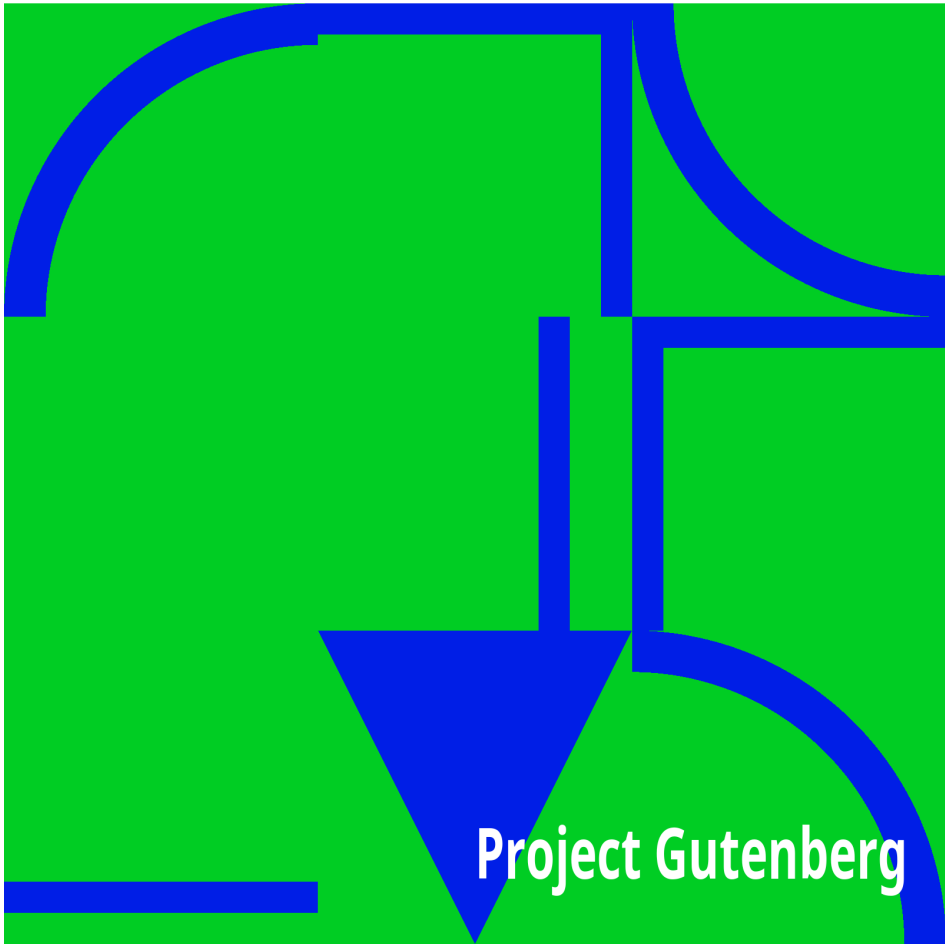
Up! Horsie!

Clara de Chatelain



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NEW SERIES.

UP! HORSIE!

AN

Original Fairy Tale.

BY

MADAME DE CHATELAIN.

JOSEPH, MYERS, & CO., 144, LEADENHALL STREET, LONDON, E.C.

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UP! HORSIE!

A young peasant was riding to market on a stout, well-fed nag, when he overtook an old Scotch shepherd, who was trudging along on foot.

"I say, Sandy," cried the young man, "if you go no faster than that, market will be over before you get to town."

The Scotchman turned round, and peered at him from under his bushy eyebrows, saying in a strong north country accent: "Gin ye think so, suppose we ride and tie?"

"A pretty story indeed!" quoth Gilbert—"I keep a horse for myself, and not for you."

And as he uttered this ungracious answer, he urged on his nag, and soon left the old Scotchman in the lurch.

Scarcely had Gilbert reached the market town, and put up his horse at an inn, when who should he behold strolling leisurely amongst the market folks, but the same old shepherd he had left so far behind.

"Somebody must have given you a lift, Sandy," observed he.

"Oh," replied the shepherd, "when I asked for a lift, it was only to see if you were obliging or not—it was all the same to me—for though you must buy your horses, I can gather mine whenever I choose."

