GOOD STORIES FOR CHILDREN

By Walt McDougall

How the Good Fairy Sandeline Helped Poor Little Amanda, the Hogans' Nursemaid

"THE BABY SEEMED TO GROW MORE SPITEFUL"

WHAT I am going to tell you about happened at the seashore.

There was a girl named Amanda Stuyvesant, who was an orphan, having neither father nor mother, and who had been taken from the poorhouse when only 6 years old by Mr. Adolphus Hogan. She helped about the house, but mostly took care of the Hogan baby whenever a new one came. There had been four of them at one time. The mother of them died and went to heaven, leaving one in Amanda's charge. Amanda thought this one, which was called Ruth Evangeline Edith, was the very worst one of all. She squalled from daylight until dark, and woke up nights at times to give extra performances. Indeed, poor Amanda often wished that the baby's mother had taken her to heaven along with her, for Amanda, who was now 10 years old, had really no time at all to do anything but attend to Ruth.

One morning early in the summer they were all sitting at the breakfast table, all but Amanda, who was not allowed to eat at the same table with the Hogan family because she came from the poorhouse, and Mr. Hogan told them he was going to take them all to the seashore for a month.

"That will be fine!" cried young Egbert Hogan. "We will have fun on the sand. I am going fishing every day!"

"The Gallaghers are going to the shore this summer," said Hermione Hogan, "but I don't think the children will enjoy themselves at all."

"Why not?" inquired her father.

"Because," she replied, "they now have a stepmother."

"That's all nonsense about stepmothers," exclaimed her father. "You children have been reading Grimm's fairy stories about bad stepmothers and have got a wrong idea. There are many lovely stepmothers in the world and many happy children who are cared for by them as if they belonged to them."

"All the same," interrupted Egbert, "I know a boy who has one, and he never has his buttons sewed on nor his tears mended, and when he cuts his finger she doesn't tie a rag on nor nothin', and he never gets half as much to eat as her children do."

The Beach Fairy

"All tommy-rot!" said his father, as he rose from the table.

"I'll bet he's just thinking about getting a nasty, mean, new stepmother for us now!" cried Hermione. "He was so red in the face."

"Well, I don't know. I saw him talking to a lady down by the market last Saturday," said Pauline. "That looked sorter suspicions."

"I'll run away from home if he does," asserted Egbert, decidedly. "I'll go and be a pirate or go to the Philippines."

"I'll never be nice to her at all," echoed Pauline.

Then the baby, as if contributing her opinion, began to cry and kick her toes against the table, so Amanda had to come in and remove her. They all went to the seashore the next week. Poor little Amanda had her hands full taking care of the baby, the baggage and the clothing, which the children forgot and left on the seats of the cars. But when they were settled at the shore, and they could wander from morning until night along the broad, white sands or wade in the salty, flashing waves that rolled solemnly up the slant of the hard beach, she thought that she was about to enjoy life. The baby, however, seemed to grow more spiteful and disagreeable than before. When she was not crying outright in her sharp, shrill voice she was wriggling as if in torture, and she kept poor Amanda hunting constantly for pins that she never found, but which she imagined were sticking into Ruth. Instead of playing in the warm, white sand like other babies, Ruth snarled and dug her little red toes savagely into it as if spurning what all children so dearly love.

If she went to sleep, which she did sometimes quite by accident, and Amanda, thinking she could enjoy it all for a brief moment, stole away a step to play with some other children, who didn't know that she came from the poorhouse, that nasty baby would instantly wake up and yell like an Indian. She kept breaking out in red rashes, so that Mr. Hogan declared that Amanda had carelessly left her to broil in the hot sun, or she sneezed all night and kept them all awake, and he said Amanda had allowed her to take cold by leaving her in the surf. Oh, I tell you Amanda often wished that she had stayed in the poorhouse, dreadful as that is, for her life with the Hogans was very unhappy, indeed.

Sometimes the other children played near where she kept the baby, but, as a rule, they remained as far away from both of them as possible, for none of them liked the baby at all. I can't blame them, for Ruth certainly was the very meanest infant that was ever handed out by any doctor to a family.

One lovely day, when the sky was filled with masses of white wool sailing slowly out to sea, and the water was like bluing itself, Amanda sat with Ruth on the beach. Egbert had dug a deep, wide hole and had gone away to play at something else with other boys. Amanda looked down into the yawning cavity and thought how much it looked like a grave dug there for some child. She sighed, and a wish arose in her poor tired brain to just crawl into the hole and bury herself. I wonder that she never thought of burying Ruth, but it never occurred to her to do that. She was just tired of being a slave in the selfish Hogan family and wished to end it all.

