,
An' ah reckon it's a mouse!—
Der's a kin' o' skittle-scuttle,
By de nursery do',
An' ah ain't goin' to listen
To dat soun' no mo';—
For ah'll buy a trap, honey,
Ah'll go buy a trap—
An' when ah catches dat ol' mouse
He'll git one good rap!"

So mammy bought a mouse-trap,
A round wire one;—
She baited it with toasted cheese,
And bits of currant bun,
Then put it in the cupboard
By her red turban-box
And said: "Ah'll git him, honey,—
An' he'll git some hard knocks—
For he's given me de misery
From de dark to de dawn,—
An' ah's gwan catch him
Suah as you's bawn—"

Well— there in the morning
Was a tiny grey mouse!
He seemed to think the wire trap
Was his little house—
For he was calmly sitting
And nibbling at the cheese
Just as cool and collected
As ever you please!—

And mammy cried: "Look honey!
Can de world beat dat!
Ah don' know if ah'll knock him
Or jes' git de cat."

The tiny mouse looked cheerful
And even quite gay,—
He romped around the trap a bit
And seemed inclined to play,
Then he sat up on his hind legs,
And washed his little face
'Till mammy said: "He surely seems
Right happy in dat place!—
Ah don' feel jes' like knockin' him—
Or bringin' in dat cat;—
Lordy—ah'll let him out—dis time;"—
So she did. What d'you think of that!

THE KEEPER

I like the Keeper of the Zoo
And ask him many things
As, "What do armadillos do?"
"Why racoon's tails have rings?"
And he answers me the best he can
For he is a very clever man.

He is not young, he is not old,
But just the nicest age;
He tells me he can't bear to hold
A wild beast in a cage,—
But if the town must have a Zoo
There's plenty there for him to do.

He knows each animal and bird,
And gives them pleasant names;
Some that I've never even heard,
And some like "William James;"
That's the gorilla's name;—but still he
Usually calls him "Willie."

Beside the new and homesick ones
The Keeper stops to smile;
His lumps of sugar and his buns
They take—after a while.
So then he pats them,—and I know
They simply hate to see him go.

I'd love to keep the Zoo with him
When I am in my prime,
Though that day seems as far and dim

As the other end of time.—
But mother takes me there, 'tis true
When she has nothing else to do.

THE LITTLE HOTTENTOT

There lived a little Hottentot
Where winter-time was always hot
And summers like a grill;—
A Mission Lady taught a lot
To him,—and many a dusky tot—
And taught them with a will.

She managed to acquire enough
Of syllables both soft and rough,
Bright wonder-yarns to spin;
Each little empty pate she'd stuff
With fairy-folk, and pirates bluff
And rhyme and song, and hymn.

She salted all she had to tell
With lovely Bible lore as well,
And ancient Jewish laws;
But in December it befell
Her homesick heart she tried to quell
With tales of Santa Claus.

She pictured him so round and red,
With whiskers, reindeer, bells, and sled
And bag that bulged with toys.
"On Christmas Eve he comes," she said,
"And stockings hung up by each bed
He fills for girls and boys!"

The small benighted Hottentot
Stole home at last, with quite a lot
Of fancies queer and quaint.
He watched his mother stir the pot
And sat and longed for what was not
And dreamed of one old Saint.

He saw the sunset colors pass;
Then found some nodding feathery grass
And curled up with a sigh
For he'd nothing to hang up—alas—
But anklets made of beaten brass,
When Santa Claus came by.

O nothing, nothing else at all
To hang up where the trees were tall
Above his soft green bed—

Boys do not let their tear-drops fall,
So he beat his breast,—'till like a pall
Night covered up his head.

The Mission Lady might not be
A beauteous dame of high degree
But she kept the Yule-tide feast;—
By the little dark one 'neath the tree
She placed a horn and drum he'd see
When pink came in the East.

PENGUINS

No matter what the hour may be
Penguins are dressed to dine,
And have a gentle dignity,—
Stuffy—but yet benign,—
As though their minds dwelt much on soup,
On walnuts, and on wine.

But really this is not the case;
The dinner Penguin's wish
At any time, in any place,
Is just entirely fish;
They do not even want it cooked
Or served upon a dish.

They have a quite misleading air,—
For when parading by
Each looks as though he ought to wear
An eye-glass in his eye,
And at the least an opera-hat
And a little white bow-tie.

But you can't judge by what you see,—
For the keeper at the Zoo
Says Penguins love simplicity
In everything they do,
And go to bed at four o'clock
Winter and summer too!

He says a Penguin all day long
Very politely plays;
He does not fight—though he is strong—
Or let his temper blaze,
But lives up to his lovely clothes
In lots of different ways.

