



THE
SPELL
THAT
WENT
WRONG
Enid
Blyton

MY SECOND NATURE BOOK
**THE SPELL THAT
WENT WRONG**
AND OTHER STORIES

Enid Blyton

MACMILLAN

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MY SECOND NATURE BOOK

Enid Blyton

THE SPELL THAT WENT WRONG AND OTHER STORIES

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FOREWORD

Dear Children,

This is the second of the Nature story books, and all the stories in it will tell you something interesting that you will like to know.

You will read about the stickleback, the tiny fish who actually builds a nest for his young ones. You will read about the bird who *doesn't* make a nest—and what she does with her eggs. You will learn how to tell a moth from a butterfly, and how very clever the dandelion is when it wants to send its seeds away.

The world of Nature is full of magic of its own, and full of beauty too, and of very queer and remarkable things. It is a world that every child loves once he knows his way about it. These stories are to help you to find your way, and to help you to love all the little creatures who live out their lives in the woods and fields and streams. You will have to keep as still as a mouse when you watch them, and you will go home with many interesting tales of your own to tell!

This is the second book. If you like it, you shall have more. There is no nicer way of learning about Nature than by stories, so you shall have plenty!

Love from
ENID BLYTON

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THE FISH THAT BUILT A NEST

Once there was a little stickleback who lived in a pond. It was a nice pond, well warmed by the sun, and with plenty of other creatures there that the stickleback knew very well.

There were the tadpoles, always wriggling this way and that. There were the black beetles, some very large, some not so large. There were the dragonfly grubs who liked to hide in the mud.

There were many other water creatures. The stickleback was not afraid of any of them. He was very quick and he was well armed too, for on his back he had three sharp spines. He would rip any enemy with these if he could—so most creatures kept out of his way if he did not like them.

One day he talked to a big frog swimming in the pond.

“Have you laid your eggs?” he asked.

“Yes,” said the frog. “There they are, in that big mass of white jelly at the top of the water.”

“Why do you lay them in jelly?” asked the stickleback.

“So that enemies shall not eat my eggs,” said the frog. “It is very slippery jelly, almost impossible to eat. And if the jelly is not eaten, then my eggs have a chance to hatch.”

“It is a very good idea to lay eggs in jelly, then,” said the stickleback. “I cannot lay eggs, because I am a father-fish. But perhaps I could ask a mother-fish to lay eggs for me in jelly.”

But no mother-stickleback knew how to lay eggs in jelly. They laughed at him, and swam away fast. He went quite red with rage.

A bird came down to drink from the pond. The stickleback swam up and spoke to her.

“Have you any eggs?”

“Yes,” said the bird in surprise. “I have three. They are pretty ones, as blue as the sky.”

“Have you put them in jelly, to be safe?” asked the fish.

The bird did not understand. “In jelly! You are very silly. I put my eggs in a nest, which I made myself.”

“In a nest?” said the stickleback. “What is that?”

The bird told him what a nest was, and the little fish listened.

“It sounds a very good thing to make,” he said. “The eggs lie in the nest, and you can guard them easily. I think *I* shall make a nest!”

“*You* make a nest!” trilled the bird in surprise. “How foolish you are! Don’t you know that fishes don’t make nests? I have never heard of one that did.”

“Well, *I* shall make a nest,” said the stickleback. “It may not be a usual thing for fishes to do, but I will be unusual. It is such a good idea.”

He swam away, red with excitement. A nest! That would be a lovely thing to make. He was sure he could make one. Then he would find a nice little mother-fish to lay some eggs in his nest, and he would keep guard over them until they hatched out into dear little baby fish.

He swam about looking for something to use for his nest. He found some loose water-weed and caught it in his mouth. That would do for a beginning!

He swam with it to the place he had chosen. He tucked it well down, and then went to look for something else. He found a bit of straw floating at the top of the water. He found a few bits of grass there too. He took them all to his nest. He was really very clever about making it.

He stuck together all the things he found. He went hunting for more and more bits, and everything he brought back to his nest he glued together carefully.

He made a nest like a muff, with an opening at each end. All the tadpoles, the beetles and the grubs came to look at it in wonder.

“What is it?” they said. “Is it a home for yourself? Are you going to live there?”

“No,” said the fish. “It is a nest for my eggs. I am not going to leave my eggs or baby fish to look after themselves. I have built them a nest and I shall take great care of them.”

“I never heard of a fish doing that before!” said a big water-snail.

Soon the nest was finished. It was nicely made of bits of grass, straw and water-weed. The stickleback swam through it many times. He was proud of it.

“Now I will find a mother-fish and get her to put some eggs in my nest for me,” he said. So he swam off to look for one.

He met one, and asked her to lay some eggs for him. “I don’t want to!” she said. But he chased her angrily, and made her go near the nest. When she saw what a dear little nest it was, she felt that she really must go inside and look at it.

So in she went. When she was there she laid a few eggs, and then swam out again. “It is a nice nest,” she said. “I have put some eggs there for you.”

The stickleback was very pleased. But when he went to look at the eggs, he felt sure there were not nearly enough. What was the good of building a nest for so few eggs? He swam at once after the mother-fish.

“Lay some more eggs for me!” he called. But she wouldn’t. He chased after her, going scarlet with rage, but it was no good, she would not lay any more.

So the stickleback had to look for another mother-fish. He soon found one, and begged her to lay some eggs for him. She swam into the nest and laid some more. The fish was very pleased and excited. Now he had enough!

He looked after his eggs so well. He would not let even the tiniest tadpole come near the nest. He would not let the water-snail peep at the eggs. He chased away everyone who came near.

Sometimes he turned the little eggs over with his nose. Sometimes he fanned them with his tail and fins, sending a current of water gently through the nest. He was as careful of them as any bird is of her eggs.

Then one day the eggs hatched out into tiny fish. How excited the stickleback was! He told the news to everyone.

“My eggs have hatched out! They are in my nest—not eggs any more, but the tiniest fish you ever saw! They are lying in my nest!”

“I want to see them,” said the dragonfly grub. But as soon as the big ugly grub came near the little nest, the stickleback swam at him, red with anger, and tried to rip him with his three sharp spines.

“Go away!” he cried. “I know what a greedy creature you are! Go away! You would eat my fish if you could.”

This was quite true. The dragonfly grub was always as hungry as could be.

The baby fish lay quietly in the nest at first. The stickleback wondered if they had enough room. He began to pull away the top part of the muff-like nest, so that only the bottom was left. It was like a little cradle for them.

The father-fish guarded them well. He was excited when they began to wriggle about, for he knew that soon they would try to swim.

They did swim—tiny little specks in the pond. The stickleback would not let them go far away from the nest at first, and if he thought that any enemy was near, he would drive them back at once.

“I can look after all of you at once, if you lie in the nest,” he said, “but if you are swimming about in the water, I cannot guard you well. So, whilst you are tiny, keep with me, and swim back to our nest if there is any danger.”

The nest fell slowly to pieces as the little fishes grew bigger. Soon they were big enough to look after themselves, and there was no longer any nest to go back to. The little family split up, and went to different parts of the pond.

But the little stickleback was very happy, for now he had many children to talk to in the pond.

“When you are old enough, you will build a nest as I did,” he would say to them. And they will. Don’t you wish you could see them?

THE LAMB WITHOUT A MOTHER

Ellen was staying at her uncle's farm. She liked being there, because there were so many nice things to do. She could feed the hens. She could take milk in a pail to the new calf. She could ride on Blackie, the old farm-horse.

It was winter-time, so it was not such fun as in the summer-time. But there was one great excitement—and that was the coming of the new lambs!

Ellen loved the baby lambs. The old shepherd lived in his hut on the hillside near the sheep, so that he might look after them when their lambs were born. Ellen often used to go and talk to him.

"Ah, it's a busy time with me," said the old shepherd. "Sometimes many lambs are born the same night, missy, and there are many babies to see to. You come and look at these two—a sweet pair they are!"

Ellen peeped into a little fold and saw a big mother-sheep there, with two tiny lambs beside her. Each of them had black noses, and they were butting them against their mother.

"I love them," said Ellen. "What do you feed them on, shepherd?"

"Oh, the mother feeds them," said the shepherd with a laugh. "Didn't you know, missy? Ah, yes, the lambs suck their mother's milk, and that's what makes them frisky and strong."

"What a good idea," said Ellen, and she watched the tiny lambs drinking their mother's milk. "Aren't they hungry, shepherd!"

"Little creatures always are," said the shepherd. "They have to grow big, you see, so they want a lot of food to build up their growing bodies. Birds bring grubs to their little ones, caterpillars eat the leaves of plants, young fish find their own food—and lambs drink their mother's milk."

One day, when Ellen went to see the old shepherd, she found him looking sad. "One of the mother-sheep has died," he said. "And she has left this little lamb behind her."

"Oh dear—and it has no mother to get milk from!" said Ellen sadly. "Will it die too?"

"I am going to see if another mother-sheep will take it," said the shepherd. "Maybe she will. She has only one lamb."

So he gave the tiny lamb to another sheep. But she butted it away angrily.

"Isn't she unkind?" said Ellen, almost in tears. "She's got one lamb of her own, and surely she wouldn't mind having another. Most of the sheep have two."

"She isn't really unkind," said the shepherd. "She doesn't know the strange smell of this little lamb, so she doesn't like it. Well, well—she won't have it, that's plain!"

"What will you do?" asked Ellen.

"It will have to be fed from a baby's bottle," said the shepherd. "I shall put milk into a bottle, put a teat on it, and let the lamb suck. Then it will live."

Ellen stared at him in surprise. "Can you really feed a lamb out of a baby's bottle?" she said. "Oh, shepherd, please may I see you?"

"Of course," said the shepherd. He took out a glass bottle from his shed. He washed it, and then put some warm milk into it. He fitted a large teat on the end, and went to where he had left the tiny lamb.

He smeared the teat with milk and pushed it against the lamb's black nose. The tiny creature sniffed at it, and then put out its tongue and licked it.

“It likes the taste!” said Ellen in excitement. “Oh, lamb, do drink the milk!”

The lamb opened his mouth and took hold of the milky teat. He sucked—for that is a thing that all lambs, all calves, all babies know how to do. He sucked hard.

The milk came through the teat and went into his mouth. The lamb sucked and sucked. He was hungry. The milk was nice. He sucked until he had nearly finished the bottle.

Ellen watched him in delight. “Please, please do let me hold the bottle whilst he finishes the few last drops,” she begged the shepherd. So he gave her the bottle to hold.

Ellen loved feeding the tiny lamb. She liked feeling him pulling hard at the bottle. He finished every drop of the milk, and licked the teat. Then he gave a sigh of happiness, as if to say, “That was really nice!”