Ruth happened to be sound asleep for a wonder and Amanda crawled into the hole. She found at once that it was too small for her and she began to dig out the soft sand with her hands, meanwhile keeping a sharp eye on baby.

She had hollowed out the hole to a much greater depth and was about to lie down in it and measure her grave, when her hand touched something soft and yielding beneath the sand at the bottom. It did not feel cold and clammy as things you find in the sand generally do, but it was warm and nice to the touch.

Amanda was not frightened, and dug farther, when, to her amazement she came upon a queer thing embedded in the sand several feet below the surface, which was unlike anything she had ever seen or read about. She lifted it out and examined it carefully. It was about as large as a big doll, but soft and more like a gray jelly than anything else. It had no real shape, but was just flabby and formless, like a large omelette. She laid it on the warm, dry sand and gazed at it in wonder. As she watched it she saw that it moved. This startled her, for she thought it might be some kind of a jelly fish, and they sting people, you know. As she watched, a head formed on it, and then arms and legs, and it turned white, and then a rosy pink all over. Then she saw that it was changing into the most beautiful little being in all the world, for lovely, fair hair came upon its head, its eyes, blue as violets, opened, and a rosy mouth disclosed pearly teeth as it smiled up at her. In a few minutes the beautiful creature sat up, and then it shook out a pair of gauzy, opal-tinted wings that flashed in the bright sunlight like gems.

"It's a fairy!" gasped Amanda in delighted wonder.

"Yes; I am Sandeline, the Fairy of the Beach, and I've been buried there for several hundred years. I'd be buried yet had you not kindly dug me out. It was good of you, my dear girl."

"I—I was digging my grave," faltered Amanda, for she was so truthful that she wouldn't allow the fairy to think that she had purposely excavated her.

"Why did you do that?" asked Sandeline; "You are too young for a grave."

"Oh, I am tired of watching this baby!" cried the girl. "I never have a moment to read or play; every instant has to be given to Ruth."

"That's too bad," said the fairy, and she walked to the sleeping Ruth and looked at her.

"This is a changeling," she said, after a moment's scrutiny.

"What is a changeling?" asked Amanda.

"The elves have taken away the real baby at some time and substituted one of their own. I can always tell them, almost at a glance."

"I shouldn't wonder if you were right," said Amanda, "for she has never been like a real baby at all. What shall I do?"

"You can do nothing, but because you have brought me back to life I will make them take her back and return the real Ruth to-night. You will find in the morning that a new baby is in the house, and one, I am sure, who will be far less trouble to you, for the babies that the elves take are always the very nicest indeed. But I want to do much more for you than that. I want you to tell me what you most wish for and you shall have it. But remember that what you wish for down here on the beach will only last as long as the tide lasts. For instance, if you make a wish when it's high tide, all that you get will disappear as soon as the tide is low. What you wish for away from the beach will remain with you. Now, what do you desire first?"

Amanda laughed joyfully. "I never thought about daring to wish for anything, for the poorhouse girl never got anything anyhow. I scarcely know that I want anything, only to have baby less of a care."

"Oh, that's all attended to already," said Sandeline, smiling. "You must need lots of things."

"Oh, yes," cried Amanda. "I need nice new clothes and shoes and a parasol. Why, dear me, I have them already."

Sure enough she was all dressed in a delicate blue gown, with a blue hat and parasol to match, and there was not a lovelier little girl on the beach.

"Dear me! It's really too fine for a nurse girl," she said, as she felt of her dress.

"Yes," said Sandeline, "I think you ought to have a carriage and ponies to go with your fine attire."

"That would be nice. I wish I had them," said Amanda, without really thinking of the result, but instantly there stood beside them such a sweet little blue phaeton, with two of the dearest little white ponies with tails that swept the sand.

"Get in and we will take a drive," said Sandeline. They drove grandly along the beach and all the thousands of people stared at them and marveled, for both looked very lovely. The baby remained sound asleep all the time as though under some spell. By and by they passed Hermione and Pauline, both of whom stared hard and then started in surprise at the sight of nurse-girl Amanda in such a fine phaeton. Then she saw Egbert, who also stared with all his might at her, for at first he didn't recognize in the beautiful girl in the carriage their household slave Amanda.

"I do wish that I had some nice candies to offer them, for I know they'll be mad and tell Mr. Hogan, and how can I explain that I wished all this."

