

The Magic Playhouse

BY KATHARINE PEARSON WOODS

Susie was not at all a naughty little girl. There were times, however, when she liked to have her own way, and then the relations between herself and her mamma were apt to be a trifle strained until Susie would say that she was sorry. But one very sad day—O! dear me! whether Susie got out of bed on the wrong side or not, I do not know, or even whether there is any right side to a bed under such circumstances; however that may be, Susie was very naughty, and cried dreadfully; and even after she was all sweet and smiling again, and goodness was shining out of her eyes, she still would not say she was sorry.

This made her mamma feel very sad indeed—so sad that she did not know what to do, so she went out into the garden to think it over. It was winter time, just about ready for spring to come, and the garden was all frozen and snowy; but when Susie's mamma had walked up and down the paths for a while, every now and then wiping her eyes with a clean pocket handkerchief, all of a sudden, in the corner, she saw something green.

"Dear me!" said Mamma, "is that a stray tulip or a jonquil that has got into that corner? I must go and look."

So she went; but when she got to the place, lo and behold! it was the funniest little Brownie you ever saw, all dressed in green, with a little pointed green cap upon his queer little head—a green cap with a long red tassel.

"Good morning, madam," he said, rising and bowing very politely; "you seem to be in trouble."

"Alack, sir," said Mamma, "my little daughter has been very naughty, and will not say she is sorry."

"But perhaps she is not sorry," said the Brownie.

"That," said Susie's mamma, "is just what distresses me."

"Well," said the Brownie, "I do not know any one who can make a little girl sorry more quickly than the Fairy Godmother."

"But how can I send for her?" asked Mamma.

"Why, as you would send for any one else," answered the Brownie; "don't you know the way to the fairy telegraph office?"

"I never heard of such a thing," said Mamma.

"Well, you shall hear of it, and also see it," said the little green man; "come with me."

With that he led the way out of the small white gate, along the village street,

and into the woods. The trees waved their bare brown boughs solemnly as Susie's mamma passed by, as though they were sorry that Susie should be so naughty; the little squirrels that peeped out had tears of grief in their bright black eyes, and one of them cried so hard that he was obliged to use the end of his tail as a pocket handkerchief; the sparrows, too, were quite distressed about it, and a dear little robin redbreast flew down on Mamma's shoulder, and whispered to her not to mind, because he felt quite sure that Susie would be sorry presently.

At last they reached a hollow tree, which had a large swinging door of dark green moss. Over it was a sheet of ice, behind which a number of glowworms were so arranged as to form the letters, "Fairyland National Telegraph. Substation X."

The Brownie pushed the moss door and they entered. The cozy little office was carpeted with dry leaves, and lit up by hundreds of fireflies which grouped themselves into beautiful designs. Behind the counter a gentlemanly woodpecker took Mamma's message, and tapped it out with his bill upon the inside of the tree trunk, while the fireflies spread themselves out into a long fairy telegraph line, which Susie's mamma could see extending far, far away into the depths of the forest.

"What is the charge?" asked Mamma, when the woodpecker said it was all right now.

"Only a few crumbs scattered before your door for the winter birds," said the Brownie, "and a little consideration for the fireflies. Though Susie is not one of the children who so cruelly catch them and pull off their wings, when they fly about your earth in the beautiful summer evenings. Such children do not know how wicked it is, I am sure, to treat a helpless insect in that way, or how it interferes with the fairies to lose their electric messengers. Now you must hasten homewards, or the Fairy Godmother will be there before you."

He took her by the hand, and they ran every step of the way, not stopping even to find the pale pink arbutus blossoms under the dry leaves, or to stroke the pussy willows down by the brook. But hurry as they would the Fairy Godmother hurried still faster, and when they reached the little white gate she was just alighting from her chariot of walnut shell, drawn by two enormous yellow dragons, whose tails were so long and so wriggly that they had to be tied with pink ribbons on top of their backs, lest they should knock the chariot into the middle of next week.

The Fairy Godmother looked as sad as the squirrels and the sparrows and everybody else, when she heard that Susie would not say she was sorry.