These words sounded so odd to Gilbert that he begged the stranger to explain his meaning, when the old man said: "Meet me at yon inn, and we'll see."

Gilbert then hurried through his business, and went to join the shepherd at the inn. But the wary Scotchman would not give his secret for nothing—and why should he, to a stranger who had been uncivil to him? Besides, as he observed truly enough, those who are curious may pay for their curiosity, so if Gilbert wanted to know how to gather horses thus easily, he must hand him over all the money he had received that morning, and give him his nag into the bargain. Gilbert thought these demands exorbitant, and tried to haggle with the stranger, but Sandy proved too much for him, Northumbrian though he was—and the young farmer finished by agreeing to his conditions, and after paying down the money, brought the horse out of the stable.

"Now I'll tell you," said the Scotchman. "May be you've heard of our late poet Burns, just over the border? Well, he told of a shepherd lad who years and years ago learnt of some wise ones, that if you pull a stem of ragwort, and sit astride it, and cry out: 'Up! Horsie!' it will carry you through the air."

"And have you tried it and succeeded?" eagerly inquired Gilbert.

"Ay—for that shepherd lad was myself, and many a pleasant jaunt have I enjoyed by that same means," said Sandy, with twinkling eyes. "Only you must not attempt it till the moon is full, or the horse might throw an inexperienced rider."

Delighted at having learnt such a secret, and without pausing to wonder how, if the shepherd had lived so many years before Burns, he could still be alive, Gilbert inquired what places he went to?

"I went to Elf-land," said the Scotchman.

Gilbert was not learned—indeed he could scarcely read—and he confessed he did not know the road thither; but the stranger assured him he need only express the wish to go, and the ragwort would take him. They then parted, and the shepherd rode away with the horse, after stowing away the money in his pouch, while Gilbert went home as best he might.

After waiting impatiently for the full moon, Gilbert at last went out one night to work the charm, and to his great delight, had no sooner bestrided the ragwort, and said: "Up! Horsie!" than it bore him at a pretty smart pace to Elf-land. Nevertheless it just began to dawn as he reached his journey's end, and dismounted. He had not proceeded far, before he perceived a splendid castle on an eminence, and numerous flocks browsing on the surrounding hills. But what arrested his attention still more was a very lovely woman, superbly drest, sitting at the foot of the hill, playing on an ivory fiddle of exquisite workmanship, with golden strings, from which she drew the sweetest tones he had ever heard in his whole life. Gilbert stood still, quite entranced, and could have listened for ever, had not the lady, on becoming conscious of his presence, stopped short, and blushed with pretty confusion at having been overheard by a stranger.

"I never heard anything like it before!" exclaimed Gilbert.

She raised her soft eyes towards his, and said: "Will you enter my service?"

"That I will," answered he, quite bewildered by her beauty. "What shall I have to do?"

The lady pointed to the flocks grazing on the hill, saying he would merely have to tend the sheep, and, above all, to mind that none got lost. She then gave him the ivory fiddle, saying he need only draw the bow across the strings, when the sheep, being accustomed to the sound, would

follow at his bidding. "Now roam about wherever you please," added she, "only mind you return to yonder castle at nightfall, and bring the flock back with you, and then you shall have your reward."

Gilbert then set off to join the sheep, though not without looking back many a time, to take a last glimpse of the lady who still sat near the bank, smiling more bewitchingly than ever. On reaching the top of the hill, he perceived that the sheep had already strayed down into the valley, when he hastened after them, but only to see them enter a narrow glen helter-skelter, as if they were running for dear life. He now recollected the fiddle would save him all further trouble, and drew the bow across the strings as the lady had told him, but instead of the exquisite music she drew from them, he only obtained a sort of screeching noise, that seemed to spread a panic amongst the flock, and after hurrying through the glen, the sheep dispersed both right and left. Gilbert ran after first one group and then another, scraping away at his fiddle as hard as he could, but it was all of no use—he could not overtake them. At length he was so tired that he was obliged to sit down and rest. He began to feel hungry, too, not having eaten since his ride to Elf-land, and looked about him for some cottage where he could apply for breakfast. But no buildings of any kind were in sight. However he soon found some trees laden with delicious fruit, and having appeased his hunger, felt his strength so renovated that he again set out in pursuit of his flock, which now looked like a mere speck in the horizon.