“He’ll do all right,” said the shepherd, taking the empty bottle. “The pity is—I’ve no time to bottle-feed lambs just now.”

“Shepherd—let me do it, then!” cried Ellen. “I know Uncle will let me. Can I go and ask him?”

The shepherd nodded, and Ellen sped off down the hill to where her uncle was working in the fields.

“Uncle! There’s a lamb without a mother, so it hasn’t any mother’s milk to drink! The shepherd says it must be fed from a baby’s bottle. Can I feed it for him every day, please, Uncle?”

“If you like,” said her uncle. “It will need to be fed many times a day, Ellen, so you mustn’t forget. You had better let the shepherd bring it down into the farmhouse garden for you. It can live there, and you can easily feed it from a bottle then, without climbing the hill every time.”

Ellen ran to tell the shepherd. “You needn’t carry it down for me,” she said. “I can carry the little darling thing myself.”

So she carried the little warm creature down to the garden. She shut the gate carefully so that it could not get out. It seemed to like being there, and frisked round happily.

Ellen fed it when it was hungry. Her aunt put milk into the baby’s bottle, and Ellen went to take it to the lamb. He soon knew her and ran to meet her. How he sucked the milk from the bottle! He almost pulled it out of Ellen’s hand sometimes!

He grew well. He had a tight, woolly coat to keep him warm, and a long wriggling tail. He could jump and spring about cleverly. Ellen often played with him in the garden, and they loved one another very much.

He grew quite fat and tubby. Ellen looked at him one day and said, “You are almost like a little sheep. Don’t grow into a sheep, little lamb. Sheep never play. They just eat grass all day long, and say ‘baa-baa-baa’.”

The lamb could bleat in his little high voice. Sometimes he would bleat for Ellen to bring him a bottle of milk. “Maa-maaa-maa!” he would say.

But soon there came a time when he did not need to drink milk any more. He could eat grass. He nibbled at it and liked it. Ellen watched him eating it, and was afraid that soon he would have to leave the garden and go into the big field with the others.

“Then you will forget about me, and won’t come running to meet me any more,” she said sadly.

One day the big sheep were sheared. The farmyard was full of their bleating, for they did not like their warm, thick woolly coats being cut away from them.

Ellen watched the shearing. “What a lot of wool!” she said. “I suppose that will be washed, and woven, and made into warm clothes. How useful the sheep are to us.”

The lamb was not sheared. He was allowed to keep his coat that year. “It is not thick enough for shearing,” said the shepherd. “The lambs keep their coats. They will be very thick next year. And now, missy, I think your lamb must come and live in the field. He is old enough to be with the others, now that you have quite finished feeding him by bottle.”

Ellen was sad. She took the little lamb from the farmhouse garden to the field. She opened the gate and let him through. He stood quite still and stared at all the sheep and lambs there.

Then a small lamb came up to him. “Come and play ‘Jump-high, jump-low’ with us,” he said. “It’s such fun.”

The little lamb frisked off in delight. “He has forgotten me already,” said Ellen.

But he hadn’t. Whenever the little girl goes by the field, the lamb comes running up to the hedge, bleating. He pushes his nose through, and Ellen pats him. And I expect that he will always remember his little friend, and run happily to greet her, don’t you?

THE DANDELION CLOCKS

Once there was a dandelion plant. It grew in a very sheltered corner, where the sun was hot, and the wind hardly ever came. It had a rosette of dark-green leaves.

“Why do you grow your leaves like that, in a round bunch?” said the grass near by. “You keep off all the blades of grass that try to grow near you.”

“Well, that is why I grow my leaves in a round rosette!” said the dandelion. “To keep you from growing too close, and taking away light and air from me, and to keep away any other plants too!”

“The daisy does that as well,” said a butterfly. “She grows her leaves in a tight rosette, and won’t let anyone else take her little bit of ground. It’s a good idea, really.”

“I have a fine big root, as well as a rosette of leaves,” said the dandelion. “It is a much bigger root than any flower has, in this little corner. It goes right down into the ground.”

“I suppose it holds you tightly in your place,” said the butterfly. “Well, well—all I can say is that I am very glad *I* haven’t a deep root like you, dandelion. I should hate to be tied down in one place. I like to fly about the world, and see all there is to see.”

The dandelion sent up some nice green buds. The butterfly came back again one day to see what sort of flowers the dandelion would have.

“Oh! You are really beautiful!” said the butterfly. “Yes, you really are. I love your bright yellow head, dandelion—it is prettier even than the daisy’s head.”

The dandelion flowers shone brightly on their green stalks. They were very bright in the sun.

“Aren’t you afraid of some animal coming along and eating you?” asked the butterfly. “You are so bright, with your yellow heads of flowers, that I am sure a cow or horse would see you at once, and nibble you to bits!”

“I taste nasty,” said the dandelion. “I have a milky juice in my stalks that tastes bitter. No animal will go on nibbling me, once it has tasted my nasty juice.”

“It seems to me that you are rather a clever plant,” said the butterfly. “With your leaf-rosette, your long, deep root, and your nasty milky juice! I shall come back again and see you another day. Perhaps you will have another clever idea to tell me.”

She flew off, and the dandelion opened another golden bud in the sun. Soon the whole plant was yellow with brilliant golden blossoms, and was beautiful in the summer sunshine. Nobody ate it. Nobody harmed it. It flowered in peace and safety.

One by one the yellow flowers faded and died. Soon there was not one left. When the butterfly came back one day, it was surprised to see the plant without its golden blossoms.

“You are growing old, dandelion,” said the butterfly. “I can see your golden hairs turning to grey, and you are hiding your head!”

All the flower-stalks had drooped, and all the golden heads were, as the butterfly said, turning grey. They lay among the grass, looking faded and sad.

“Yes, your hair is going grey,” said the butterfly, looking at the old flower-heads. “What a pity! Can’t you raise your heads up any more? Do you feel so tired and old?”

“No,” said the dandelion. “I don’t feel at all tired. All I am doing is resting my flower-heads whilst they make seed for me.”

“Make seed!” said the butterfly. “What is seed?”

“Ah, seed is the most important thing of all to a plant,” said the dandelion. “Without seed we cannot go on and on growing new plants each year. I want to send out my seeds so that I may know that there will be hundreds of new little dandelion plants growing everywhere!”

“Oh,” said the butterfly, “I know how you feel about it, dandelion. It is the same as I feel about eggs. I want to lay many eggs, so that they will hatch into caterpillars that will grow into butterflies like me. You want children like yourself, and I want children like *myself*. That is a rule of life, isn’t it?”

“I don’t know what a rule of life is,” said the dandelion. “All I know is that I must make seed, and send it out into the world to grow.”

“And I must lay eggs,” said the butterfly. “I know where I shall lay my eggs too. I am a cabbage butterfly and I shall lay my eggs on the underside of a cabbage leaf, so that when they hatch out, there will be plenty of good food for my caterpillars to feed on.”

The dandelion was not listening. She was slowly lifting up one of her flower-stalks. She raised it high—and higher—and the butterfly stared in surprise.

“Dandelion! Did you know that your flower-stalk had grown very, very long whilst it has lain in the grass? It is so tall that now you will be able to see much farther!”

“I haven’t eyes like you,” said the dandelion, beginning to lift another stalk. “Yes—I know that my stalks have grown tall. There is a reason for that.”

“Is there?” said the butterfly. “Do tell me.”

“Well,” said the dandelion, “look at my old flower-heads, on the top of their long stalks. As you said, they have turned grey—but the grey is the plumes that belong to my seeds. Look carefully, and you will see what I mean.”

The butterfly flew down close beside a grey-plumed head, and looked at it carefully.

“Dandelion,” she said, “your old flower-heads have all grown tiny seeds, each with its own parachute of silky hairs. How wonderful! I have never seen such a marvellous change in my life. You are the cleverest plant I know.”

“There are many cleverer than I am,” said the dandelion. “We all have our own tricks and ways, butterfly. Now you see why I have grown my stalks so long—I want to take my seeds high up into the air, where the sun can warm them, and the wind can blow them.”

“Why do you want the wind to blow them?” said the butterfly in surprise.

“I want the wind to take each of my seeds far away from me,” said the dandelion. “As far away as it can! I do not want dozens of tiny dandelions growing near me, all choking one another. I want the wind to blow them far away.”

“And so you have given each tiny seed a parachute of silky hairs to carry it away!” said the butterfly. “Well, what a marvellous idea, to be sure. May I blow one?”

“Your breath won’t move a seed!” said the dandelion.

The butterfly blew—but the dandelion was right. Not one seed moved away from the stalk-head. The seeds stood on a kind of cushion, and they made a most beautiful globe of grey-white.

One by one the stalks raised themselves up into the air, and soon there were about twelve lovely dandelion “clocks” standing in the little sheltered corner. The butterfly thought she had never seen anything so beautiful.

“When will the wind come and blow your seeds away for you?” she asked. “I want to see them fly in the air.”

“Soon, I hope,” said the dandelion, and the plant and the butterfly waited patiently for the wind to come.

But it didn't come. The corner that the dandelion grew in was very, very sheltered. Hardly any wind ever came to it. The tall clocks stood there, not moving. No seed blew away at all.

The dandelion grew anxious. "Oh, I do hope the wind comes soon!" it said. "I don't want seeds to fall off to the ground. They must not grow too near to me. Oh, how I wish the wind would come!"

After a while, there came the sound of children's voices, and a boy and two girls came into the sheltered corner. They stopped in delight.

"Harry! Look! What lovely dandelion clocks!" cried a girl's voice. "Let's pick them and blow them to tell the time!"

Then, in a trice, all the dandelion clocks were picked, and the children danced away with them. They blew hard at the clocks. "Puff! One o'clock. Puff! Two o'clock. Puff! Three o'clock."

The seeds flew off, each with their tiny parachute of hairs. They flew far away, and then fell gently to the ground. The butterfly flew round the children's heads and watched the seeds flying away.

She flew back to the dandelion plant. "Your seeds have all gone to their new homes," she said. "There will be hundreds of tiny new dandelions next year, so you can be happy. The children made little winds with their mouths and blew the seeds away!"

"Good," said the dandelion. "Now I am happy, and I can take a rest. Go and lay your eggs, butterfly, and be happy too!"

THE STRANGE BIRD

There was once a hedge-sparrow who built a dear little nest in a hawthorn hedge. She laid some sky-blue eggs in it, and she and her mate thought they were lovely.

“Now I must sit on them to warm them,” said the little hedge-sparrow happily. “You fly off and find me some grubs and flies to eat, because I shall stay here for many days.”