"There are your candies," said the fairy, and she pointed to a five-pound box filled with more delicious things than poor Amanda had ever even seen, to say nothing of tasting. She stopped the ponies and held up the box, which Pauline saw and ran to get at once.

"Will you have some candy?" asked Amanda.

"Of course I will," answered Pauline, and then she ran off with the box, followed by her sister and brother.

"How mean of her!" exclaimed Amanda. "Why, I never even had a taste of one of the candies!"

"Well, wish for some more," said Sandeline, laughing. "You can fill the carriage if you wish."

"Won't it make any difference to you?" asked Amanda.

"No, indeed, and you may as well ask for some nice flowers, also. All girls love them so."

"I've never had any flowers. I wish the carriage were filled with them!" cried Amanda, and instantly she was almost buried in magnificent roses and other flowers, so that she could scarcely see to drive the ponies. Then, as they went along, they saw Mr. Hogan approaching in his white flannel suit. His eyes opened wide when he saw them, for he did not recognize Amanda, having hardly ever looked at her, but he stared at the fairy, and when Amanda turned to her to see what she would do, as he took off his hat, she was amazed to find that the little fairy had turned into a most magnificent woman, dressed just like Amanda, and she was smiling at Mr. Hogan in a way that made his heart go pit-a-pat. I don't think Mr. Hogan had ever seen a fairy before, for he did stare awfully, and she blushed as they drove past. He didn't take his eyes off her until they had driven away out of sight down the beach.

"It's truly wonderful how nicely Ruth is sleeping," said Amanda after a while.

"Why, you wished that she would, don't you remember?" said the fairy. "Now let us drive into the country."

A Wonderful Journey

They went along the dusty road, and the ponies didn't seem to like it.

"Wouldn't it be lovely to go like this all over the world!" cried Amanda. "I wish all these roads were the ones I've read about in Italy and Greece, and South America and New Jersey," she added, for she was not thinking of her wish coming true, only indulging in fancy. The fairy smiled to see Amanda's surprise when the scenery changed, and all along the road there grew tall palms as high as the towers of the beautiful marble palaces that lined the road, and wonderful fruits grew everywhere, hanging over the walls in great profusion, while brilliantly-clad and strange people walked along the shaded paths everywhere. There was the sea, but it was bluer than she had ever seen it, while purple mountains, topped with snow, reached far up into the sky.

"This is Italy," said Sandeline as they drove on, "and now we are coming to Switzerland. See, there are the Alps!"

Up the carriage went and along narrow roadways that wound among snowy peaks and bordered the edges of tremendous precipices until they came to sunny France, all in a few minutes, and so they passed through all Europe, and then, in some mysterious manner, jumped clear across the ocean again to South America, and then to Australia.

Everywhere Amanda saw the most wonderful things, all of which remained in her mind just as well as if she had lingered for many weeks in each of the countries they visited, and all the time the fairy told her the tales about each land they passed through. Then she said rather suddenly: "It's almost night. We must get home, or the carriage and ponies will disappear and leave us here, for, you know, it will be low tide at 7 o'clock."

"Dear me! I had forgotten all about that!" cried Amanda, and the next minute found herself standing at the door of the Hogan cottage. The ponies and phaeton were just vanishing into thin mist, and Sandeline stood smiling beside her.

"Good-bye, until to-morrow," she said, and she, too, disappeared. Then Ruth began to bellow as if a whole paper of pins were sticking into her, and Amanda ran into the house.

All the Hogan children were eager to know who the lovely lady was, and it was a long time before Amanda told them that she was a fairy.

"Huh!" said Egbert. "What rot! Who believes in such things? She's one o' those charity women who do things for poorhouse kids 'cause she's sorry for 'em. I don't believe a word of your story."

But when Mr. Hogan heard the tale he said right away that he believed she was a fairy all right, and he wanted to know when Amanda was going to see her again.

The next morning, when Amanda woke Ruth up from her sleep she remembered with a start that the baby hadn't cried once during the night, and now on waking she smiled and looked at Amanda as if she loved her dearly. Amanda examined her closely, and was sure that her eyes were different in color as well as in expression. She was the dearest little thing imaginable now, all smiles and coolings every hour. Amanda could scarcely believe her eyes and ears. Before they went to the beach as usual that morning they were all talking about the fairy, for all the girls believed in her after their father had expressed an opinion. Suddenly Hermione said: "What's the matter with baby? She hasn't blubbered once this morning. And see how soft and blue her eyes are, too!"

She purred into Ruth's face and added. "Nice blue eyes! What kind of eyes baby dot?"