Up hill and down dale did Gilbert go the livelong day, till the sun was beginning to set, and then just as he thought he had come up with the stray sheep, they seemed to roll away and become clouds, that were drunk up by the parting rays of the glorious sun. He was now at a loss what to do, and half ashamed to return to the castle and own to the lady that he had lost, not merely two or three sheep, but the whole flock. But while he was considering how to put the best face on the matter, he found himself right in front of the castle, which he had deemed to be at a great distance, and there still sat the lady, singing most exquisitely, and

holding a goblet of wine in her hand. As soon as Gilbert drew near: "Drink," said she, "for you must need refreshment after your day's work."

"Alas!" said he, "I have lost the sheep."

"Did I not tell you the fiddle would always bring them back?" rejoined she with the sweetest smile.

Then, as she handed him the goblet, she took the ivory fiddle from him, and drawing the bow across the strings, brought out such thrilling sounds, that Gilbert listened in amazement, wondering why he had been unable to elicit any such tones from the instrument when it seemed so simple to accomplish. In a moment he saw the surrounding heights covered with sheep or mist, he could not tell which, for the wine that had only just moistened his lips, seemed already to have confused his brain, and altered all the features of the landscape. By the time he had drained the goblet, Gilbert felt elated and delighted to an extraordinary degree, while at the same time be lost, as it were, the consciousness of his own identity. All he could remember was, that the lady bid him go and rest in the castle, and that he went up the hill, and, as he thought, entered the building, when sinking down on a soft couch he was quickly lulled to sleep by the snatches of the enchantress's song, the breeze wafted from below, and lapped in the pleasing visions of dreamland.

On waking next morning, he found himself lying on the grass near the castle, with the ivory fiddle beside him, and saw the flocks grazing quietly around, as if they had never ceased browsing all night. He rose up refreshed and invigorated, and when the lady came forth from the castle and again plied him with a draught from the goblet, he felt ready to go forth and lead the sheep to fresh pastures.

"Mind you do not lose any of them, and don't forget the fiddle will call any stragglers back to you," said the lady with a parting smile and wave of her hand.

Gilbert thought nothing could be easier, having only an indistinct remembrance of yesterday's disasters, and longing more than ever to do everything in his power to please the lady of the castle. But in spite of his good-will, the sheep strayed away as before, and he spent a toilsome day in vainly running after them, and fiddling away to no purpose. As before they seemed to merge into mist at the close of the day, and it was with a heavy heart he presented himself at the foot of the hill where the lady was awaiting him. Again she gave him a draught of the delicious wine, and again took the fiddle and drew the bow across the strings, when the flock began to return as before, but she looked very grave as she said: "Some of them are lost—you must seek them to-morrow. Go now and rest in the castle."

Then Gilbert, whose wits were in a still more confused state than the first time he quaffed that richly flavoured wine, went up the hill and fell asleep as before, and slept soundly till morning, when again the lady brought him a bumper, bidding him be sure and bring back all the sheep, or he would fall under her displeasure, while on the other hand, if none were found missing, she would not only give him his evening's draught, but a kiss into the bargain. On hearing this, Gilbert thought no exertions would be too great for such a reward, and he set off in high spirits; but he had not gone a hundred yards before the flock dispersed three different ways, and let him fiddle as he would, he found it impossible to gather them together again. Nevertheless, he followed one of the three groups, and in the heat of the chase, was led into a wild district amongst rocks and cascades, with overhanging trees, where the sheep seemed to turn quite wild, and subdividing into yet smaller bands, some were seen scaling the steep crags and looking down from dizzy heights, while others dashed into the water and swam across the mountain streams. Gilbert ran about almost like one possessed, vainly striving to collect the scattered fragments of the flock entrusted to his care, and in despair at the thought of the sorry figure he should cut on

returning to give an account of his day's work to the lady, and sorely troubled at the prospect of losing the promised kiss which he would not have exchanged for a kingdom.