A loud voice came from somewhere near by. “Cuckoo! Cuckoo!” A big bird with a barred chest perched clumsily on a tree, and looked all round. The hedge-sparrows took no notice. They were used to the call of the cuckoo by now. He sang all day.

Later on in the day the cock hedge-sparrow came back to the nest in great excitement.

“Leave your eggs for a minute! I have found a place where there are many caterpillars, all fat and tasty. Come with me and we will have a feast before the other birds get them.”

The little hen hedge-sparrow left her eggs and flew off for a few minutes with her mate. Surely her eggs would not get cold in such a short time!

When they had gone, and the nest was empty except for the blue eggs, a big cuckoo flew to the hedge. She squatted on the hedge-sparrow’s nest, and laid an egg in it. Then she flew off again, for she knew that the two little birds would soon come back.

And now, in the nest, lay an extra egg, not so blue as the others, but much the same size and shape. There it lay, a cuckoo’s egg.

The cuckoo never made any nest for her eggs. She was a lazy bird, and did not want the trouble of nest-building or of bringing up young birds. This was a little trick she had, each summer—she put her eggs into other birds’ nests.

Soon the little hedge-sparrows came back, well fed with the fat caterpillars. The hen hopped to her nest, took a look at her eggs, and then sat comfortably down on them. She did not seem to notice that there was a strange egg there.

Sunny warm days followed. There were plenty of grubs to find, plenty of flies to catch. The cock-bird fed the hen well, and sometimes sang her a shrill little song.

One day she was excited. “My eggs are going to hatch,” she said. “I can feel one of them moving.”

The first egg that hatched was a tiny hedge-sparrow. The egg broke and the baby bird came out.

The next egg that hatched was the cuckoo’s egg. Out came a very ugly baby indeed. It was bare and black, and its eyes were tight shut. It seemed stronger than the first baby bird.

No more eggs hatched that day. Both the baby birds were hungry for food, and they opened their beaks wide, and cheeped a little. The cuckoo baby had a loud voice.

“I will help you to feed the two babies,” said the hedge-sparrow to her mate. “The other eggs are almost ready to hatch. It will not hurt to leave them for a while with the two warm babies.”

So she flew off with her mate. Then the baby cuckoo began to do strange things. He couldn’t bear to feel the other eggs near him. He moved about to get away from them, but he couldn’t.

He was angry. He wriggled about until one of the eggs fell on to his back. He had a little hollow there, and the egg stayed there. The baby cuckoo shook with rage. He began to climb backwards up the side of the nest.

It was like a steep wall to the bare, blind baby. He went up and up, and at last came to the top. He stopped—and then sent the egg rolling from his back, over the edge of the nest, through the hawthorn branches, and down to the ground.

The baby cuckoo fell down into the nest, tired out. But soon he felt the other egg pressing against him, and once more he became angry. He wanted the whole nest to himself. He could not bear to share it with anyone else.

Once again he managed to get the egg on to his back, and once more he climbed painfully up the side of the nest. The egg rolled from his back—down to the ground it went, and broke. The baby bird inside, almost ready to hatch, rolled out and lay feebly on the ground.

Then there was only the baby hedge-sparrow in the nest with the cuckoo. But the baby cuckoo was now too tired to do anything but lie quite still.

Soon the hen hedge-sparrow came back. She had brought food with her for the babies. She missed the other eggs, and looked round the nest for them.

She fed the baby birds, and hopped out of the nest into the hedge. She caught sight of the broken eggs below, and the feeble little bird that had rolled out of one of them. But she did not seem to know that they were hers.

As she stared at them, her head on one side, a rat came by. In a trice he had snapped up the baby birds, sniffed round the egg-shells, and then went on his way.

“Our babies in the nest are very hungry,” said the hen to her mate, when he came with some grubs. “This one makes such a noise. I wish he would be quieter. I am so afraid he will bring enemies to the nest.”

Now, the next day, when the parents had gone food-hunting, the baby cuckoo felt the little hedge-sparrow pushing against him. Again he fell into a rage, and stiffened all over.

“I will throw this thing out of the nest too,” he thought, and somehow he managed to get the baby hedge-sparrow on to his back. It was heavy, but the little cuckoo was getting stronger.

He climbed slowly up the side of the nest. He stood on the rim. He gave himself a shake—and the little hedge-sparrow rolled off his back, down through the hedge, and on to the ground. There the big rat found him a little later, and snapped him up greedily.

Now only the cuckoo was left in the nest. He was glad. He liked having the nest all to himself. He liked having the food all to himself.

The little hedge-sparrows did not seem to notice anything except that they had a wonderful baby.

“He is so big and strong,” they told the robin.

“Better to have four little birds than one enormous one,” said the robin.

“He has such a loud voice,” said the hedge-sparrows proudly. “And you should see him eat! Do you know, he even eats the hairy caterpillars that no other bird can eat!”

The baby cuckoo grew very fast indeed. He soon filled the nest. He looked funny there, for his tail and head stuck out far over the edge of the nest.

“The nest soon won’t hold him,” said the cock. “Isn’t he a marvellous child? No other bird has such a wonderful baby as we have.”

“I wish you would tell him not to make such a noise,” said the thrush, who had a nest near by. “He makes such a terrible noise that I am always afraid he will bring the rat here, and I don’t want my young ones eaten!”

“You see, he’s so hungry,” said the hen hedge-sparrow proudly. “He has such a big appetite. We can’t bring him enough to eat!”

The cuckoo called so loudly that all the other birds began to bring him grubs too, to try and make him quiet. He grew and he grew. He was really enormous.

He had to leave the nest, for it would no longer hold him. He flew into the trees, still calling loudly, in his piercing voice. “Cheez, cheez, cheez!” he cried.

Soon the little hedge-sparrows had to sit on his shoulder to feed him, for that was the only way in which they could reach his beak. But still he cried loudly.

“Cheez, cheez, cheez!” The robin brought him a fat hairy caterpillar. The thrush brought him two. How they wished the noisy bird would be quiet.

“Isn’t he a wonderful child?” cried the two hedge-sparrows. “Did you ever see such a marvel? He must be the biggest hedge-sparrow that was ever hatched! We are so proud of him.”

“**Hedge-sparrow!**” said the little owl, flying up to look “What do you mean—**hedge-sparrow**? That’s not a hedge-sparrow. That’s a cuckoo!”

“A cuckoo!” said the two hedge-sparrows in dismay, and they looked at their enormous baby. And they saw that he was indeed a cuckoo. What a dreadful shock for them!

“What sillies we are!” they said. “Oh, what sillies we are!”

Poor little hedge-sparrows. The cuckoo played a very cunning trick on them, didn’t she, when she laid her egg in their nest?

HATS FOR SALE! HATS FOR SALE!

There was once an elf who kept a tiny hat-shop in Cuckoo Wood. You should have seen the hats she sold! They were really lovely.

She used to beg pink-tipped petals from the daisies, and sew them together into dear little hats. She sometimes made bluebell-caps, when the bluebells were out, and she was very clever at using red poppy petals for broad-brimmed summer hats.

But there was one kind of hat that she was always asked for in the winter-time, and never could make—and that was fur hats.

Everyone wanted a fur hat when the cold weather came. Hatty the elf could have sold dozens if only she had had some fur. But she couldn't seem to buy any fur anywhere that would be fine enough and light enough for fairies' hats.

Still, she made quite a lot of pennies by making flower hats, and sewing them with spider thread. There was one kind spider who let out thread for her from her spinnerets, and Hatty wound the thread round a tiny cotton-reel.

One day Hatty was running through the wood, singing a little song to herself, when she heard a loud squeaking noise. She stopped to listen.

"It isn't a mouse," she said. "It's not loud enough. It isn't a bat, because they are all fast asleep, hanging upside down in the old hollow tree. They won't wake until it is night. What can it be?"

The squeaking came again, and Hatty peeped round a big clump of dead-nettles to see what was making the noise.

"It's too tight!" said a high, squeaking voice. "It's much too tight! I shall never get it off. I know I shan't. It's got stuck just under my tummy."

Hatty saw that it was a big caterpillar talking to himself. He was a woolly-bear caterpillar, with a very hairy coat. Near by were two or three more, watching the first one.

Hatty stared at him in surprise. He seemed to be trying to take off his coat, and he couldn't. He had split it down the back, and he was wriggling hard to get out of it. The elf ran up to him.

"What are you doing? Don't take off your coat, because the wind is cold to-day."

The hairy caterpillars looked at Hatty. "You don't know what you are talking about," said the first caterpillar. "I've GOT to take my coat off. I shall burst if I don't."

"You *are* very fat," said Hatty. "I think you must have eaten too much."

"Caterpillars always do," said a snail crawling near by. "They eat all day long—yes, and sometimes at night too. Eat, eat, eat, gobble, gobble, gobble, that's all they do! I never knew such greedy creatures."

"*You'd* eat as much if you were as hungry as we are," said the caterpillar crossly. "Oh dear—I shall *never* get my skin off!"

"It's the first time I've ever seen anyone burst their skin," said Hatty. "Oh, my goodness—there's another caterpillar splitting his coat too!"

So there was. A hairy woolly-bear suddenly split his skin down the middle of his back, and began to wriggle hard to get his coat off.

"Do you often do this sort of thing?" said Hatty.

“Oh yes,” said the caterpillar. “We eat so much that we’re always splitting our skins. But it doesn’t matter. We always have fine new skins underneath.”

“Do you really?” said Hatty. “Well, that’s lucky for you! *I* shouldn’t have a new skin underneath if I split the one I’m wearing.”

She felt sorry for the wriggling caterpillar. “I’d like to help you,” she said. “I think your skin is stuck tight just under your tummy. If I give it a pull, I expect it would get loose, then you’d be all right.”

“Thank you,” said the caterpillar gratefully. “That’s right—pull just there.”

The elf pulled at the furry coat. It gave way, and the caterpillar gave a squeak of joy. “Thank you! Now I can easily wriggle out.”

He was soon out of his hairy skin—and it was just as he had said, he had a fine new one underneath!

“Ah! Now I feel better!” he said, stretching himself out until he was very long indeed. “This skin fits nicely.”

He began to eat a dead-nettle leaf very quickly. Hatty could hear his jaws crunching loudly. “You really are greedy,” she said. “You’ll soon split that nice new skin.”

“I shan’t mind,” said the caterpillar. “There’ll be another one underneath again!”

“Could you help *me* now?” asked another caterpillar, crawling up to Hatty. “Just give my split skin a little tug *here*, will you?”

“I’ll help you all,” said Hatty. “Hurry up now, anybody that wants to split, and I’ll help you out of your skins.”

She helped five woolly-bear caterpillars out of their skins. They at once began to gobble leaves again. They left their skins in a heap on the grass.