He says he calculates they own
An ancient family tree,
And down in the Antarctic zone

They never bend the knee.—
I'm glad they're friendly though they have
So long a pedigree.

THE LITTLE PRAYER

Bright angels shake the trees of heaven
To bring the snow-flakes down,
And turn this grey and darkling place
Into a silver town!

Out where the hurrying crowds go by,
Where shops shine for a mile,
Please put on everybody's face
A merrie Christmas smile!

And in our stockings let us find
The things that we would choose;
And send the carol-singers down
A lot of over-shoes.

For singing in the silver street
The 'Herald Angel' song,
Makes even carol-singers cold
Before so very long.

O keep the little kittens safe
From motor cars and things
Because they really can't run fast
And haven't any wings.

And dogs that have no collars on,—
The lost ones, sad and thin,—
Dear heavenly angels, find a house
Where they may all go in.

And if I get some Christmas skates
(As happened once or twice)
Do please to make the weather freeze
And turn the pond to ice!

Because old Santa Claus will have
Ten trillion things to do,
O angels ever bright and fair!
I make this prayer to you.

I met Santa Claus, and shook hands with him!
Yes, really I did, though you'd never think it true;—
When I looked up and saw him, everything went dim,
'Till he called, "Hello Goldilocks! I'm watching for you!"

It was down in a shop—just a great, great big shop,
With such a noise and rushing that no one could think;—
And then in some fairy way the noise seemed to stop,
For suddenly, he was there—so red, and white, and pink!

There were toys all around him;—but what I could see
Was only himself, as he stooped and took my hand,
And said, "Little girl, you look mighty sweet to me;—
What do you want for Christmas? A doll-house—or a band?"

"A little silver thimble, or paints in a box?
A pretty fur tippet, or a stove to bake pies?"
Then he laughed in the gladdest way, and shook his white locks—
And it's queer—for I thought he had such tired eyes.

EMMY LOU THINKS ON KITTENS AND CATS

Kittens are such purry things!
Such little gay and furry things—
So silky-soft and frail;
As though they had some kind of wings
They fly for balls and apron strings
Or chase a spinning tail.

Their eyes are clear as amber pools
Where flickering sunlight sinks and cools;
They love the noon-day heat—
And their pansy faces always smile
When they curl up and drowse awhile
On mother's window seat.

They pat my hand with velvet paws;—
(You'd hardly think that they had claws
Like ivory curved and strong;)
And when I take them anywhere
They walk out with a delicate air
(Like the lass that's in the song.)

It's sad to see them turn to cats
That like to hunt for mice and rats
Or even bats and birds;
I think some wizard makes them change
With ancient magic, queer and strange
And old forgotten words.

For cats have dark mysterious ways;

Quite by themselves through nights and days
They walk (as Kipling tells)
And when they leave for here or there
As still and blank a look they wear
As oysters in their shells.

My brother John says cats well know
That cats were sacred long ago
In old King Pharaoh's land,
And so they have a haughty mien,
And something in their eyes of green
No one can understand.

(But O! I wish they all would try
To just stay kittens till they die!)

THE SCISSOR-GRINDER MAN

I like the scissor-grinder man
When he comes down our little street;
His face is tanned the brownest tan
And he smiles the very best he can
A crookedy smile and sweet.

I'd like to go along with him
For I'd help him ring his bell;
Far, far away where the road is dim,
Across the hills, and the forests rim,
He knows where some fairies dwell!

And while he sharpens our carving knife
Or the scissors, shining and small,
He says a man gets the good of life—
Plenty of comfort, and little strife—
Who goes atravelling, and all.

He says he knows where the wild geese go,
And where there are nuggets of gold!
He heard the Chinook begin to blow,
Where salmon leap, and the rivers flow,
And winter has lost its hold.

He says that a man can journey well
With his trade-kit up on his back,
And nothing beside, except a bell
To ring, where stay-at-home people dwell,
Not knowing all that they lack.

He says that he knows a lusty song
That the deep-sea fishermen sing;
And he would sing it—but it's too long—

So he goes his way; (ding-dong!—ding-dong!)
With a sort of sailor swing.

It all seems quiet—and maybe queer—
When his little round wheel is still.—
But by and by we can faintly hear
His silvery bell sound far and clear
The other side of the mill.

O I like the scissor-grinder man
When he comes down the village street;
His face is tanned just the brownest tan,—
And he smiles the very best that he can,—
A crookedy smile and sweet.

BOBBY CONSIDERS HIS POLLYWOG (IN THE GOLD-FISH BOWL)

They tell me that my pollywog
Will turn himself into a frog
And hop out on the land!
I've thought about it quite a lot
But how he'll do it;—that is what
I cannot understand.