At length, after having scaled one of the highest crags, where he made sure of catching a sheep, which seemed just as he tried to seize it to merge into the spray of the waterfall that leaped down a kind of natural staircase of rocks, he felt so exhausted that he lay down on a knoll in the fissures of the rock, exclaiming: "Surely I must be bewitched!"

A loud laugh reverberated from the rocks below, and Gilbert slightly raised his head to see whence it proceeded. Seeing no one, he concluded it must be the cry of some strange bird, caught up by the echo, and then to drive away a kind of grisly feeling of terror that began to creep upon him, he took up his fiddle as he lay stretched on the grass, and fell to scraping away without the slightest regard to time or tune, more as if he were sawing a piece of wood, than playing on a musical instrument. He then became aware of a very curious thing, which was that the sheep all returned as he drew the bow backwards, tho' they were off again the moment he drew it forwards. This convinced him he had not attended to the manner in which the lady drew the bow, and accounted for his losing the sheep every evening. "Now," thought he, "I am sure of obtaining the kiss and the cup of wine, and I need take no further trouble about the flock."

Bye and bye what he had taken for the gnarled and knotted branches of a tree, at a short distance from the spot where he was lounging, gradually assumed a human shape, and he saw the old Scotch shepherd advancing towards him.

"So you have found it out at last!" said he with a merry twinkle in his eye, "and what are you going to do next?"

"Do?" echoed Gilbert, "why I shall roam about all day, and bring the sheep home every evening without a bit of trouble; and then the lady will be pleased with me, and who knows, as there seems to be no other young

men hereabouts, but what she may make me the lord of her fine castle."

The Scotchman laughed loud and long, and it was not till Gilbert had nearly lost his temper that he could be induced to explain the cause of his mirth, and then he said: "Why, man, you have gone clean mad, and no wonder, as this fine lady of yours has been drugging you with Elfin wine to make a fool of you. If you don't mind she'll keep you here like a horse in a mill all the days of your life, running after clouds you mistake for sheep."

Gilbert winced at this, and did not half like to be told he was a day-dreamer. He maintained he saw the flocks all round him, while Sandy explained that morning mists were to be seen on the tops of all mountains, then become dispersed during the day, till they gather once more at the approach of night, and that mists also hover over waterfalls —and this was the whole history of Gilbert's flock. He had been served the same way himself the first time he came to Elf-land, only not being quite so soft-pated as his new acquaintance he had found out the tricks that were played upon travellers; and he now asked Gilbert whether he should help to extricate him from running after clouds, or whether he was determined to make a fool of himself for the rest of his life? Gilbert answered gravely that he was set upon wooing the beautiful lady, and becoming the lord of the castle. "The castle is about as solid as those built by youngsters with playing cards, and as to this beautiful lady of yours, she is only an Elle-maid," said the Scotchman contemptuously.

"Suppose she is?—What then?" returned Gilbert philosophically. For the fact was he did not exactly know what sort of a creature that might be, never having travelled so far before. "Come, I must take pity on you, and save you in spite of yourself,"—said Sandy. "Here is some wax with which you must stop up your ears to-night, when you return to the lady, that you may not hear that singing of hers which bewitches your sober senses, and then if you draw the bow lengthways up and down the

middle string of the fiddle, in this fashion (taking up the fiddle and showing him) as you approach her, and refuse both the wine and the kiss, you will see what an Elle-maid really is."

He then laid the ivory fiddle down again, and by the time Gilbert had raised himself on one elbow to take it back, the shepherd was clean out of sight. Gilbert thought this very strange, and he began scraping once more on the fiddle to see if the branches of the tree would again sprout into his singular acquaintance, but they did not stir any more. Though not believing in the full truth of Sandy's sneers about the castle and the lady, Gilbert thought he would just follow his advice out of curiosity, to see what it might bring to light, and perceiving it was now time to retrace his steps, he descended from the rocks, and following the course of the stream, returned to his night quarters by a different road to any he had taken before. He now stopped his ears with the wax Sandy had given him, and it was well he did, as he had just come within hearing of the Elle-maid's enchanting strains. He then drew the bow rapidly across the strings in a backward direction, when all the sheep instantly appeared on the surrounding heights, and next drew it lengthways up and down the middle string as the Scotchman had shewn him how to do. He had now come upon the rear of the stately castle he longed to call his own, when he perceived it had neither a court-yard nor back-premises of any sort, and consisted solely of a front wall with windows, but no rooms behind, like a ruin, though he had hitherto entertained the notion that he had slept beneath its roof, and on soft cushions too, which he now plainly perceived could only have been clouds like his fabulous flock. Eager to pursue his discoveries still further, he went on fiddling as he came down the hillock towards the lady, when what was not his horror and surprise on perceiving that the face he had so much admired was hollow as a mask behind!