“The mouse comes to get them,” said the first caterpillar. Hatty stared at the furry coats, and a wonderful idea came into her mind.

“Caterpillars!” she said suddenly. “Could *I* have your old furry skins, please? I make hats, you know, and I could make lovely fur hats out of these. I would clean them, and brush them, and then sew them into the dearest little fur caps you ever saw!”

“What a good idea!” said the caterpillars. “Better than having them eaten up! The mouse won’t mind. Yes, you take them, elf, and do what you like with them.”

“I’ll show you the hats next winter,” said Hatty, picking up the skins.

“We shan’t be here,” said the caterpillars. “We are going to be tiger moths, you know—those lovely, bright-coloured moths that come to the fairy dances sometimes. And before we are moths, we shall turn into silken cocoons and sleep. When we wake up we shall be moths.”

“You must use very powerful magic to change yourselves like that,” said Hatty, astonished. “What queer creatures you are, eating so greedily, splitting your skins, turning into cocoons and sleeping—and waking up as beautiful moths.”

“We may be queer, but we don’t *feel* queer, except when we have finished eating, and are going to sleep in our cocoons,” said the caterpillars.

“Well, thank you for the fur skins,” said Hatty. “I’ll always come and help you at any time, if you want a tug or a pull when your skins are splitting again.”

“Thank you,” said the caterpillars. “We *would* like your help. You see, when our skins are splitting, and we are wriggling out of them, we are rather helpless—we can’t crawl away quickly and hide if enemies come.”

“We are afraid of the cuckoos in this wood,” said the first caterpillar. “They eat furry caterpillars like us, though the other birds don’t like us.”

“Squeak loudly when you want my help and I’ll come,” said Hatty. “And tell any other hairy caterpillars you know, and I’ll help them too, if they will give me their old furry skins.”

She ran off with the skins. She was very excited. She was longing to begin making fur caps.

“I shall work hard all the summer at making fur caps,” she thought. “Then, when the winter comes, I shall have dozens to sell! Won’t everyone be pleased!”

The caterpillar skins made the dearest little fur caps you ever saw! Hatty couldn’t help feeling very proud of them. She tried one on, and it looked beautiful.

“They are very little trouble to make,” she said to herself. “First I clean the skins, then I brush the hairs well, then I take my scissors and shape the skin, and then I sew the cap with my strong, silken spider thread. Lovely!”

Each day when she heard caterpillars squeaking loudly, Hatty went to help them. She didn’t only help the tiger-moth caterpillars, but other kinds, too, that grew hairy coats. She soon had a wonderful collection of furry skins, and knew a great many caterpillars.

She watched them split their skins many times, and then she watched them turn into cocoons and go to sleep. What a surprise she will get when they creep out of their cocoons as beautiful, big-winged moths! I expect she will take a ride on their backs.

She has made thirty-three fur caps now. Would you like to see them? Well, here are some of them, and you can’t think how sweet the elves and pixies look in them! I wish my head was small enough for one—don’t you wish yours was too?

DOWN WILLOW WAY

One night Jack had a queer dream. He told it to his mother the next day.

“Mother, I suppose it *was* a dream!” he said. “But it did seem so real.”

“Tell me about it,” said Mother.

“Well,” said Jack, “I was in Cuckoo Wood, Mother, and I came to where the little stream runs. I sat down with my back to a tree, to look at the water. And I saw a queer little man coming along.”

“A fairy, or a brownie, do you mean?” asked his mother.

“A brownie,” said Jack. “He had a long beard, so long, Mother, that he had to tie it round his waist to keep it from getting under his feet.”

“How queer!” said his mother. “Go on with your porridge, Jack.”

“Well, as I watched that brownie, what do you think he did?” said Jack. “Mother, you will never believe it! He stood by some small trees near the stream, and he took out a funny little flute, that he blew.”

“What did he play?” asked his mother.

“He played a funny tune that made me think of milk and cream and mice,” said Jack. “I know it sounds funny, Mother, but it *did* make me think of those things. And then a very strange thing happened.”

“What?” said Mother.

“There were some furry, silky buds on a tree near by,” said Jack, “the sort we call pussy-willow buds, Mother, because they are so soft and furry. Well, all the furry buds began to move about—and they suddenly ran down the stems to the ground—and they were little grey kittens with yellow eyes!”

“Oh, Jack—how queer!” said his mother.

“Yes, wasn’t it?” said Jack. “They danced round the little brownie, and he played that tune all the time—the tune that made me think of milk and cream and mice. I expect the pussy-buds heard it too, you see, and wanted to get to the milk and cream and mice—so they jumped down the stem!”

Mother laughed. “It was the queerest dream,” she said. “If you like, Jack, we’ll take a walk to the stream to-day, and see if there are any pussy-buds on the willows there.”

So, after breakfast, they put on their things and set off to the stream in Cuckoo Wood. Sure enough, the goat-willows there were covered with the softest, silkiest grey buds—just like real fur, as Jack said, stroking them.

“Mother, I *wish* these pussy-buds would turn into grey kittens and come running down the stem, as they did in my dream,” said Jack. “They had yellow eyes, very bright indeed.”

“We will come back here later on in the year and see if the pussy-buds have grown yellow eyes!” said Mother. “I think you will find plenty of yellow eyes springing out from some of these pussy-buds then.”

So, later on, Jack and his mother went again to the stream—and this time, what a change there was in the pussy-buds! They had grown fat and big—and one tree had its furry buds sprinkled full of “yellow eyes”.

“Mother! These yellow dots are just the colour of the eyes of the kittens I saw in my dream,” said Jack in delight. “What *are* these eyes?”

“The yellow heads of stamens,” said his mother. “These furry buds are really catkins, Jack, full of golden-headed stamens.”

“The hazel tree has catkins too, full of stamens that send out yellow pollen,” said Jack. “We have some at school, Mother, and they send out so much pollen-powder that our desks get yellow with it.”

“The hazel tree has hanging catkins. These are sitting ones,” said his mother.

“Does the wind blow the pollen out? Does the pussy-willow make the wind take the pollen to the seed-flower on the same tree, like the hazel does?” asked Jack. “Mother, did you know that we get nuts because the hazel tree makes the wind take its catkin pollen-powder to the seed-flowers?”

“Yes, I know that,” said his mother. “But you won’t find any seed-flowers on this pussy-willow, Jack. It isn’t like the hazel—it doesn’t grow catkins and seed-flowers on the same tree.”

“Oh!” said Jack, surprised. “There is a Mr. Tree and a Mrs. Tree, then—how queer! Where’s the Mrs. Tree, Mother?”

“Here is one,” said his mother, and she went to another willow tree, on which were other catkins. But they were not golden yellow with stamen-heads. They were green, and not nearly so pretty.

“That’s the Mrs. Catkin, as you call it,” said his mother. “Waiting patiently for yellow pollen-powder to come to her, so that she may make seed to fly away on the wind.”

“Mother, I can see bees in the pussy-willows,” said Jack in surprise. “Why are they there?”

“They take the yellow pollen-powder from the Mr. Catkins to the Mrs. Catkins,” said his mother. “If you were a bee, you would be very pleased when willow-time came each year, Jack.”

“Why?” asked Jack in surprise.

“Well, you would come flying along Willow Way one sunny morning,” said his mother, “and you would smell a delicious smell. ‘Honey!’ you would say. ‘Sweet nectar. Where is it? Where is it?’”

A bee hummed by and went to a yellow pussy-catkin.

“Then,” said Jack’s mother, “you would go to where the smell came from—look, to that golden catkin, where the bee is now—and there you would find plenty of sweet nectar hidden away for you. Look at that bee, Jack—do you see how his body is getting yellow with pollen? It falls on him whilst he is busy sucking the honey.”

Jack looked and saw that the big bumble-bee’s body was covered with pollen. The bee went to another golden catkin and yet more yellow powder fell on him. Then he flew to the next tree, which was one that Jack had called a Mrs. Tree, because it had the green seed-catkins, not the pollen ones.

“Watch!” said his mother, as the bee landed on a green seed-catkin. “Do you see how the yellow points on the seed-catkin are rubbing against the bee? He cannot help leaving some of the pollen behind him, on the seed-catkin—and that is just what it wants, to make seed!”

“Mother, it’s very clever, isn’t it?” said Jack in wonder. “I think it’s marvellous! Mr. Pussy-Willow has pollen-powder to send to Mrs. Pussy-Willow—and he uses the bee as his postman! But he gives him a fine reward by making sweet nectar for him, honey that the bee loves!”

“Yes, it *is* marvellous!” said Mother. “The bee, of course, doesn’t know that he is acting as postman, taking pollen-powder from Mr. Pussy-Willow to Mrs. Pussy-Willow—all he knows

is that there is nectar waiting for him on both trees, and he fetches it.”

“I think it’s all more wonderful than my dream,” said Jack, as they went home. “I dreamt of furry kittens jumping from the pussy-willow buds—but now I’ve seen the bee really and truly acting as postman to the willows—and that’s even stranger and more marvellous, Mother.”

It is, really, isn’t it? Will you try and find some Mr. Pussy-Willow catkins, and some Mrs. Pussy-Willow ones, and see if *you* can spy a bee acting as postman, taking the pollen-powder on his back from one to the other?

MOOO-OOO-OOO!

Once upon a time there was a little girl called Lucy. She lived in a big town, and every year she went to the seaside.

But one year she went to stay in the country instead. Her mother sent her to stay with her Aunt Mary on a big farm.

“You will have such a lovely time, Lucy,” said her mother. “You will have chickens and ducks round you, big sheep in the fields, and perhaps Aunt Mary will let you ride on one of the big horses.”

“Will there be cows?” asked Lucy.

“Oh yes,” said her mother. “Lovely big red and white cows that say ‘Mooo-ooo-ooo!’ You will like them, Lucy.”

“I shan’t,” said Lucy. “I’m afraid of cows.”

“Silly girl,” said her mother. “You have only once seen cows, and that was last year down at the seaside. You need not be afraid of them. They won’t hurt you.”

“They might toss me with their big horns,” said Lucy.

“Of course they won’t,” said her mother. “Cows are gentle animals. You will like them.”

But Lucy didn’t like them. As soon as she was down at the farm, she began to look out for cows. She saw some in a field—and oh dear, as she walked by the field, one of the cows put its head over the hedge and mooed loudly.

“Mooo-ooo-ooo!” it said. It did make poor Lucy jump. She ran home crying, and her aunt was sorry.

“Darling, the cows won’t hurt you,” she said. “They are our friends. They give us lots of nice things, really they do.”

“They don’t give *me* anything,” sobbed Lucy. “At least, they only give me nasty things. That cow gave me a horrid fright.”