For now he only seems to wish
To be a jolly little fish
And float around and swim;
Still if he can make legs to grow
Why anyone would say, you know
It's pretty smart of him.

Imagine how surprised he'll be
When he discovers suddenly
He has no tail at all!
And then again, down in his throat
He'll find a lovely rumbling note
To sing from Spring to Fall.

Well,—caterpillars put on wings,
And other things do other things,
But all know where to stop;
So go on, pollywog, and change;
And though it may seem rather strange
Get legs—and learn to hop!

AWAY DOWN SOUTH

I saw the Town's tame alligator
Adozing in the sun,
They had built a fence around him
And he really couldn't run;
But my old Mammy whispered low:
"O come along chile! Do!—
Aw reckon aw wouldn't 'sturb him
Honey—if aw were yo'!"

I saw an old grey fisherman
Mending his fishing-net,
With a lovely bull-dog by him
He keeps just for a pet—
And Mammy said: "Dat dog, sure sweet!
His eyes am kind an blue;
But aw'd take de far side of de street
Honey—if aw were yo'."

I saw the old brown-pea-nut man,
Beneath a cotton-wood tree,—
O his little push-cart whistles
The most delightfully!
And though Mammy doesn't like pea-nuts
I thought we'd get a few—
Till she said: "Aw wouldn't buy or'nary things
Honey—if aw were yo'!"

"Come! Mammy'll get yo' paw-paws,—
Or little yallow pears!
Pea-nuts! Dey's for monkeys,
'An efelunts an' bears!
Less find de hurdy-gurdy boy;
Come 'long! Dat's what we'll do—
Aw'd leave dat whistling pea-nut man
Honey—if aw were yo'."

Well—I like to walk with Mammy
Down town on market-day,
With people going here and there,
And all the shops so gay;
She wears her best bandanna then
Bound round and round her head,
Her face is nice,—though its mighty dark—
And her dress is poppy-red.

Yes. I like to go with Mammy;—
But I tell you this is true,
I wish she wouldn't say so much:
"Honey—if aw were yo'!"

I WISH I HAD—

I wish I had a wallaby
To hop along and follow me
When I go for a stroll,—
Or a penguin would be rather nice,
They say a penguin walks on ice
With a deep-sea sailor's roll!

If I could have a porcupine—
A little one—to just be mine,
I'd make him very tame,—
Then take him down the avenue
And show him things he never knew
Existed—e'er he came!

Of course he'd go much like a crab
And no one ever ought to grab
Or tease him—you could see;—
But with his quills, and with his squeak
He'd just be something so unique,
And a curiosity!

I used to think, perhaps one day
I'd own a monkey, small and grey,—
—I asked them about that.
But Dad and Mother both said, "No!"
And Dinah said she'd promptly go
If one came to this flat.

Meanwhile I always walk out now
With Grannie's little Chu Chin Chow,
For he must take the air.
He has seen the avenue before
And seems to find it such a bore—
—Well, I'd rather have a bear.

My Mother says: "O Gwyneth—please
O please don't ask for wallabys!
Play with the nice park squirrels."
And Grannie says: "We must use tact—
Come, baby darling! Try to act
Like other little girls!"

DRIFTWOOD

When the dark days come, and it is late November,
When sea-fog is curling in across the old sea-wall,—
Then Mother lights the driftwood we found in September
And piled up in the fireplace out in the hall.

It burns green and violet with bright orange spangles,
While twilight wrapped in gauzy mist dims each window pane;
The little flames flash in and out in wild blue tangles,
And we children gather round to roast chestnuts again.

Then Nicholas says sometimes: "What are you seeing, Dickie,
Where the coals are like garnets, and the little flames dance?"
And Dick says: "flames like flowers. I just see flames, Nickie."
Then Bill frowns: "No like feathers. Or pointed like a lance."

And Betty nods: "Yes, every flame's a flower or a feather."
But Gwyn gaily tosses back her mop of red hair,
And laughs: "It's only salty wood, seasoned by sea weather
It sparkles when it burns. And that's all there is there."

Then Nicholas laughs too, and says: "I see a tower!—
So hark ye! Hark ye! Ye lustreless small fry!
I see a castle and a lady in her bower—
A draw-bridge, and a moat, and a flag flying high.

"And—by my Halidom! A knight I see riding—
Look! Look! The lady waves to him her lily-white hand.
Me-thinks, very like, she is tired of abiding
Aloft on the turret when her true Knight is on land!"

Then all the others cry: "O Nick it's just your fancy!
There are no pictures in the driftwood fire at all."
So at last he turns to me. "Don't you see them Nancy?
The Knight, and the Lady on the battlemented wall?"