And Ruth replied, "Goo Goo," and they all laughed and said she certainly had Goo-goo eyes now. Then Amanda told them about what the Fairy had said about Ruth being a changeling, and all but Egbert agreed that Sandeline must have compelled the wicked elves to exchange the baby. Egbert was positively the most difficult boy to convince that I ever saw.

Then they went to the beach, but they did not see the fairy, although they all watched for her.

"Rats!" said Egbert vulgarly; "She's all humbug. She won't come. It's a fairy story of 'Mandy's, that's all."

"I am not in the habit of telling fairy stories," said Amanda, with dignity and warmth, for she was just then thinking over her lovely visit to all the foreign lands yesterday.

"You do so," he answered. "You told us once about the awful and fierce Parallelapipedon that gets boys that slide down bannisters, and there ain't no such beast. My teacher told me so. Now."

"I wish the Parallelapipedon would come right now and chase you down this beach this very minute!" cried Amanda. She had forgotten all about the result of wishing, but she instantly remembered it as an awful thing came roaring up out of the surf and started for Egbert, with its immense red mouth so wide open that she could see way down to its stomach. Egbert howled in terror and ran, with the dreadful animal monster after him, chasing him as far as they could see, while the people fled from the beach, crying "Sea serpent! sea serpent!" with all their might and main, so that all the reporters from the hotels came hurrying with cameras to get a shot at him.

"THE FAIRY APPEARED WITH MR. HOGAN"

"AN AWFUL THING CAME ROARING UP OUT OF THE SURF"

Amanda was too alarmed to think of wishing the monster back in the water again for several minutes, and when she did, she instantly wished, but they didn't see Smarty Egbert again all day nor, in fact, his father either, for he had been up very late the night before, and when he saw the monster it scared him so that he went at once to the drug store and took ammonia and the pledge, too.

Then the fairy Sandeline appeared, smiling, for I guess she wouldn't have allowed the Parallelapipedon to get Egbert, anyway. She said:

"Good morning. I see that you've begun to wish already."

"Oh, I'm so sorry. I didn't mean, really, to wish that thing at all," cried Amanda.

"Never mind. It will teach the boy a lesson. You wished the monster away so quick that no harm is done. In fact, I imagine many thousands of people will be coming here to see the sea serpent after this. What are you going to wish for to-day?"

Hermione and Pauline and Gladys, another sister whom I have not before mentioned, stood looking anxiously at Amanda, wondering what she would wish for [illegible] They were much disgusted to hear her reply:

"[illegible] all of the finest things, with fountains and pianos and organs and brass bands, ice cream soda fountains, aquariums, pictures, hammocks and everything, right here by the shore."

Sandeline smiled and pouted. They all looked, and there stood the most beautiful mansion, a real palace, before them. Then Amanda took the fairy by the hand and led her up the marble steps, on each side of which fountains sent tall lances of glittering water almost roof-high, and she said:

"Now, dear fairy, I wish that all the poor children could be carried here from all the poorhouses in the country, and from all the miserable homes and have all the fun they wanted and all they could eat."

It was wonderful how quickly the fairy could do things, for before they could get their breaths all the halls and rooms of the immense palace were filled with children whooping and laughing and making more noise than a boiler factory. They overflowed into the surf and, astonishing as it may seem, all were provided with bathing suits or other clothes as they desired, and with any toy or anything else they wanted. You may be sure it made Amanda's heart leap with joy when she saw how happy her wish had made them all, as she thought of the fun they'd have until the tide turned.

"They'll all think they dreamed it," said Pauline after awhile.

"I suppose they will," said Amanda. "I wish I could stay here always."

"That's the only wish you've made that I can not grant," said the fairy, "and I am sorry, too, for this is a sweet thing that you have done. Now what shall we do while they enjoy it all?"

"Oh, now you must wish for something for all of us," cried Pauline.

You are the girl who ran off with all the candy yesterday, are you not?" asked the fairy.

"Yes," replied Pauline, somewhat shamefaced, "but I got very little of it, for somehow at dark it all disappeared as if by magic."

Amanda, who was very kind-hearted, fearing that the fairy was about to give Pauline the scolding she so richly deserved, said hastily:

"I wish you would take us all to the caverns under the waves. I've always wanted to see what is there."