“Well, come with me and feed the hens,” said Aunt Mary. Lucy dried her eyes and went with her aunt.

When she came back again it was eleven o’clock. Her aunt went to the larder and brought out a bun. Then she poured some rich yellow milk into a blue cup, and set it down beside Lucy.

“A present from the cow,” she said to Lucy. “Drink it up and see how nice it is. The cow gave it to me this morning, and I put it in a jug for you.”

Lucy tasted the milk. It was simply lovely. “It’s much nicer than my milk at home,” she said. “Did the cow really give it to me?”

“Yes, it came from the cow,” said Aunt Mary. “As soon as you stop being afraid of my dear old cows, I want you to come with me and see me milk them. You will like to hear the milk splashing into the pail. It is a lovely sound.”

When dinner-time came, there was an apple pie for pudding. Lucy was glad.

“It’s one of my favourite puddings,” she said. “Is there any custard, Auntie?”

“No,” said her aunt. “But the cow sent you this instead. You will like it.”

Aunt Mary put a little blue jug of cream down beside Lucy’s plate. “Pour it out over your pie yourself,” she said. “It is all for you. Have it all and enjoy it. Isn’t the cow kind?”

Lucy poured out the cream over her pie. It was thick and yellow and tasted very good. She liked it.

In the afternoon she went out to play, but she didn't go near the field where the cows were. "If I do they will shout 'Mooo-ooo-ooo' at me again," she said to herself.

When tea-time came Lucy was hungry. She was glad to hear the tea-bell. She ran indoors and washed her hands. She brushed her hair, and went down to tea.

There was a loaf of crusty new bread on the table, and beside it was a white dish full of golden-yellow butter. There was a pot of strawberry jam, and some buns. Lucy thought it was a lovely tea.

"What lovely golden butter!" she said. "Can I spread it on my piece of bread myself, Auntie? Mother lets me at home."

"Yes, you can," said Aunt Mary. "It's a present from the cow again."

"*Is it?*" said Lucy, surprised. "I didn't know butter came from the cow."

"Well, we make it from the cream that we get from the milk that the cow gives us," said Aunt Mary. "So it is really a present from the cow too, you see."

"Oh," said Lucy, spreading her bread with the rich yellow butter. "The cow *does* give us a lot of things, doesn't it? This is really lovely butter."

Lucy met the cows that evening as they walked to their milking-place. One mooed rather loudly and she ran away again. She told her aunt about it at supper-time.

"That nasty horrid cow mooed loudly at me again," she said. "I don't like cows. They are horrid things."

"Dear me, I'm sorry," said Aunt Mary, as she set down Lucy's supper in front of her. "I suppose you won't want to eat another present from the cow, then?"

"Does this lovely cheese come from the cow too?" cried Lucy, in great surprise. "Oh, Aunt Mary—I didn't know that! Milk—and cream—and butter—and cheese! Well, really, what a nice animal!"

Lucy ate her bread and butter and cheese. She had some stewed apple and cream, and she drank a glass of milk. What a number of things came from the cow! She thought about it quite a lot.

"Auntie," she said the next day, "I think I am wrong to be silly about cows. But I can't help it. Do you think if I got used to baby cows first, I would grow to like grown-up cows?"

"I am sure you would," said Aunt Mary. "That is a very good idea! We have some calves, and you shall help me to feed them to-day. You shall see me feed a little new-born calf. You will like that."

"Do calves grow into cows?" asked Lucy, trotting after her aunt.

"Oh yes, always," said Aunt Mary. "Now look, here is our very youngest baby. We must teach her to suck milk. We cannot let her suck her mother's milk—that big cow over there—because we want all *her* milk to sell; so we must feed her out of a pail."

The baby calf was very sweet. She was rather wobbly on her long legs, and she had the softest brown eyes that Lucy had ever seen. She sniffed at Lucy's hand and then began to suck it.

"Oh—she's very hungry, Auntie," said Lucy. "She's trying to suck my hand."

It wasn't long before Aunt Mary had a pail of milk ready for the calf. "Now watch me teach her to drink," she said.

She dipped her fingers in the milk and held them out to the calf. The calf sniffed the milk and then licked it eagerly, trying to take Aunt Mary's hand into her mouth. She dipped her

fingers in the pail of milk again, and once more the calf licked the milk off.

The next time Aunt Mary did not hold her fingers out so far. She held them in the pail. The calf put her head in the pail, and followed her fingers down. Aunt Mary put them right into the milk as soon as the calf began to suck them.

Then the little creature found that she was sucking up a great deal of milk! She still nuzzled round Aunt Mary's fingers, but she couldn't help taking in some of the milk in the pail, for her mouth was in it!

"That's a clever way of teaching her to drink milk," said Lucy, delighted. "Let me put *my* fingers in, Aunt Mary. I want to do it too."

So Aunt Mary held the pail whilst Lucy dipped her fingers in, and let the calf suck them. Then slowly the little girl put them nearer to the milk, until once again the calf was drinking in the pail!

"She will soon learn," said Aunt Mary. "You can help me to feed the little thing three times a day, if you like, dear."

So for the next week or two Lucy helped to feed the little calf. She loved her, and then one day she found that she was no longer afraid of cows!

"I can't be afraid of you when I love your little calf so much," she told the big red and white cow. "The little calf will grow up to be just like you, and she will give me presents like you do—milk and cream and butter and cheese. Thank you, cow. I'm sorry I ever said you were horrid. I like you now, big red cow, and one day I'll help to milk you!"

"Moo-ooo-ooo!" said the cow, pleased. "Moo-ooo-oooo!"

OLD UGLY, THE WATER-GRUB

Once upon a time there was an ugly grub that lived in a little pond.

At first it was only small, but as time went on it grew. It had a long body, with many joints, and six legs on which it could crawl about in the mud.

The other creatures in the pond thought it was very ugly indeed. "Look at it!" said the pretty little stickleback. "I'd be ashamed of myself if I was as ugly as that!"

"I don't like its face," said a water-snail with a nicely-curved shell. "There's something wrong with its face."

"Let's call it Ugly," said a cheeky tadpole. "Old Ugly! There goes Old Ugly! Hi, Old Ugly! What's wrong with your face?"

The grub did not like being called names. It could not help being ugly. Nor could it help its enormous appetite. It was always hungry.

The water-snail sometimes crawled near to where Old Ugly lay in the mud. "Hallo, Old Ugly!" it would say. "Would you like me for your dinner? Well, you can't have me, because I can always pop back into my shell-house if you come too near. What's the matter with your face, Old Ugly?"

Certainly the grub had a curious face. The water-snail used to watch him, and see it change.

Sometimes the grub would lie quietly in the water—and then perhaps a cheeky tadpole would swim too near him.

At once a queer thing happened to his face. The lower part of it seemed to fall away—and out would shoot a kind of claw that caught hold of the tadpole. The claw put the little creature to the grub's mouth—and that was the end of him.

Then the grub would fold up this curious claw, and put it by his face, so that it seemed part of it. The water-snail was very curious about it.

"Show me how it works," he asked the grub. "No—I'm not coming too near you—and I'm only going to put my head out just a little, in case you think of taking hold of it. Now—show me how that funny claw-thing works."

The grub showed him. It was very clever the way he could fold it up below his face, so that it looked like part of it. It was on a hinge, and could be folded or unfolded just as he liked.

"It's a good idea," said the water-snail. "You are really rather a lazy creature, aren't you, Old Ugly—you like to lie about in the mud, and wait for your dinner to come to you. You don't like rushing about after it, like the water-beetle does. So that claw-thing is useful to you."

"Very useful," said the grub. "I can just lie here and wait—and then shoot out my claw—like this!"

The water-snail shot his head in just in time. "Don't play any tricks with *me*, Old Ugly," he said. "I tell you, I've got a hard shell. You could never eat me."

The other creatures in the pond were very careful not to go too near the grub. When they saw his face looking up out of the mud, they swam away quickly.

"That dreadful face!" said a gnat grub. "It is horrid the way it seems to fall to pieces when that lower part, the claw, shoots out. It really gives me a fright. There he is—look! Hallo, Old Ugly!"

“Don’t call me that,” said the grub. “It hurts me. I can’t help being what I am. It is not my fault that I am ugly.”

But nobody called him anything else. Nobody liked him. The snails teased him. The stickleback said that he would tear him to bits with his three spines if he went near his little nest of eggs. The tadpoles gathered round him at a safe distance and called him all the rude names they knew. And they knew a good many, for they were cheeky little things.

Even the frogs hated the grub. “He snapped at my leg to-day,” said one. “I didn’t see him in the mud down there, and I swam too near. Out shot that claw of his and gave my leg quite a nip.”

“Let’s turn him out of the pond,” said the stickleback. “We don’t want him here. He is ugly and greedy and fierce. If we all get together, we can turn him out.”

So the stickleback, the frog, the two big black water-beetles, the tadpoles, the water-spider, the gnat grub, and the water-snails all swam or crawled to where Old Ugly was hiding in the mud, and called to him:

“We don’t want you in the pond!”

“Go away from here or I will tear you with my spines!”

“Leave our pond, or we will chase you round and round it till you are tired out!”

Old Ugly’s face fell apart, and he shot out his long claw in anger. “How can I go away? There is nowhere for me to go to. I can’t leave this pond. It is my home.”

“You must leave it by to-morrow or we will bite you,” said one of the water-beetles, the very fierce one.

“Yes, you must, or I shall rip you with my spines,” said the stickleback, and he went scarlet with rage.

Well, of course, there was nowhere that the ugly grub could go. He could not breathe out of the water. He could not catch his dinner except in the pond.

He was sad and frightened. Next day the other creatures came to him again. The stickleback rushed at him and nearly pricked him with his spines. The fierce water-beetle tried to bite his tail.

“Go away!” cried the water-creatures. “Go away, Old Ugly.”

Old Ugly felt ill. There was the stem of a water-plant near by and he began to crawl up it.

“Leave me alone,” he said. “I feel ill.”

The water-snail crawled after him. The stickleback tried to spear him with his spines. The grub went on up the stem, and at last came to the top of the water. He crawled right out of the water, and stayed there on the stem, still feeling queer.

“Has he gone?” cried the tadpoles. “Has he gone?”

“He’s out of the water,” said the water-snail. Then he stared hard at the grub. “I don’t think he feels very well,” he said. “He looks a bit strange.”

The grub stood still on the stem, and waited. He didn’t know what he was waiting for, but he knew that something was going to happen. He felt very strange.

Then, quite suddenly, the skin began to split across his head. The water-snail saw it and called down to the creatures below:

“His skin has split! He really is ill! Something queer is happening to Old Ugly.”

