

## FOR THE CHILDREN

### WHY BETTY BABBIT BROKE HER PROMISE

By Anne Warner.

BETTY stood by the window, looking out at the April rain.

"I wish I had a dancing mouse," she said. "Harriet's little sister had two dancing mice for her birthday. I do wish I had just one."

Betty's mother, writing at her desk, made no answer.

"Or an alligator," said Betty; "oh, if I only had an alligator! Eleanor's uncle brought her home such a cunning little one from Florida when he came to visit them last week, all over lumps and knobs, just as *cute*."

Betty's mother went on writing.

"I would so like to have a rabbit, too," Betty said next, "a rabbit with pink eyes. You can hold rabbits tight and love them. If I might only just have a rabbit!"

And then she went to her mother's side and held up one of her rosy fingers in signal that she must be answered.

Mrs. Babbit stopped writing and looked up.

"Well, darling?" she said.

"Mama, I do want something alive."

"Oh, no, you don't, my dear."

"But I do, mama, truly I do."

"Pets are a great care, dear, a much greater care than you can possibly imagine. It is not as if we lived in the country; we only have a narrow city house, and no pet would be very happy here. Besides, anything that has to be attended to each day is a great deal too much for a little girl of eight to see to herself."

Betty looked doubtful at that. She liked to feed and pet creatures, but not to scrub and sweep their houses.

"If there would only a fairy come," she said finally. "If a fairy came, you'd let me keep her, wouldn't you, mama?"

"I think that you would get very tired of attending to a fairy's wants; nevertheless, I don't mind promising you that if one comes you may keep it."

"Oh, you good mama," Betty cried, "I saw one skimming around the morning-glories yesterday. Perhaps it will come to me."

Mrs. Babbit smiled again. "I must go out now," she said, folding her letter into its envelope.

Then Betty went up to her own pretty playroom with the balcony and its pots of vines and flowers. She was very fond of this little bit of outdoors in the city. She liked to water her flowers, and bring her toys out in the sunlight. She had a little table and a rocker there.

She sat down in the chair now. Suddenly she gave a little cry and put her hand to her ear. It was as if a fine wire had pierced into her brain, and the next instant she felt as if words had been threaded on the wire.

"Look out!" they said, "I'm on the table."

With her hand still to her tingling ear she looked quickly at the table, and there was a fairy, a real live fairy, about two inches tall, with her arms up unhooking her wings as little girls unbutton their dresses at night.

"I heard your mama say that I could stay, so I thought that I would just try visiting you," said the fairy; "I shall stay as long as it is agreeable. I shall not be very particular," added the fairy. "I can attend to my own hair and so forth. But I shall need a room and food, of course. I trust you understand that."

Betty never had imagined that fairies talked in just that tone and way.

"There, there, there!" said the fairy now. "Come, come, come! You look quite enough like a Jack-o'-lantern without being dumb, too; jump up and show me where I can live."

Betty rose from her seat as if in a dream and stood looking at her visitor.

"Well, well, well!" said the fairy, impatiently.

"Could you live in the doll's house?" Betty asked, pointing to where it stood.

"In there!" She gave a little screech. "In that wretched place! Why, my child, that to me is as living in a grain-elevator would be to you; it's nothing but a great big barren hole."

"I suppose the furniture is too big," said Betty.

"Too big! My child, those chairs to me are as dry-goods boxes to you."

Betty looked at her.

"Perhaps I could make you a little room out of a pasteboard box, turned on one side, you know."

"A pasteboard-box!" said the fairy, with a very unkind laugh. "A paste-board box to me would be as a freight-car turned on its side to you, and then what about furniture?"

"Oh," Betty said brightly, "I have two little chairs, made out of spools, with velvet seats; you could have those."

"Velvet seats!" said the fairy, in great disgust. "My child, velvet to me is like a door-mat to you. Should you like to sit on furniture covered with door-mats?"

"No," said Betty. "But perhaps I could make you a little cushion to sit on."

"What would you stuff it with?" asked the fairy.

"Jeweller's cotton?" Betty asked.

"Ow!" cried the fairy sharply. "Jeweller's cotton to me is like the coarsest shavings to you."

Betty's lip almost trembled, the fairy's tone was so very sharp.

"Do get me some water," said the fairy. "You gave me to understand that I should be well cared for if I came, and I've come, and I'm thirsty."

"Ice-water?" Betty asked.

"Ice-water!" screamed the fairy. "No, child, double-distilled dew."

"I'm afraid we hav'n't any," Betty murmured.

"Hav'n't any! Well, then, get me a drop of what you have."

"What shall I put it in?" Betty asked.

"Hav'n't you any hemp-seed cups?"

"No, I'm afraid not."

"Good gracious, what sort of hole have I dropped into?"

"Could you drink from a salt-spoon?"

"Could you drink from a shovel?" asked the fairy.

Betty winked back her tears.

"I suppose," said the fairy, "that you will have to spill a little into a glass saucer and I shall have to scoop it up with my hand. How dared you wish to entertain a fairy?"

Betty turned and ran as fast as she could for the water.

When she returned the fairy making a cup of her hand, slaked her thirst.

"Oh, the abominable stuff," she said as she rose. "And now about food. What can I have?"

"Would you like some grains of sugar?" Betty faltered.

"Grains of sugar! Grains of sugar to me, child, are like eating whole lumps would be to you."

"What would you like?" Betty asked.

"What I'm not very likely to get," said the fairy. "I'd like mosquitoes' legs fried in moth-dust, but I might as well wish for the moon, I know."

"Oh, I'm afraid that you might."

"I wonder if I could have a nap," she said at last. "I am so tired standing here yelling at you."

"What is your bed like at home?"

"My springs are grape tendrils, my sheets are spun cobweb, and my mattress is stuffed with butterflies' feathers."

"Oh, dear me!" cried Betty. "I'm afraid we never can get you such a bed."

The fairy stooped and took up her wings. Something in her manner reminded Betty of a child "going home mad."

"I think I'll go," said the fairy, coldly. "I see that you hadn't an idea what you were talking about when you said you would love to take care of me. Sugar and jeweller's cotton, indeed!" And she sprang into the air and was gone.

Betty sat down in her little chair before her little table and drew a long, long sigh of relief. Then she laid her head on her arm and went fast asleep. When mama came home later she told her.

"Wasn't she rude and disagreeable?" she said, "and, oh, mama, suppose she had stayed longer."

"It would have been awful, dear."

Then she kissed her little girl and said, "Wait till papa's holiday, dear, and then we will go into the real country and you can have all the pets that you want."

And Betty waited quite content.—*New Idea Woman's Magazine.*

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