Instantly a great car like a shell of mother-of-pearl came to the water's edge, drawn by eight dolphins, and the fairy asked them all to enter the car. They did so and shot out to sea with the speed of an arrow. After a few minutes they saw a great dark hole in the water and into it the dolphins plunged. All was dark for an instant, and then they saw about them marvelous purple and gold fish darting about wildly, tremendous crabs crawling over green and mossy rocks, sea urchins playing tag, sea cows grazing on the submarine grass, silvery eels and blue swordfish at play, and all the strange creatures that inhabit the dark depths of ocean, while the strong sunlight came down to them mellowed and softened by the water as though it came through thick green glass.

Then they entered the caverns of the mermaids and saw the great pearl oysters at work making the pearls, some of them as big as marbles, while the star fish modeled stars out of sea-ooze and the fairy gathered bouquets of sea-anemones and gave them to Amanda.

It was so cool and so beautiful down there that Amanda wished to stay all the afternoon, but they went on through the tall sea weed forests waving softly in the gentle current until they came to the place where the flying fishes build their nests and hatch out their young.

Thousands of little flying fish peeped out at them over the edges of their nests, which were made of small, pretty shells, while the mother fish darted wildly about in great alarm. Big green lobsters came out of dark crevices and solemnly waved immense claws at them as they passed. They came to the sunken wreck of an ancient ship, all covered with seaweed, but still with its masts standing and its rigging all perfect, looking just as if it had been formed by a florist out of green moss. Then they called upon a mermaid family and had some luncheon, and by that time the fairy told them they must return. The children never forgot the wonders of that trip, for not many people ever see the bottom of the ocean, and few know what is down there.

Married to Sandeline

When they got home, Mr. Hogan inquired if they had seen the fairy again and was very much disappointed that he had missed her, and much mortified as well to learn that it was only the Parallelapipedon which had so alarmed them. He said that he would go with them next day, and asked Amanda to introduce him to the fairy.

Next day it rained and they all sat on the porch until afternoon, all but Mr. Hogan, who drove away with another man, and Egbert, who did not mind rain. By-and-by Egbert returned in some excitement to say that he had seen papa walking with the fairy. The announcement startled Amanda, who somehow felt as if Sandeline were her own personal property, but when she reflected what a pushing, energetic man Mr. Hogan was, she realized that it wouldn't take him a minute to get acquainted with a dozen fairies. She wished silently that she had a lovely house, all her own, and just as grand as the beach palace she had wished for yesterday, with stables for her little ponies of the day before that, and so much of everything that she would never have to be a nurse girl any longer, but spend all of her time reading and traveling about.

Just then Sandeline came to the porch steps and said:

"Dear Amanda, I am glad you remembered to make your wish away from the beach, for now you can keep what you wish for. There is your new house yonder and waiting for you to take possession."

They all ran to the grand new house, the finest ever seen at the shore, filled with everything a child could desire. Amanda could not find words to thank Sandeline for the gift, but the fairy laughed and said she deserved it all. The other children were quite jealous.

"I wish you would do something for them," said Amanda. The fairy replied: "I will give you one wish if you make up your minds what it shall be in five minutes."

All of the Hogan children began at once to dispute as to what the wish should be and who would make it, and finally the fairy said: "The time is almost up."

"We can never agree!" cried Pauline, "for we are too selfish, all of us. I wish you would fix it so that our papa can never marry any woman. There!"

"Very well," said Sandeline, smiling. "I have so fixed it. He can marry no woman."

"We are dreadfully afraid of having a stepmother," explained Hermione, "but if we had to have one, I think I would rather have a fairy for a stepmother."

"That would be grand!" cried Gladys. "We could make wishes all day long!"

"I will consider it," said Sandeline, with a lovely smile, and then she went away, and they didn't see her for more than a week. Meanwhile, they all spent their time in Amanda's grand palace, playing with the wonderful toys and musical instruments, reading the books and looking at the pictures, so that the days whizzed by like automobiles.

Then one day the fairy appeared with Mr. Hogan, both of them looking guilty, and he announced that they had been married that morning.

Pauline and Hermione cried out together:

"But you promised to fix it so that he couldn't ever marry any woman."

"And she has kept her promise," said their father, "for she is not a woman, you see. I have married a fairy."

So that was the end of it. All the children were satisfied, but Amanda went to live in her new house and she was now so fond of sweet baby Ruth that they gave the baby to her to keep. Strange to say, however, the minute Sandeline married Mr. Hogan she lost all of her fairy power and couldn't grant a wish, except just ordinary ones such as you and I could do. So it was mighty fortunate that Amanda made her wish in time, was it not? Now she has more things than all the Hogans put together, and nobody dares to say a word about "poorhouse kids," let me tell you.

WALT McDOUGALL

"IT'S A FAIRY!" GASPED AMANDA IN WONDER