Something queer certainly *was* happening to the ugly grub. The skin split down his back too. Out from the top part came a head—a new head—a head with big brilliant eyes! The water-snail nearly fell from his leaf with astonishment.

“He’s got a new head,” he said. “And my goodness, he’s got a new body too! His skin is splitting down his back. I can see his new body beneath.”

“Is it as ugly as his old one?” asked a tadpole.

“No—it’s beautiful—it’s wonderful!” said the snail, watching patiently. And, indeed, it *was* wonderful. As time went on, the grub was able to wriggle completely out of his old skin.

He was no longer an ugly grub. He was a most beautiful dragonfly! His body gleamed bright green and blue—and what a long body it was! He had four wings, big, shining ones that quivered in the sun. He had wonderful eyes. He had six rather weak legs and a strong jaw.

“The ugly grub has changed into a dragonfly!” said the water-snail. “Oh, what a strange thing to see! Dragonfly, what has happened?”

“I don’t know!” said the dragonfly, glad to feel his wings drying in the sun. “I don’t know! I only know that for a long, long time I was an ugly grub in the pond—but that now I have wings, and I shall live in the air! Oh, what a wonderful time I shall have!”

When his wings were ready, the dragonfly darted high in the air on them, his blue and green body almost as bright as the kingfisher’s feathers. He flew off, looking for insects to catch in his strong jaws. Snap—he caught a fly!

“What a beautiful creature!” said a little mouse in surprise, as the dragonfly whizzed past. “Hi, Beauty, Beauty, Beautiful! Where are you going?”

“Are you talking to *me*?” said the dragonfly in surprise. “I’ve always been called Old Ugly before!”

“You are lovely, lovely, *lovely*!” said the mouse. “Stay and talk to me, do!”

But the dragonfly was off again, darting through the air on strong wings, as happy as a swallow.

“What a strange life I have had!” he hummed to himself. “This is the nicest part. How happy I am, how happy I am!”

Maybe you will see him darting down the lane or over the pond. Look out for him, won’t you, for he is one of our loveliest insects.

MUDDLE'S MISTAKE

There was once a brownie called Muddle. I expect you can guess why he had that name. He was always making muddles! He did make silly ones.

Once his mistress, the Princess of Toadstool Town, asked him to take a note to someone who lived in a fir tree. But Muddle came back saying that he couldn't find a tree with fur on at all!

Another time she asked him to get her a snapdragon—and he said he didn't mind fetching a dragon, but he didn't want to get one that snapped.

So, you see, he was always making muddles. And one day he made a very big muddle. The Princess always said he would.

"You just don't use your eyes, Muddle," she would say. "You go through the world without looking hard at things, without listening well with your ears, without using your brains. You are a real muddler!"

Now once the Princess was asked to a party given by the Prince of Midnight Town. She was very excited.

"I shall go," she told Muddle. "You see, this prince gives really wonderful midnight parties, and he lights them by hanging glow-worms all over the place. It's really lovely!"

"Shall I go with you?" asked Muddle. "I expect you will need someone to look after you on your way to the party, because it will be dark."

"I think I shall fly there on a moth," said the Princess. "That will be nice. You get me a nice big moth, and you shall drive me."

"Very well, Your Highness," said Muddle, and he went off to get a moth. He hunted here and he hunted there, and at last he found a beautiful white-winged creature.

"Ah!" he said, "just the right moth for the Princess. I must get it to come with me. I will put it into a beautiful cage, and feed it on sugar and honey, so that it will stay with me until the night of the party."

So he spoke to the lovely creature. "Will you come home with me, White-Wings? I will give you sugar and honey. You shall stay with me until next week, when you may take the Princess of Toadstool Town to a party."

"I should like that," said White-Wings. "I love parties. Get on my back, brownie, and tell me which way to go to your home."

Muddle was pleased. He got on to White-Wings' back, and they rose high in the air. It was fun. They were soon at Muddle's house, which was a sturdy little toadstool, with a little green door in the stalk, and windows in the head.

"Shall I put you in a cage, or just tie you up, White-Wings?" asked Muddle. White-Wings didn't want to be put into a cage. So Muddle took a length of spider thread and tied her up to his toadstool. He brought her honey, and she put out her long tongue and sucked it up. Muddle watched her.

"What a wonderful tongue you have!" he said. "It is a bit like an elephant's trunk! I like the way you coil it up so neatly when you have finished your meal."

"It is long because I like to put it deep down into flowers, and suck up the hidden nectar," said White-Wings. "Sometimes the flowers hide their nectar so deep that only a very long tongue like mine can reach it."

Muddle told the Princess that he had found a very beautiful moth to take her to the midnight party. The Princess was pleased. “Well, I am glad you haven’t made a muddle about *that!*” she said. “Bring White-Wings to me at twenty minutes to midnight, and we will fly off. Make some reins of spider thread, and you shall drive.”

Muddle was so pleased to be going to the party too. It was a great treat for him. He had a new blue suit made, with silver buttons, and a blue cap with a silver knob at the top. He looked very grand.

When the night came, Muddle went out to White-Wings. The lovely insect was fast asleep. “Wake up,” said Muddle. “It is time to go to the party.”

White-Wings opened her eyes. She saw that it was quite dark. She shut her eyes again. “Don’t be silly, Muddle,” she said. “It is night-time. I am not going to fly in the dark.”

“Whatever do you mean?” asked Muddle in surprise. “It is a midnight party! You *must* fly in the dark!”

“I never fly at night, never, never, never,” said White-Wings. “Go away and let me sleep.”

“But moths always fly at night!” cried Muddle. “I know a few fly in the day-time as well—but most of them fly at night. Come along, White-Wings. The Princess is waiting.”

“Muddle, what is all this talk about moths?” asked White-Wings in surprise. “I am not a moth. I am a BUTTERFLY!”

Muddle lifted up his lantern and stared in the greatest surprise at White-Wings. “A b-b-b-butterfly!” he stammered. “Oh no—don’t say that! No, no, say you are a moth!”

“Muddle, sometimes I think you are a very silly person,” said the butterfly crossly. “Don’t you know a butterfly from a moth? Have you lived all this time in the world, and seen hundreds of butterflies and moths, and never once noticed how different they are?”

“I thought you were a moth,” said Muddle, and he began to cry, because he knew that the Princess would be very angry with him. “Please be a moth just for to-night and let me drive you to the midnight party.”

“No,” said White-Wings. “I am a butterfly and I don’t fly at night. If I were you, I’d go and find a moth now, and see if you can get one that will take you.”

“But how shall I know if I am talking to a moth or a butterfly?” said Muddle, still crying. “I might make a mistake again.”

“Now listen,” said the butterfly. “It is quite easy to tell which is which. Do you see the way I hold my wings? I put them neatly back to back, like this, so that I show only the under-parts.”

The white butterfly put her wings back to back. “Now,” she said, “a moth never holds her wings like that. She puts them flat on her back—like this; or she wraps her body round with them—like this; or she just lets them droop—like this. But she certainly doesn’t put them back to back.”

“I’ll remember that,” said poor Muddle.

“Then,” said the butterfly, “have a look at my body, will you, Muddle? Do you see how it is nipped in, in the middle? Well, you must have a look at the bodies of moths, and you will see that they are not nipped in, like mine. They are usually fat and thick.”

“I will be sure to look,” promised Muddle.

“And now here is a very important thing,” said the butterfly, waving her two feelers under Muddle’s nose. “A *most* important thing! Look at my feelers. What do you notice about them?”

“I see that they are thickened at the end,” said Muddle. “They have a sort of knob there, butterfly.”

“Quite right,” said White-Wings. “Now, Muddle, just remember this—a moth *never* has a knob or a club at the end of his feelers, never! He may have feelers that are feathery, or feelers that are just threads—but he will never have knobs on them like mine. You can always tell a butterfly or moth at once, by just looking at their feelers.”

“Thank you, White-Wings,” said Muddle, feeling very small. “All I knew was that butterflies flew in the day-time, and moths mostly flew at night. I didn’t think of anything else.”

“Now go off at once and see if you can find a moth to take you and the Princess to the party,” said White-Wings. “I’m sleepy.”

Well, off went poor Muddle. He looked here and he looked there. He came across a beautiful peacock butterfly, but he saw that it held its wings back to back as it rested, and that its feelers had thick ends. So he knew it wasn’t a moth.

He found another white butterfly like White-Wings. He found a little blue butterfly, but its feelers had knobs on the end, so he knew that wasn’t a moth, either.

Then he saw a pretty moth that shone yellow in the light of his lantern. It spread its wings flat. Its feelers were like threads, and had no knob at the tips. It *must* be a moth. It left the leaf it was resting on and fluttered round Muddle’s head.

“Are you a moth?” asked Muddle.

“Of course!” said the moth. “My name is Brimmy, and I am a brimstone moth. Do you want me?”

“Oh *yes!*” said Muddle. “Will you come with me at once, please, and let me drive you to the midnight party, with the Princess of Toadstool Town on your back?”

“Oh, I’d love that,” said the moth, and flew off with Muddle at once. The Princess was cross because they were late, and Muddle did not like to tell her why.

They went to the party and they had a lovely time. Muddle set White-Wings free the next day, and gave her a little pot of honey to take away.

“You have taught me a lot,” he said. “I shall use my eyes in future, White-Wings!”

Now let’s have a game of Pretend! I am the Princess of Toadstool Town and you are just yourself. Please go out and see if you can find a moth to take me to a party! If you point out a butterfly to me instead, do you know what I shall call you?

I shall call you “Muddle” of course!

THE BIRDS GO TO SCHOOL

There were hundreds of nests in the trees and hedges around. Some of them still had eggs in, but most of them had baby birds. How busy the fathers and mothers were!

You should have seen them flying to and fro, looking for grubs and flies to give them. The baby birds put up their heads and opened their beaks wide for their food.

“We do have to work hard now,” said a blackbird to a thrush. “We have four little ones, and they are so hungry. I really don’t know how many times a day I go out to look for grubs and flies for them, and fly back to the nest. My wings are really getting tired!”

“It will be a good thing when they are out of the nest and can learn to look after themselves,” said the thrush.

“Well, that is a very anxious time for us,” said the blackbird. “We have to teach our little ones so many things! Some of them learn easily and are obedient—but some are lazy or disobedient, and I am always afraid the cat will get them.”

“Boys and girls go to school to learn things they need to know, and our babies go to school too—but only with their parents,” said the thrush. “Mine are almost ready to go to school. I have four children—Freckles, Speckles, Brownie and Fluff.”

“I have four too,” said the blackbird. “I must go. I believe I can hear them squeaking for me. How hungry they always are!”

She flew off, and the thrush went back to her own nest too. She looked at her youngsters, and cocked her head on one side.

