

Chapter III The Turtle Tells of the Corrugated Giant

"WHY, it's wonderful!" said Twinkle, who had listened eagerly to the turtle's speech.

"It would be wonderful, indeed, if I were but a simple turtle," was the reply.

"But aren't you a turtle?"

"Of course, so far as my outward appearance goes, I'm a common little mud-turtle," it answered; "and I think you will agree with me that it was rather clever in the Corrugated Giant to transform me into such a creature."

"What's a Corrugated Giant?" asked Twinkle, with breathless interest.

"The Corrugated Giant is a monster that is full of deep wrinkles, because he has no bones inside him to hold his flesh up properly," said the turtle. "I hated this giant, who is both wicked and cruel, I assure you; and this giant hated me in return. So, when one day I tried to destroy him, the monster transformed me into the helpless little being you see before you."

"But who were you before you were transformed?" asked the girl.

"A fairy prince named Melga, the seventh son of the fairy Queen Flutterlight, who rules all the fairies in the north part of this land."

"And how long have you been a turtle?"

"Fourteen years," replied the creature, with a deep sigh. "At least, I think it is fourteen years; but of course when one is swimming around in brooks and grubbing in the mud for food, one is apt to lose all track of time."

"I should think so, indeed," said Twinkle. "But, according to that, you're older than I am."

"Much older," declared the turtle. "I had lived about four hundred years before the Corrugated Giant turned me into a turtle."

"Was your head gray?" she asked; "and did you have white whiskers?"

"No, indeed!" said the turtle. "Fairies are always young and beautiful in appearance, no matter how many years they have lived. And, as they never die, they're bound to get pretty old sometimes, as a matter of course."

"Of course!" agreed Twinkle. "Mama has told me about the fairies. But must you always be a mud-turtle?"

"That will depend on whether you are willing to help me or not," was the answer.

"Why, it sounds just like a fairy tale in a book!" cried the little girl.

"Yes," replied the turtle, "these things have been happening ever since there were fairies, and you might expect some of our adventures would get into books. But are you willing to help me? That is the important thing just now."

"I'll do anything I can," said Twinkle.

"Then," said the turtle, "I may expect to get back to my own form again in a reasonably short time. But you must be brave, and not shrink from such a little thing as danger."

That made Twinkle look solemn.

"Of course I don't want to get hurt," she said. "My mama and papa would go distracted if anything happened to me."

"Something will happen, sure," declared the turtle; "but nothing that happens will hurt you in the least if you do exactly as I tell you."

"I won't have to fight that Carbolated Giant, will I?" Twinkle asked doubtfully.

"He isn't carbolated; he's corrugated. No, you won't have to fight at all. When the proper time comes I'll do the fighting myself. But you may have to come with me to the Black Mountains, in order to set me free."

"Is it far?" she asked.

"Yes; but it won't take us long to go there," answered the turtle. "Now, I'll tell you what to do and, if you follow my advice no one will ever know you've been mixed up with fairies and strange adventures."

"And Collerated Giants," she added.

"Corrugated," he corrected. "It is too late, this Saturday, to start upon our journey, so we must wait another week. But next Saturday morning do you come to me bright and early, as soon as you've had breakfast, and then I'll tell you what to do."

"All right," said Twinkle; "I won't forget."

"In the mean time, do give me a little clean water now and then. I'm a mud-turtle, sure enough; but I'm also a fairy prince, and I must say I prefer clean water."

"I'll attend to it," promised the girl.

"Now put me down and run away," continued the turtle. "It will take me all the week to think over my plans, and decide exactly what we are to do."