

# **THE COUNTERPANE FAIRY**



## **Table of Contents**

CHAPTER FIRST. THE PRINCESS OF THE GOLDEN CASTLE

CHAPTER SECOND. THE OWLS AND THE GAMBLESOME ELF

CHAPTER THIRD. STARLEIN AND SILVERLING

CHAPTER FOURTH. THE MAGIC CIRCUS

CHAPTER FIFTH. AT THE EDGE OF THE POLAR SEA

CHAPTER SIXTH. THE RUBY RING

CHAPTER SEVENTH. THE RAINBOW CHILDREN.

CHAPTER EIGHTH. HARRIETT'S DREAM.

CHAPTER NINTH. DOWN THE RAT-HOLE.

CHAPTER TENTH. THE COUNTERPANE FAIRY SAYS GOOD-BYE



# CHAPTER FIRST.

## THE PRINCESS OF THE GOLDEN CASTLE

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

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

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

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

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

“Hannah, I want to ask mamma something,” said Teddy.

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

“I want to ask her something,” repeated Teddy.

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

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

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

“No,” said Teddy, and his lip trembled.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Nothing in what?" asked Teddy.

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

"What became of them?"

"Oh, they moved away. They left before I did. As soon as they were old enough, Mother Field-mouse went. She said she couldn't stand the court fairies. They were always playing tricks on her, stopping up the door of her house with sticks and acorns, and

making faces at her babies until they almost drove them into fits. So after that I left too.”

“Where did you go?”

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

“Do you like little boys?”

“Yes, when they don’t cry,” said the Counterpane Fairy, staring at him very hard.

“Well, I was lonely,” said Teddy. “I wanted my mamma.”

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

“Do you mean *tell* me a story?” asked Teddy.

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

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

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

Teddy fixed his eyes on the square and the fairy began to count. “One—two—three—four,” she counted; Teddy heard her voice,



thin and clear as the hissing of the logs on the hearth. “Don’t look away from the square,” she cried. “Five—six—seven” —it seemed to Teddy that the yellow silk square was turning to a mist before his eyes and wrapping everything about him in a golden glow. “Thirteen—fourteen” —the fairy counted on and on. “Forty-six—forty-seven—forty-eight—FORTY-NINE!”

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

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

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

“Yes,” said Teddy, “I will do it.”

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

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

Up and up and up he went. Once he turned and waved his hand to the Counterpane Fairy in the golden garden far below. She waved her hand in answer, and he heard her voice faint and clear. “Good-bye! Good-bye! Be brave and strong, and beware of that that is little and gray.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The next thing he knew he was standing in the golden garden, and there was the Counterpane Fairy beside him looking at him sadly.

“You should have known better than to try the emerald door,” she said; “and now shall we break the story?”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“No,” said Teddy, “I knew no better.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Yes,” answered Teddy, “I have come.”

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

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

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

“Oh, but I can’t,” said Teddy, “because —because—”

But the princess drew him out with her through the hall, and there they were at the head of the flight of glass steps. A great host of soldiers and courtiers were running up it. They were dressed in cloth of gold, and they shouted at the sight of Teddy: “Hail to the

hero! Hail to the hero!” and Teddy knew them by their voices for the golden birds that had fluttered around him in the garden below.

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

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

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

“Did you like it?” asked the fairy.

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

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

“Oh, no, no!” cried Teddy. “Please don’t go yet.”

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

“But will you come back again?” cried Teddy.

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



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



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