“Time for you to learn to fly,” she said. “You are too big for the nest now. Come along. You shall go to school with me to-day, and learn a lot of things! You get out of the nest first, Freckles. You are the biggest.”

Freckles got out of the nest, a dear little fat brown baby thrush. He sat on the bough beside his mother.

“Now, spread your wings like this and fly down to the ground,” said his mother. But Freckles wouldn’t. The ground looked so far away. He was afraid. He half-opened his wings and then closed them again.

“Come along, Freckles,” said his mother. “It is easy.” She flew down to the ground and back again. But still little Freckles wouldn’t try.

Then Fluff climbed out of the nest. She was the smallest. “*I’ll* try!” she said. She spread her little wings, tipped herself off the bough—and fluttered clumsily down to the ground. She landed with a little bump—and wasn’t she proud of herself!

“I’ve done it, I’ve done it!” she cried. “Oh, I do feel grand. I can fly, I can fly!”

“Keep under that bush for a moment,” said her mother. “And don’t make a noise in case the cat comes by. Now, Freckles, you try.”

But no, Freckles wouldn’t. In the end both Brownie and Speckles flew before Freckles did. All three were down on the ground, and still Freckles stayed on the bough.

The mother-thrush was cross. She suddenly gave Freckles a push with one of her wings. He toppled off the bough, opened his wings, and fluttered in fright down to the ground. How the others laughed!

“If you won’t learn your lessons, you must be made to,” said the big thrush to silly little Freckles. “Now come along. I’ll take you to the smooth grass, where we can perhaps find a

worm or two, and some flies or grubs. Keep close to me, all of you—and if I make a loud call, like this—luck-aluck-aluck-aluck—follow me at once, because that will mean that danger is near.”

The little family was soon on the smooth lawn. The big thrush saw a worm coming out of a hole. She ran to it, pecked it, and gave a hard tug. Up came the worm, and the thrush divided it among her children.

“Now,” she said, “look around for another worm. Who will be the first one to get one?”

Brownie saw one and ran to it—but she wasn’t quick enough and the worm disappeared into its hole. Freckles saw one, but he missed it when he tried to tug at it, and it slid back.

It was Fluff who got the first worm, but she almost lost it by not pulling hard enough. “You want to tug sharply,” said the big thrush. “That’s the secret of getting a worm right out of its hole.”

She saw a caterpillar swinging from a long thread hanging from a twig. She called her children round her. “Try to catch that swinging caterpillar,” she said. So they all had a try, but it was very difficult. Fluff caught it at last, and her mother was pleased with her.

It was Freckles who gave her the most trouble. He was lazy and didn’t seem to want to bother to learn how to get food for himself. He kept running away from his mother too, and he sometimes didn’t run to hide when she sounded her alarm-note. She was cross with him.

“If you don’t obey me at once, an enemy will catch you, and then you will be eaten,” she scolded him. “You see, any stupid or disobedient bird will always be caught, Freckles. So just learn your lessons properly, and do as you are told.”

“Mother, Mother, I have found a fly, such a big one!” cried Speckles in excitement. “Come and see.”

Speckles had found a wasp crawling over the grass. The mother thrush spoke to her little family sharply. “Never eat any insect striped with yellow. They can hurt you. Now remember that, please! And never eat the little red beetles called ladybirds. They taste very nasty indeed!”

“Very well, Mother,” said Fluff. But soon she saw a real fly, and rushed happily after it. She managed to catch it and swallowed it proudly. “I caught a fly,” she told the others. “It was really quite easy. It did taste nice.”

When the babies had all learnt how to find a little food for themselves, and were not quite so hungry, the big thrush made them practise flying again. “It is easy to fly *down*,” she said. “But not so easy to fly *up*. Now—up we go to the top of the fence.”

The little birds were clumsy at first. Freckles was very stupid. He wouldn’t even try until his mother gave him a sharp peck.

Soon the little birds were all hungry again and down to the grass they flew. But they hadn’t been there very long before the sharp eyes of the mother-bird saw the big black cat slinking along under the hedge. She sounded the alarm at once.

Now Freckles had just seen a worm! He heard his mother calling out that danger was near, and that they must all fly into the trees to hide—but he did want that worm!

So he didn’t fly up into the bushes as the others did. He stayed on the lawn, pulling at the worm.

The cat saw him. The cat came padding softly round the grass. He crouched low, ready to spring. The mother-thrush cried out in fright: “Come up to the trees, come up to the trees! Cat, cat, cat! Beware of the cat!”

The cat sprang—and the mother-thrush flew down, trying to peck at his head. But it was no use. The silly little thrush was caught and eaten. That was the end of him. The mother-thrush was very sad. She flew back to the others, and took them away to another garden.

“I was afraid that Freckles would come to a bad end,” she said. “Every year the foolish, silly, disobedient bird-babies get caught by their enemies. Only the wise, obedient ones live to grow up. Poor Freckles! He would never learn his lessons well.”

They flew to the edge of a pond. A mother-duck was there, teaching her young ones to swim. The little thrushes watched. The duck showed her children how to dive and how to hunt in the mud for water-insects.

And then the thrushes had another treat. The kingfisher brought her four pretty children to a branch of a tree that overhung the water, and taught them how to dive in to catch fish. It was lovely to see them.

They were clumsy at first and they missed the fish—but how excited the kingfisher family were when one of the babies really did manage to catch a minnow! “Tee-tee-tee!” said the mother-bird. “Very good, little one, very good!”

“All baby-birds seem to be going to school now,” said Fluff. “Lessons are fun. What a lot birds have to learn! We have to learn how to catch flies and pull worms from their holes. We have to learn how to fly well.”

“And *we* have to learn how to swim and dive properly,” said the ducklings. “We have to learn not to dive into water-weeds, or we might get tangled up, and not be able to get out. Then we should drown.”

“And *we* have to learn how to dive,” said the little kingfishers, “and how to catch fish in our beaks.”

“And the baby sea-birds have to learn how to swim on the rough sea,” said the big kingfisher. “I was talking to a sea-gull yesterday, and she was saying that her babies had to be taught to paddle first, and not to go too near the very big waves or they would be knocked over. You all have to go to school and learn different lessons!”

The three little thrushes did their lessons well. Now they are all grown-up, and I hear them singing sweetly in the spring-time. They have built nests in my hedges—but isn’t this a strange thing?—nobody taught them how to build their nests! They didn’t have any lessons in nest-building at all.

How do you suppose they know how to build their nests so well?

THE FRIENDLY LADY-BIRD

Hop and Skip were always at work in the garden of the Queen. The roses were their special care, and how hard they worked so that the Queen might have lovely roses to wear or to put on her tables!

In the early spring they cut back the rose-twigs so that they might send out strong buds that would hold big and beautiful roses.

In the summer they watched for caterpillars or grubs that might eat their roses. They loved taking in big bunches of perfect red, pink, yellow, and white roses for their Queen.

Hop and Skip had a great friend, and that was a handsome ladybird. All the little folk know the insects well, and talk and play with them—but Hop and Skip really loved the bright-red ladybird.

She had got caught in a spider's web one day, and she couldn't get out. The spider did not run out to catch her and tie her up in spider-thread. She knew that ladybirds tasted horrid. So she stayed hidden under her leaf and watched the little insect struggling hard to get out.

The web was strong and the threads were sticky. The ladybird's legs were tangled up. Even her short feelers were caught in the web. She was very frightened.

"Even if the spider doesn't catch me and eat me, I shall die if I don't get out!" she thought. "Oh, if only someone would come by and rescue me."

Not very long after that, Hop and Skip came by on their way to the rose-garden. "Look," said Hop, stopping. "There's a pretty ladybird in that web. It can't get out."

"We'll help it out," said Skip. So, very carefully, he untangled the ladybird's legs and feelers, and she dropped to the ground. She landed in some mud, on her back. She rocked to and fro, trying to turn herself over.

Hop helped her. "My goodness, how muddy you are!" said Hop. "Wait a minute—let me rub you hard with my handkerchief, Ladybird. There—now the mud is off, and your red back, with its seven black spots, is all bright and shining again."

"How pretty you are!" said Skip. "Let *me* give your back a good rub too."

The ladybird cleaned her legs and feelers, for they still felt sticky with the spider's web. Hop and Skip gave her some more rubs with their hankies, and soon she felt and looked quite all right.

"How good you are!" she said. "I shall come and see you each morning now. I want to be friends with you. Perhaps one day I shall be able to repay you for the good turn you did me."

"Perhaps you will," said Hop politely, but he and Skip smiled at one another. How could a small ladybird be of any help to pixie gardeners? It was quite impossible!

Each morning the ladybird came to call at their small cottage. She was very polite and good-mannered.

"How do you do?" she would say. "I hope you are quite well. Is there anything I can do for you to-day?"

"No, thank you," Hop and Skip would say, with a smile. Then they would talk. Sometimes the ladybird sat on the breakfast-table, if she was very early. They thought she was very, very pretty.

When she went, she always said the same thing to them: "Promise me that if ever you are in trouble, you will come to me for help?"

And Hop and Skip would always promise very gravely: “Yes, we promise to come to you for help, Ladybird.”

It was spring-time when they saved the ladybird from the spider’s web. The days went by, sunny and warm, and Hop and Skip were very, very happy in their rose-garden. They had cut back the rose-tree twigs, and now they were watching the strong shoots grow, in which were the leaves and the flower-buds.

May-time came, and the rose-trees had never looked so well. Hop said he could see a rose-bud coming already.

“We shall be able to take the dear Queen a lovely red rose-bud very early this year,” he said. “She can wear it in her hair when she goes to a party. Then she will look more beautiful than ever.”

One morning Hop and Skip had a dreadful shock. They went to look at their rose-trees, and they saw that one of them had something black on the shoots. They bent to see what it was.

“Oooh! How horrid! It is a whole lot of tiny little black insects!” said Hop.

“Are they eating the new leaves?” said Skip angrily. “Yes, they are! Hop, what are they?”

“It must be what is called *blight*,” said Hop. “We’ve never had it before. We must get it all off, Skip, or it will spoil this tree.”

But dear me, before many days had passed, every single rose-tree had the black blight. Hundreds of tiny black insects crawled on the rose-plants, eating leaves and buds. They would all be spoilt. There would be no roses to give to the Queen.

Hop and Skip cried bitterly, for they loved their roses. “Shall we go and tell the ladybird?” asked Hop. “We did promise to tell her when we were in any trouble.”

“Well, she can’t possibly help us, but it would be a comfort to tell somebody about it,” said Skip.

So off they went to the ladybird. She was surprised to see the tears running down their cheeks.

“Ladybird, we haven’t come to you for help but just to tell you our trouble,” said Hop. “Our rose-trees are covered with hundreds of horrid little black insects that are eating all the new shoots. We shall have no roses. We may even lose our jobs.”

