

Once upon a time there was a rich farmer who had a thrifty wife. She used to go out and gather all the little bits of wool which she could find on the hillsides, and bring them home. Then, after her family had gone to bed, she would sit up and card the wool and spin it into yarn, and then she would weave the yarn into cloth to make garments for her children.

But all this work made her feel very tired, so that one night,

sitting at her loom, she laid down her shuttle and cried:--

"Oh, that someone would come from far or near, from land or sea, to help me!"

No sooner had the words left her lips than she heard someone knocking at the door.

"Who is there?" cried she.

"Tell Quarry, good housewife," answered a wee, wee voice.

"Open the door to me. As long as I have you'll get."

She opened the door and there on the threshold stood a queer, little woman, dressed in a green gown and wearing a white cap on her head.

The good housewife was so astonished that she stood and stared at her strange visitor but without a word the little woman ran past her and seated herself at the spinning-wheel.

The good housewife shut the door but just then she heard another knock.

"Who is there?" said she.

"Tell Quarry, good housewife. Open the door to me," said another wee, wee voice. "As long as I have you'll get."

And when she opened the door there was another queer, little woman, in a lilac frock and a green cap, standing on the threshold.

She, too, ran into the house without waiting to say, "By your leave," and picking up

the distaff, began to put some wool on it.

Then before the housewife could get the door shut, a funny little manikin, with green trousers and a red cap, came running in, and followed the tiny women into the kitchen, seized hold of a handful of wool and began to card it. Another wee, wee woman followed him, and then another tiny manikin, and another, and another, until it seemed to the good

housewife that all the fairies and pixies in Scotland were coming into her house.

The kitchen was alive with them. Some of them hung the great pot over the fire to boil water to wash the wool that was dirty. Some teased the clean wool, and some carded it. Some spun it into yarn, and some wove the yarn into great webs of cloth.

And the noise they made was like to make her head run round. "Splash! Splash! Whirr!

Whirr! Clack! Clack!" The water in the pot bubbled over. The spinning-wheel whirred. The shuttle in the loom flew backwards and forwards.

And the worst of it was that all the Fairies cried out for something to eat and although the good housewife put on her griddle and baked bannocks as fast as she could, the bannocks were eaten up the moment they were taken off the fire and yet the Fairies shouted for more.

At last the poor woman was so troubled that she went into the next room to wake her husband. But although she shook him with all her might, she could not wake him. It was very plain to see that he was bewitched.

Frightened almost out of her senses and leaving the Fairies eating her last batch of bannocks, she stole out of the house and ran as fast as she could to the cottage of the

Wise Man who lived a mile away.

She knocked at his door till he got up and put his head out of the window to see who was there, and then she told him the whole story.

"Thou foolish woman," said he, "let this be a lesson to thee never to pray for things thou dost not need! Before thy husband can be loosed from the spell the Fairies must be got out of the house and the fulling-water, which they

have boiled, must be thrown over him. Hurry to the little hill that lies behind thy cottage, climb to the top of it and set the bushes on fire; then thou must shout three times: `BURG HILL'S ON FIRE!' Then will all the little Fairies run out to see if this be true, for they live under the hill. When they are all out of the cottage, do thou slip in as quickly as thou canst and turn the kitchen upside down. Upset everything the Fairies

have worked with, else the things their fingers have touched will open the door to them and let them in, in spite of thee."

So the good housewife hurried away. She climbed to the top of the little hill back of her cottage, set the bushes on fire and cried out three times as loud as she was able: "BURG HILL'S ON FIRE!"

And sure enough, the door of the cottage was flung wide open and all the little Fairies

came running out, knocking each other over in their eagerness to be first at the hill.

In the confusion the good housewife slipped away and ran as fast as she could to her cottage; and when she was once inside, it did not take her long to bar the door and turn everything upside down.

She took the band off the spinning-wheel and twisted the head of the distaff the wrong way. She lifted the pot

of fulling-water off the fire,
and turned the room topsy-
turvy, and threw down the
carding-combs.

Scarcely had she done so,
when the Fairies returned and
knocked at the door.

"Good housewife! Let us in,"
they cried.

"The door is shut and bolted,
and I will not open it,"
answered she.

"Good spinning-wheel, get up
and open the door," they
cried.

"How can I," answered the
spinning-wheel, "seeing that
my band is undone?"

"Kind distaff, open the door
for us," said they.

"That would I gladly do," said
the distaff, "but I cannot walk,
for my head is turned the
wrong way."

"Weaving-loom, have pity and
open the door."

"I am all topsy-turvy and cannot move," sighed the loom.

"Fulling-water, open the door," they implored.

"I am off the fire," growled the fulling-water, "and all my strength is gone."

"Oh! Is there nothing that will come to our aid, and open the door?" they cried.

"I will," said a little barley-bannock, that had lain hidden, toasting on the hearth; and it

rose and trundled like a wheel quickly across the floor.

But luckily the housewife saw it and she nipped it between her finger and thumb and because it was only half-baked, it fell with a "splatch" on the cold floor.

Then the Fairies gave up trying to get into the kitchen and instead they climbed up by the windows into the room where the good housewife's husband was sleeping and they swarmed upon his bed

and tickled him until he tossed about and muttered as if he had a fever.

Then all of a sudden the good housewife remembered what the Wise Man had said about the fulling-water. She ran to the kitchen and lifted a cupful out of the pot and carried it in and threw it over the bed where her husband was.

In an instant he woke up in his right senses. Then he jumped out of bed, ran across the room and opened the door,

and the Fairies vanished. And they have never been seen from that day to this.

Burg Hill's on Fire



Halloween Stories



By Elizabeth W. Grierson