O just to see what Nicholas sees is my one desire;—
But I think he is a poet, and far different from me,
For all I can find when I gaze into the fire
Is an old grey ship sailing on the waves at sea.

TWINS—AGED NINE

My name is Jack (it's really John) and my brother's name is Jerry.
We're twins, and so we look alike. O very much! O very!—
There's just one person that can quickly tell us from each other,
And do it every single time,—and that one is our mother.

We both of us have hair that's red. We hate it for it's curly,
And father says we're built four-square—and we'll grow up strong
and burly—
And all our eyes are just alike, and so are both our noses,
So Jerry says God really tried to match us he supposes.

But that is on the outside—inside is where we differ.
Jerry sometimes almost cries, but my heart is sort of stiffer;
And things that hurt him make me mad—yes, mad as any hatter!

And I would rather fight than not—when anything's the matter.

Of course he's just as brave—but then he has a different feeling
In almost every way;—he calls taking apples *stealing*!
For when I took one yesterday, from old Dan Tully's orchard
Why Jerry said if he had, his conscience would have tortured.

I know I never could like anyone as well as Jerry,—
He just about knows everything, and he is so good and merrie,
But one thing we agree on, and he's just as glad as I am.
That if we must be twins, at least we were not born in Siam.

THE MULBERRY BUSH

It is only children who really know
Where the magical dark-red mulberries grow,
And they find them whatever place they go!

Hand locked in hand, and all free from care
They dance in a ring, with wild wind-blown hair,
Round an unseen bush, that they know is there.

For I saw them only the other day—
On a city street where the dust was grey,
Singing and singing and dancing away!—

And although it was twilight there before,
Tired eyes watching from window and door
Saw the dawn, and a fairy bush once more.

"Here we go 'round the Mulberry bush—
The Mulberry bush—the Mulberry bush—
Here we go 'round the Mulberry bush
So early in the morning!"

CHRISTMAS EVE IN TOWN

This is the night, O small ones! At last this is the night
When the sweet old Saint comes driving from his land of shining white!
His rushing little reindeer must have wings upon their heels,
And as they come their harness bells chime out in silvery peals.
(But they are fairy reindeer—and he may be fairy, too—
And it's hard to follow fairies on a road of midnight blue!)

Yet whether you are little, or very nearly tall,
Just wait and see when morning breaks what he has brought you all!
Tied up with crimson ribbon or wound with greenest string,

And wrapped in snowy paper, you will find each lovely thing;
The thing that you have wished for, the thing you most adore—
(Well—he always tries to bring them, for that is what he's for.)

So run and hang your stockings up before the fireplace
(And may all children do the same in this our year of grace.)
But, darlings, hang them properly, and never up-side-down,
For Santa Claus has little time when he drives through a town.
Then—come here to the window and look up at the stars,
And watch them twinkle far away above the motor cars!

There may be carol singers down somewhere in the street
Singing, "Noel! Noel!" with voices sharply sweet.
So from your banks of painted tin, it's very well I know,
You will take out all the pennies and drop them down below!
(But if you have no bank, my dear, just smile and wave—and wave—
At the chilly singers carolling the song the angels gave.)

Then afterward kneel down beside your warm and fluffy bed,
And for a moment fold your hands, and softly bend your head;
For O! This is a strange night that comes but once a year;
This night of lighted candles, when Bethlehem seems near;
This night for happy children—for youth, and song, and dance—
And for some to watch the hours through in long remembrance.

TABU

There are so many things I may not do,
For when I try to they all say, "Not that!
That is the one thing, darling, that's Tabu;
No! No! You cannot have a baseball bat—
Baseball is not for little girls like you."

I long to slide down bannisters quite fast,
And walk upon my hands, and turn back-flops
Like circus clowns; but Grannie is aghast
If I do these, and so they quickly stop,
And all the world is dark and overcast.

I greatly wish to climb an apple tree,
Or skate on roller skates around the block—
(Not in the kitchen!) I just want to be
Where fire engines live, or at the dock
To watch the fishermen come in from sea.

I'd rather not feed gold-fish in a bowl,
Or take my mother's dog out on a string;
I don't desire to plant seeds in a hole.
To pull up weeds, when God loves everything,
Gives me the queerest feeling in my soul.

I know that I may bake a cake with Jane,
Or skip a while with my new skipping rope;
And I may take a walk if there's no rain
Or blow some bubbles with the bathroom soap;
Well—these things only give my heart a pain.

I think "Tabu" is quite the nicest word;
It sounds like something pleasant you can play,
But don't believe it! Though it seems absurd,
It means "Forbidden," spelled another way.
(In German it's "Verboten")—Daddy heard.