On hearing him playing in so unusual a manner, the lady turned round her head sharply, exhibiting her bewitching countenance to his gaze, and singing more sweetly than ever, as she offered him a goblet of wine. It was fortunate he could not hear her sing, or that voice would have

melted all his resolutions, instead of which, he boldly dashed down the proffered cup, and on her offering to give him a kiss, he dealt her a box on the ear, which upset her like a card figure, when he became so horrified at the spectral unreality of the objects about him, that he ran off as fast as his legs would carry him, fiddling like mad as he went along. In his frantic flight he passed by streams of water that seemed to be nothing but tinfoil, and rocks that looked as if they were made of pasteboard, and hollow like the Elle-maid's face, nor did he stop to take breath till after all the objects in the landscape had resumed their natural consistence, and clouds were clouds, and sheep real woolly sheep, which shewed him to be beyond the limits of Elf-land.

Meantime evening had waned into night, and the moon was beginning to rise, when Gilbert flung himself down on a bank to rest after his headlong scamper. The cool air blew refreshingly over his fevered brow, and he felt like one restored to reason after a fit of madness, or awaking after a strange uneasy dream. "Now," thought he, "I need only gather some ragwort and go home." And he looked all about for some, but as it happened to be very rare in that neighbourhood, he walked on a good way, peering about in the moonlight before he could find any. When at last he hit upon the wished for herb, great was his joy, and he plucked it as triumphantly as if he held in his hand the bridle of the finest steed mortal ever looked upon, crying out: "Up! Horsie!" in a loud voice. But no horsie answered to the appeal, and the ragwort remained the simple herb it was before. Again and again he called out the magic formula in tones now commanding and now entreating, and lastly quite passionately, only there was no spur nor whip that could move the ragwort to serve as his horse. He now perceived old Sandy had tricked him after all, and sent him to Elf-land without giving him the means of coming back. So there was nothing for it but to trudge all the way back on foot,—and a long way it was I can tell you! It is true Gilbert retained a hope that kept up his spirits a good while, that he should still find some of the right sort of ragwort, and accordingly in each new district he came to, he industriously gathered some specimens to try the experiment, but

with no better success. And after each fresh disappointment, he could not help saying to himself: "I wish I had given Sandy a lift, and then I should never have got into this scrape." The worst of it was that Gilbert had scarcely any money about him, and when that little was spent, he was at his wit's end to know how to pay his way home. Luckily he still had the fiddle, and though he could not play a single tune, its tones were so sweet that people liked to hear them, and village children enjoyed having a scrape upon it, so that he always managed to get a night's lodging and a supper as he journeyed along, and even to get carried across the sea, for the sailors said it was as good as listening to a mermaid.

When at last he reached home, he hung up the fiddle in his cottage, but that same night it cracked right through with a loud moan, and fell in shivers on the floor. Gilbert tried to mend it, but he never could manage to restore it to its right shape again. It was like a puzzle that baffles a child's attempts to put it together. However, he made a sort of box of it, something like an Eolian harp, across which he stretched the golden strings, and whenever the wind blew from Elf-land they would play sweet mournful tunes, as the instrument lay on the window-sill.

For years Gilbert had a hankering to return to Elf-land and see a little more of life amongst the Elle-maids and men, if there were any, but he could never obtain a conveyance, and he knew he should not be able to find the way on foot. And though as long as he lived he could not resist pulling up some ragwort at every full moon, just to see if it possessed the wished for quality, and muttering, "Up! Horsie!" certain it is he never again obtained a horse out of the same stables, wherever they happen to be situated.

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