“Don’t cry,” said the ladybird. “I can help you. I will soon get rid of that rose-blight for you.”

“What! You can *really* help us!” cried Hop in astonishment. “How? How can a little ladybird like you help us? It is impossible.”

“Oh no, it is quite easy,” said the ladybird. “I am a very good friend to gardeners, and to farmers too. I will just go and get some of my friends, and then we will all fly to your rose-garden. Meet me there.”

She unfolded her wings from beneath her red back, and flew off. Hop and Skip ran back to their roses. Before very long there came quite a cloud of ladybirds flying into the garden.

They settled on the rose-bushes. They began to lay eggs. What a lot they laid! They were yellowish eggs, and the little red beetles laid them on the leaves. Hop and Skip watched in surprise.

“Why do you do that?” said Hop. “Eggs won’t help us!”

“No—but the grubs that come out will help you,” said the ladybird. “You wait and see!”

The ladybirds flew away. Hop and Skip did not feel very comforted—but dear me, how exciting it was when the eggs hatched out! They hatched into dark grubs, which had enormous

appetites.

And what do you think they liked eating better than anything else? The rose-blight—the hundreds of tiny black insects that were spoiling the rose-trees!

“Look at that now!” said Hop in delight. “Did you ever see such a thing? These little dark nigger-grubs are gobbling up all this horrid blight. There soon won’t be any left!”

The little dark grubs cleaned up one tree after another, for the ladybirds had laid eggs on every tree. Soon the trees were clean, and not one black blight was left.

Then the nigger-grubs hung themselves head downwards from a leaf, changed into hard little cases, and slept soundly. Hop and Skip found them there, and were most astonished.

“They ate all the blight—and then they turned into these little cases—and now they’ve gone to sleep!” said Hop. “Most extraordinary! What will come out of the cases?”

Well, you can guess what did come out of the cases one day—some lovely little ladybirds! Yes, those dark nigger-grubs had changed into ladybirds, every one of them. They sat in the sunshine, and then they flew away to enjoy a different sort of life.

The ladybird that Hop and Skip had made friends with came to see the two very soon after that. They stroked her shiny back, and told her all that had happened.

“All the eggs hatched into dark grubs that ate the blight,” said Hop and Skip. “It was wonderful. You have saved all our roses, Ladybird. We shall always be grateful to you.”

“I told you I would pay back your good turn one day,” said the ladybird, pleased. “I am very glad I’ve been able to help you.”

The two gardeners were able to give the Queen some beautiful roses after all. They told her how the ladybird had helped them.

“You had better tell all gardeners that,” said the Queen. “I think it is wonderful!”

And so, boys and girls, I hope when you find a ladybird, you will let her run on your hand, and then take her carefully into the garden.

“Lay your eggs there,” tell her. “You are a great friend of mine!”

And she will help you, just as she helped Hop and Skip so many, many years ago!

THE SPELL THAT WENT WRONG

There was once a very clever brownie called Big-Head, who could make wonderful magic spells.

He had a little goblin servant called Heyho. Heyho had to run about and get Big-Head the things he needed for his spells.

One day Little-One the red imp came to see Big-Head. Little-One was not a nice imp at all. He was spiteful and mean, and nobody liked him. But he was very, very "rich. No one knew how many sacks of gold he had, for he kept them locked up in a cave, deep in the heart of a hill.

"What do you want, Little-One?" asked the clever goblin. "Is there anything you want me to sell you? I have some marvellous spells."

"Big-Head, I want to be strong and big," said Little-One the imp. "I am tired of being small. I want to grow as big as a hill, as strong as an oak tree, as mighty as the wind that roars in winter-time. I will pay you well if you can get me a spell that will make me big."

"Little-One, I don't think you are good enough to be made strong and powerful," said Big-Head. "You see, only really good and wise people should be given strength and power, for if wicked people are strong, then they can make others very unhappy."

"I shall be very, very good and wise when I am big and powerful," said Little-One. "I am only mean and spiteful because I am small and people laugh at me. But as soon as I am tall and strong, you will see what good things I do! I shall be the finest imp that ever lived."

"Will you really?" said Big-Head. "Well, it would be worth making you big, then. But you are quite sure, Little-One, that you will use your strength and power well, and not ill, if I give you a spell to make you big?"

"I promise," said Little-One. But he did not mean it. He only wanted to be big and strong so that he might get richer still, so that he might punish the people he did not like, and make everyone fear him.

But Big-Head the goblin believed him. He called his servant Heyho to him and told him about the imp.

"Little-One wants to be made big and strong and powerful," he said. "He will give me as much gold as I like if I give him the spell he wants."

"What things do you want for your spell?" asked Heyho. Big-Head had to think about that. It would be a difficult spell to make, he knew. But at last, by thinking and dreaming hard, he knew how to make the spell for Little-One.

"Fruit of the oak, keys of the ash,
Rumble of thunder, and lightning-flash,
Thread of a spider, wing of a bee,
Breath from the gale blowing over the sea,
Tooth of a lion, a limpet's shell—
These are the things that I need for my spell!"

This was the spell-song that Heyho heard his master singing. He sighed. What a lot of things to find for the spell! Well, Big-Head would have to wait for some of them. It was only

spring-time now, and the oak and the ash were hardly in leaf, and the fruit would not be ready till the autumn.

Big-Head knew what Heyho was thinking.

“You can find me nearly all the things quickly, but I must wait for the fruit of the oak and the ash,” he said. “Choose a big oak tree, the biggest you can find, Heyho, and a big ash tree, and watch the flower carefully, so that you may choose me the finest, strongest fruit from the trees in the autumn. Get me the other things as soon as you can, and store them in the big blue pan for me.”

So Heyho got all the other things, and he was really very clever at getting them, for it is not easy to get a rumble of thunder, and a flash of lightning.

Still, he managed it, and put them into the big blue pan. The thunder kept rumbling round the pan and made a noise, but nobody minded.

It was easy to get a strong silken thread from a spider’s web, and the strong little wing from a dead bee. Heyho got the tooth of a lion quite easily, because he looked for a lion with toothache, and took out the bad tooth. It was enormous.

“Now, a limpet’s shell,” said Heyho. “I must go to the sea for that, and for the breath of a gale too. Let me see now—the limpet has a shell like a pointed hat—and it is very, very strong.”

He found an empty limpet shell, and then he caught a breath from the rough gale, and put it into a bottle to take home and empty into the blue pan.

Now he only had the fruit of the oak and the ash to take, and then Big-Head could stir everything up together, and say the magic words to make the spell.

“All the same, I wish he wasn’t going to give the spell to that nasty Little-One,” said Heyho. “I know he will use his power badly.”

Heyho went out to find an oak tree and an ash tree. He knew them both. They were immensely strong trees, tall and beautiful. They were just beginning to leaf.

Heyho chose a great oak tree. It was putting out tender reddish-green leaves. Among the leaves Heyho found the flowers. There were two kinds, both catkins.

One was a small, thin catkin, with bunches of yellow-headed stamens growing on it. The other was a stouter, upright catkin, set with two or three tiny cups. In the middle of each cup was a seed-vessel.

“I’ll watch you carefully,” said Heyho. “I’ll choose your finest fruit, oak tree.”

Then he went to the ash tree, whose black buds had broken out into thousands of queer little flowers, that opened before the leaves unfolded. There were bunches of purple stamens in the midst of which stood little bottle-shaped seed-vessels of green.

Heyho looked at the flowers. “I shall watch you changing into ash-keys,” he said. “Ash-keys are your fruit, ash tree. I shall pick them when they are green, before the ‘spinners’ come whirling down to the ground!”

The ash tree put out its leaves when the flowers had faded and were already beginning to form into ash-keys. They were beautiful feathery leaves, light and strong, cut into pale-green leaflets.

Soon the oak, too, was covered in feather-shaped leaves, and its stamen catkins had faded and withered. But the little cup-like seed-vessels were growing well.

Heyho forgot to watch the oak and the ash trees. He didn’t notice how the fruits were growing. He just didn’t bother. But Big-Head gave him a shock one day.

“Heyho! I want to make that spell for Little-One to-morrow. He is coming to me with twenty sacks of gold. Have you everything I need for the spell?”

“Oh, good gracious!” said Heyho. “Yes—no—yes—er—I mean no, not quite. There’s everything there except the fruit of the ash or oak.”

“Go and get them at once,” said Big-Head crossly. “It is autumn, and they should be ready.”

Heyho rushed off. He plucked some of the ash-keys, which were now big and well formed. Then he ran to the oak. He saw a good many little round brown balls growing on the twigs, and he picked some quickly. Then he hurried back and put the ash-keys and the round brown balls into the blue pan.

“Ready, master, ready,” he cried. Big-Head came up with his magic spoon. He stirred the curious mixture, and he sang a magic song. Everything grew quiet and small and green in the pan. At last, at the bottom, there were two or three drops of a curious shining green liquid. Big-Head tipped it out into a golden cup.

“Here is the strongest spell in the world!” he said. “It will make Little-One as tall as a hill, as strong as the sea, as powerful as the wind!”

Little-One drank the spell the next day and everyone waited to see him grow enormous. But he didn’t. He stayed small—but he went a curious green colour. Yes, his face and hands, and even his hair, turned a pale green!

“Something went wrong with the spell!” groaned Big-Head. “What could it have been?”

And suddenly Heyho knew. “Oh, Master, do forgive me!” he cried. “I know what I did wrong. I took the wrong thing from the oak tree. I took oak apples instead of acorns! I forgot they were not the real fruit of the oak tree!”

“You stupid fellow!” said Big-Head angrily. “Oak apples are made by insects! They pierce an oak twig, lay eggs there, and cause a round ball to grow, in which their eggs hatch! The grub eats the soft juicy ball that has formed.”

“I know, I know,” wept poor Heyho. “And those balls grow hard and woody and brown, don’t they, master? Look—here is one I didn’t put into the pan.”

He showed Big-Head a hard round ball. Big-Head pointed to a hole in it. “That is where the insect came out,” he said. “Now you have spoilt my spell, and turned Little-One green, instead of making him big and powerful!”

“It’s a good thing, master, it’s a good thing!” cried Heyho suddenly. “I know Little-One is bad. He would never be good. He would have used his power to make people unhappy, not happy! It’s a good thing the spell went wrong!”

And, indeed, it was. If Heyho hadn’t made that mistake, and put oak apples into the spell, instead of acorns, the red imp would have become big and strong enough to rule all the little folk! Then goodness knows what might have happened!

[The end of *My Second Nature Book: The Spell that Went Wrong and Other Stories* by Enid Blyton]