UNCLASSIFIED

Bob has the dearest dog! But no one knows
Exactly just the kind of dog he is;
Bob tried to get him into lots of shows,
Where there were nice new kennels, rows on rows,
And every single sort of dog but his.

The judges always looked him up and down;
They'd pat his head and shake his little paw—
And one man said: "Wherever in this town
Did you discover, Son, this here cheesehoun'?"
I tell you, he's a dog without a flaw."

"But we can't tell you, now, what we can do,
For this here dog is in a class alone.
It's certain that you'd take a prize or two,
And carry home rosettes of red or blue,
If any others of this breed were shown."

So Bob comes home and wears a downcast face;
But Chummy (that's his name) is blythe and gay,
Because he'd rather be in his own place
Under the table, when Dad's saying grace,
Than in some funny dog-show far away.

OVER THE FENCE

Sometimes when it's so late at night
That everybody is fast asleep
My room is a boxful of silver light
With a shadowy cover, dark and deep.

I know it is only the old old moon
Shining right in through the window pane,

And I know that it will be morning soon;—
But I'd rather go back to sleep again.

So first I think of a field of grain
Running in ripples before the breeze
And next I think of the soft grey rain
Pattering down on the willow trees.

I remember the sound the pigeons make
Over and over all the day long
And if I grow wider and wider awake,
Why then I think of the river's song.

But it's only when I start to count sheep
Jumping a fence that is low and white
That almost at once I fall asleep
In my little boxful of silver light.

A LITTLE FRIENDLY CALL

How are you, Mrs. Kangaroo?
I've just come in to call on you
A little while;
Your keeper says he thinks you grew
Beside the Nile,
Or some such place—O very far—
Where duckbills and flamingoes are,
And vampires too!
Where no one drives a motor car
Or wears a shoe.

I'm sure you'll like it better here
When you get used to us my dear,
For you will find
That even if you think we're queer,
We can be kind.
And where you come from—anyway—
Was all your life a holiday
Without a care?
Did you go places, or just stay
Well—anywhere?

I do adore your silver coat!
And you're a little like our goat,
For you don't bite;
Your tails are different, though, I note;—
O different—quite!
Your keeper says that some fine day
You'll hop a bit, if I can stay
Perhaps, for tea?
Then I'd hop too,—and we would play

Most happily!

But now I think I'll say, "Adieu,"
(As Mother's grown-up callers do)
Ere I'm a bore,
I really have to see the Gnu
Who lives next door.

IT SEEMS TO ME

Yesterday we went to see
The baby Chimpanzee!—
Although they said that it was new
It seems quite old to me;
About as old (Bob thought so too,)
As we shall ever be.

Upon its little face it wore
A discontented look
As though it found most things a bore;
But still from Bob it took
A peanut. Then it dropped it for
Its mother raged and shook!

Its hair is not exactly hair.
It has such worn-out knees
As we have not seen anywhere
On any Chimpanzeese!
And it seems to me it does not care
For anyone it sees.

Bob says he thinks, perhaps—maybe,
It will improve some day;
But then again, it seems to me
It never, never may.
Its just a kind of mystery
We thought.—And went away.

GAME

"Only the game-fish breast the sea,"
Said an old, old salty sailor to me.
All the others lean to the tide,
Or out on the back of the breakers ride.
Only the game-fish bold and brave
Pits his shining body against the wave;
And whether the spring be quick or slow

Up the rapids the salmon go!

Only the game-fish swim up-stream,
Where the golden spangles of sunlight gleam,
And cool brown ripples run and race,
All edged with a shaken, silver lace,
Where splintered shadows toss and fall,
And the loon and lonely whip-poor-will call,
His head to the current facing the spray,
The glittering game-fish takes his way!
"Only the game-fish breast the sea,"
Said an old, old salty sailor to me.

LULLABY

Hark! The wind is rocking the robins in their nest—
All the little children long have gone to rest—
Every tiny lambkin out upon the hill
Is curled up by its mother, white and warm and still.
Butterflies are sleeping beneath a midnight spell
Swinging on a green leaf or in a flower bell—
On muffled wing the grey owl takes his lonely flight
While all the drowsy crickets chirp a long good-night.

O restless little baby, shut your wondering eyes,
For now the stars are nodding, nodding, in the skies.
They're growing very weary of the watch they keep
And want to stop atwinkling and go fast asleep.
Hear the clocks all striking! The moon grows very bright,
But still the ship from dreamland tarries out of sight.
Hurry kindly Captain, across the silver dew,
There's one more little baby wants to sail along with you!