"The best thing," she said, "would be to shut her up in a gray stone tower, with no light and no fire, and nothing to eat!"

"O, my dear Fairy Godmother," said Susie's mamma, crying very hard indeed, "do, pray, don't be quite so severe!"

"Very well, then," said the Godmother, "what do you say to a magic playhouse, with little dolls that can eat and walk and talk?"

"If—" said Susie's mamma, for she did not see how a little girl should say she was sorry on account of anything half so delightful and altogether charming. But Susie laughed and clapped her hands and danced all about the room at the mere thought; so the Fairy Godmother said the magic playhouse was certainly THE THING, and she would forward it as soon as she returned, by the Fairyland National Express Company.

With which she stepped into her walnut-shell chariot, and the enormous yellow dragons spread their raven-black wings, and breathed out a cloud of fire and smoke, and when it cleared away the Fairy Godmother was gone.

In about two minutes there rattled up to the gate a spruce little wagon, drawn by six large yellow caterpillars and lettered on the side, "Eve's Express Company," for you see the queen of the fairies was a lady, and it was called Eve's Express Company out of compliment to her.

A cute little Brownie sprang down from the driving seat with a book under his arm made of lily leaves sewn together and bound in mouseskin.

"Miss Susie Littlegirl," he said, briskly, "one package. Charges paid. Sign here, please."

So Susie wrote her name in the book, just where he showed her, and the Brownie pulled out of the wagon a very large package. In fact, it was so very large that if he had not been a Brownie he could never have got it into his wagon or taken it out either.

Then he touched his cap and drove away in the twinkling of an eye, and your eyes would have twinkled too, I can assure you, if you had seen that playhouse. Do you know the house you live in? Well, it was just like that, only prettier. And the mamma and papa dolls were alive, and the little boy dolls could fly kites and spin tops and the little girl dolls had dolls of their own.

Susie was so happy for a while she didn't know what to do, and only cared to sit and watch these tiny, cunning, little people, but by and by, as was quite natural, she thought it would be nice to have a general housecleaning.

"Housecleaning," said the doll mamma, "and a new seamstress coming tomorrow! It is not to be thought of."

"Well, then, let's have a party," said Susie.

"A party," said the doll papa, "why, I have to write seventeen editorials for the Fairyland *Nocturnal Review* between this and tomorrow morning. I cannot possibly allow any such interruption."

"Well, anyhow, we can take a drive," said Susie, almost crying.

"Drive! We're going to skate on the fairy ice pool. It is too small for big things like you, and against the rules for you to come, anyhow," cried the boys and girls together.

Well, that was only the beginning of it. Whatever Susie wanted them to do those provoking dolls always wanted to do something else. And as for dressing and redressing twenty times a day, being ill with scarlet fever four days out of six and sitting down to meals whenever Susie took a notion to have them, they just wouldn't hear of it. The mamma doll said gravely that such a life would

ruin the strongest constitution. It was fully as objectionable as wearing pins inside one's anatomy instead of out; and if Susie did not know how a doll liked to be treated it was time she began to find out.

"But you ought to do as I tell you because I'm your *mother!*" cried Susie, at last. The dolls suddenly stood up stiffly in a row and looked at her with accusing eyes.

Then all at once Susie understood, and she was sorry; so she ran very quickly and threw her arms around her mamma's neck and said, "O, Mamma, I am sorry I was naughty; please to forgive me!"

Then her mamma hugged her and kissed her and was very happy indeed, and out of doors the leaves came out on the trees, the flowers sprang up from the earth and bloomed, the birds began to sing and the pussy willows united in a grand cats' opera.

Susie is now, at all times and in all seasons, the best little girl in Fairyland or out of it, and the magic playhouse is not magic any longer, but just like your playhouse, only prettier. And the dolls no longer insist on having their own way, but do just as their little mamma tells them; and Susie has her own way so entirely in her playhouse that in Mamma's house she has Mamma's way and finds it always the best. And if she ever happens—as will happen even to good little girls sometimes—to be just the least little bit naughty, she runs quickly—O! so quickly—and says she is sorry. And Susie's mamma is the happiest mamma in the whole round world because she has such a good little daughter.