IN THE ABBEY

Not far from the Chapel of Henry VII. in Westminster Abbey, and near the tombs of the three Queens, Mary, her half-sister Elizabeth, and Mary Queen of Scots, there is thought to have been buried long ago the body of a little girl. Above it is this inscription only: "JANE LISTER, DEAR CHILDE."

How came you here—tell me, how came you here
With these of England's garnered great to lie?
In this vast tomb of Kings, cool and austere,
Why should you sleep while centuries go by
Lost and alone,—Jane Lister, childe so dear?

Who brought you down this dim and storied way,
Where mighty names are carved on wall and floor;—

Who carried you that far forgotten day
In through the Abbey's heavy darkened door—
You, who belonged to Morning, and the May.

Poets, and Queens, and Ministers of State,
These are your neighbors in this house of peace.
You are ringed round with weary men and great,
Who each one, here, at last found long release
From weight of grandeur, pain of love, and hate.

Here Gloriana's restless heart is still,
And Mary Queen of Scots is free of grief,
Here the Crusader's armour rusts at will,
And never summer shine or swinging leaf
Brighten these alcoves that the shadows fill.

For here the night and day are both as one,
And folded hands have laid their treasures down;
Here are no battles fought—no races run;
No man wears other than a carven crown,
In this grey quietness, bereft of sun.

They should have found for you a pleasant place
Small one,—where daisies grew and grass was green,
And shadows from tall trees made lovely lace,
And in young April little lambs were seen,
Or the high moon looked down with smiling face.

O much I wonder why they brought you here,
Where Kings and Queens and glorious warriors lie,
With one lone unknown soldier on his bier.
Strange ghosts, methinks, you are companioned by
Little Jane Lister—childe forever dear.

THE MERRY GENTLEMAN

A Story in Rhyme, and in Three Parts

PART I.

Spring had come again and at Greenwich one day
There were revels out on the green,
A May-pole dance and a mummers' play
And cherry-sack sent by the Queen;
(It added much to the gaiety
The cherry-sack sent by the Queen.)

Little Barbara Crewe of old London Town
Spent the day there with Cobbler Greer;
There was no one else either up or down
To heed her or reckon her dear;—

As far as she knew there was no one else
In the distant lands, or the near.

For it chanced in the time that the black plague came,
Sweeping city and country-side,
That this child alone of the clan of her name
Drifted back from death's ebbing tide,
And old Greer had found her frightened and lost,
And had taken her home to abide.

For the ancient was kindly, and all day long
While he cobbled the broken shoes,
He shielded her well from want and from wrong,—
Though he drank to banish the blues.
When worries were plenty, and pennies few
Why he drank to banish the blues.

He bought little Barbara a horn-book to read
And a scrivener taught her to write,
While a pretty wench in bitterest need,
With a ragged shawl of scarlet and white
Taught her the steps of an old Spanish dance,
And a prayer when she knelt at night.

Beauty had marked this stray child with its sign,
Its white and its rose and its gold;
Three years had gone by;—perhaps she was nine
And she grew like a flower from the mould,
And there in the dim little cobbler shop
Her lovely days were unrolled.

She enchanted the heart of old Gaffer Greer
For where he had lived all alone,
She brought the sweet of the spring of the year
And echoes from youth that had flown.
To the old one battered and worn by life
She brought dreams of things that had flown.

Now he borrowed a donkey and rickety cart
And they went off to Greenwich Green,
But once at the revels, drifted apart
For there was so much to be seen;
And the ancient's desire was towards cherry-sack,
And the child's—towards the young May Queen.

But every gay holiday passes, and so
When the gloaming was drawing near
Little Barbara hunted high and low
For some sign of old Gaffer Greer.
And she found him at last in the donkey-cart
Overcome by the cherry-sack's cheer.

Then the little grey donkey would not depart
But laid himself down on the grass;
With his harness loose and Greer in the cart

He took orders from no young lass—
He was happy there, and could sleep all night
Unheeding whate'er came to pass.

So Barbara made up her mind to walk back
The six miles by the King's high-way,
For Greer would not waken (with bones on the rack)
And return until break of day—
But for little maids 'twas best to go home
And not wait for the break of day.

PART II.

The twilight was long and silvery-bright
For the moon like a sickle swung low—
And the road-side hedges were sweet and white
As the hawthorn was full ablow;
O it seemed to Barbara a fairy world
Where she had a long way to go!

And she followed the London-bound crowd along
Where it flowed as a tide to the sea;
Then because she was tired she sang a song
For that helps wherever you be—
And when the miles are terribly long
Why one sings the more cheerily.

She sang like a bird in the greening spring
And her song owed as little to art;—
But the tune was old, with a salty ring,
While the words were both sweet and tart—
And a horse-man reined up and said, "May I sing
That old song with you, sweetheart?"

A goodly rider he seemed to the child
When he leaned from his saddle and spoke,
His face was dazzlingly bright as he smiled
And he looked as strong as an oak!
(But his horse had a rolling violet eye
And was one that no child would stroke.)

He swept her a bow with his wide feathered hat
And spoke in most courteous tone,
"Come, fair one!" he said, "By this and by that,
You should not be travelling alone.
'Tis a rough-going crowd and night is at hand,
While no princess should travel alone!"

"So! Give me your hand! Take the stirrup and spring,
You have naught to fear. Just obey.
At my saddle-bow you can sit and sing
While we gallop and gallop away!
A song like yours makes a long road short
Though one goes till the break o' day."

Then Barbara looked gravely up in his eyes
Where she sat at the saddle-head
For she had obeyed him in soft surprise
And not ever a word had said,
But her old sea chanty had vanished and gone
While memory had come in its stead.

For often her father had lifted her so
To his saddle—in beautiful years,
And the swift remembrance came like a blow
That blinded her eyes with tears.
But the rider cried: "Ho! my Princess! What now?
Such hot weeping my poor heart sears!"

"O good sir," she said, "I remember too well
How I rode with my father in May.—
But the Black Death came—and the tolling bell
And all—all were taken one day.
So I followed the hearse to see where they went
Till Gaffer Greer took me away."

The light hoofs clattered along the King's road
And the rider held fast to the child.
Beside them the tide of the people flowed
But he held her the closer and smiled—
"Little Princess," he said, "'Tis a weary world
But still by much sweetness beguiled."

"Come! Away with remembrance of death and grief
Sing thy old sea music with me—
'Tis the merry month of blossom and leaf
And the high-road is wide and free—
Come, Little Princess, and I'll sing too
For the song's in my memory."

"But prythee, I be not a princess!" she said,
"I be only Barbara Crewe."
"Well, Od' so!" he smiled and nodded his head
"No princess is sweeter than you."
Then he laughed so gaily the echoes rang
As they rode through the dusky blue.

So singing the ballad they galloped along
While the crowd kept silent to hear,
For they never had known a more swinging song
Or voices more heavenly clear—
And the dim lights of London came in sight
And the smoke from chimneys blew near.

Then the man said: "Princess, I beg of your grace,
Let me go still further with thee—
I would break my fast at some quiet place
Ere I travel on speedily."
"Good sir," she replied, "Be our welcome guest,
Gaffer Greer would say so, with me."

"'Tis a little old darksome cobbler shop
Where we live—but 'twill serve for the night
And gladly and gladly I bid thee stop
For 'twill be a most dear delight!
I will give thee ale and good bread and cheese
And a bed that is warm and white."

PART III.

The rider dismounted,—lifted Barbara down,
Then unsaddled his horse for the hour—
"So—this low little house in London Town,"
He smiled—"is my sweet maid's bower?
Well—for me to-night, O most charming one,
It becomes a high conning tower."

They entered and Barbara bade him to rest
In the cobbler's worn hickory chair.
She lit a candle and brought him the best
Of their simple everyday fare—
And he ate and drank very lustily
While they made a right happy pair.

Then he took from a pocket his mellowed pipe
And smoked "till the air was blue."
"Now Princess," he said, "the hour is ripe
For a measure of merriment too.
He who dines and wines like a Lord, my fair,
Must have mirth and amusement too."

"Perhaps I could dance—an it please you," she said,
"Just an old Spanish tango or so—
But it needs a shawl and some lace on my head
And a skirt that whirls to and fro—"
"We'll imagine all that;—dance, dance for me then
Little Princess," he said, "ere I go!"

So Barbara danced in the candle-gleam
And her shadow danced on the wall—
While he whistled a tango sweet as a dream
With a deep linting rise and fall—
And he clapped when she ended: "Bravo, my fair!
Come now! Take your curtain call."

"But will you not dance for me too?" she pled,
"A horn-pipe—or old country reel?"
"I will dance perhaps soon, little maid," he said
"Where I touch neither toe nor heel;—
At the end of a rope I may dance very soon
On no ground that a man may feel."

"But ah, little Barbara—Barbara Crewe,
There is more—far more you must hear—
For 'tis strange—but I have the same name too

—We're the last of our people my dear.—
And I was away in an Eastern land
When the quick Death took them my dear.

"I am the black sheep of all our race—
Ay! The heart-break—the prayed-for, the-stray.
When the prodigal son came home to his place
Disaster had swept all away.—
But in truth I learned there was one child left
And I searched for her many a day.

"Then you sang on the road an old song I knew
As you journeyed so bravely alone;—
You were like one I loved;—your eyes were as blue
And your hair was like gold-thread—wind blown—
When you told me your name I had never a doubt
But that I had come to my own."

Then the child looked up in his dark young face
And a quick chill struck at her heart;—
"But where do you go," she cried, "from this place?
And why should you ever depart?"
"I'm a man pursued, my sweet one," he said,
"And a dead man, unless I start."

"You are Nicholas Crewe!" she cried, "father's friend,
His cousin—adored past belief!
O you cannot go now! This is not the end!
If you go I will die of grief."
"Little princess," he smiled, "we break not on that,
As the ships break up on a reef."

"But listen—you bring me new hope—strange hope,
Come! Get me the cobbler's best!—
With his coat and small-clothes I'll try to cope
With his hat and boots and the rest.
And then I will make for an out-bound ship
And they'll lose the scent they have guessed.

Nay ask me no questions—for questions I ban—
But this much I tell thee alone—
I have fought a duel and slain a man
Little maid—who stood near to the throne,
Ay! It was a fair fight and had to be—
But he stood over-near to the throne.

And so I am followed.—But you saved the day
When you rode at my saddle head.
No one dreamed that I would a-singing go—
A man who was marked for the dead.
They lost my trail on the King's highway—
When you rode at my saddle head."

She tremblingly brought him the cobbler's best black,
His boots and his neck cloth and hat.—

"O dress quickly!" she cried, "Then I will come back."
"Ay!" he laughed, "And make certain of that!
I would not start on my journey at all
Unless I made certain of that!"

So he doffed the beautiful cavalier's dress
And put on the sombre attire,
For old Greer was of Puritan breed, more or less,
And held to high heaven, and hell-fire.
(On Sabbath each week he took Barbara to church
To hear of God's heaven and fire.)

Never Puritan looked like this man who now stood
Transformed in the little dim place.
His hair was square-cut; he had done what he could
To harden the lines of his face—
He seemed like a tree made of lightness and strength
And a dark and infinite grace.

"Come Princess!" he called, "It is time to away!
Look! Who would know me my sweet?
And listen for I have somewhat to say—
E'er I take to the cobble-stoned street,
And make my way to the dock and the ship
Where new hope and liberty meet.

'Tis true I have broken some laws, but these sins
Have not been the blackest, my dear;
And he who lives and atones—well he wins
To heaven, when life has grown sear.
'Twould do little good to hang me on high
Nor bring back a dead man—I fear.

"On the morrow give the old cobbler this gold,—
Though 'twill only repay him in part—
And this for thyself.—Also tightly hold
This paper, and learn it by heart.
These are directions that you must obey
So hold them, and learn them by heart.

"I will leave my horse for the cobbler to sell—
In return for these desperate black things;
And hark! As surely as all goes well
I'll come back should I have to find wings!
When the hue and cry dies down, princess,
I'll come back should I have to find wings!

"I'll take you away to some beautiful land
Where a princess is safe from harm,
But now—O how should you understand
That the law has a long swift arm?—
When it seeks a man there is only the sea
Where his soul is free of alarm."

All ivory white she stood for a space

And had never a word to say.
Then against his brown hand she laid her face
And said: "I will wait for that day.—
But go now—Nicholas! O quickly go—
I would know you are safely away!"

"Brave heart!" he whispered, and touched her hair,
"You alone have had faith in me."
And he swung down the street and left the child there
Too blind with her tears to see—
Then through them she smiled, "I know he'll come back
Though he said not what day it would be."

THE EVANESCENT

*Where is the country of our young enchantment?
The lovely, lovely land we used to know,
Where summer built for us her green pavilions
And winter wove for us her robes of snow;—
Ah then at dawning all the wide horizon
Called us away and beckoned us to go!*

*Where is the country of the morning-glories,
Where have departed all its nights of blue,
When we could dance 'till little stars grew tired
And the sweet rose of day came shining through—
Dance as the elves and fauns and fairies used to
In that dim time when all the hills were new.*

*Something has gone that we may not recapture,
Something untamed—something unbound and rare,
Essence of April—breath of early blossoms
Shaken from orchards—blown upon the air—;
Glamour of dreams, and faith in God's glad heaven—
Balm of soft sleep unstirred by any care.*

*Sweetness of youth,—but this we may remember;
This for our keeping when all else is said—
Haunting and strange as perfume of old amber
Locked in its gold from cedar trees long dead.
Country of youth—and fountain of enchantment—
Ah Ponce de Leon—where have its waters fled?*

[End of *Fairy Doors*, by Virna Sheard]