



Australian Nature Story Collection

for children

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1. THE FLOWER FAIRIES

by Amy Mack

It was a hot sunny day in October. Early in the morning Dickie's sisters had sent him out into the bush to get flowers to decorate the house; but, though he had been out a long while, and walked a long way, he had only gathered a few. For he had spent his time looking for flannel flowers, and they were very scarce.

The few flowers he had in his hand looked as flowers generally do when they have been picked by little boys. Some of them had scarcely any stalk at all, and most of them had been pulled up by the roots; so altogether it was not a very pretty bunch.

Dickie could see this for himself, and he also knew that his sisters would be very disappointed if he did not take home anything better.

"Someone must have pulled all the flannel flowers," he grumbled to himself as he walked along. This was quite true, but he did not stop to think that it was because other people had pulled the flowers up by the roots, just as he himself had done, that there were no flannel flowers left. So he went on looking all round and searching under ferns and shrubs for the flowers he wanted.

After a time he came to a little gully, where beneath the tall gums, clumps of white flannel flowers waved amongst the grey rocks.

"Oh, what beauties!" Dickie exclaimed as he saw them, and he at once began to pick them as fast as he could, tearing them up roots and all in his hurry. At last he had gathered every single one of the pretty flowers, and then he sat down to arrange them in his bunch.

It was cool and quiet in the shade, and he was very tired, so he thought he would just lie down on the ferns for a while before he set out for home. He lay flat on his back, gazing up at the blue sky through the trees. The gently waving boughs of the wattles and the gum-trees above his head made him feel drowsy, and he was just dozing off to sleep when suddenly he was aroused by the sound of someone crying very softly.

He sat up quickly and looked round. There, sitting beside his bunch of flowers was the daintiest, prettiest little fairy a boy had ever seen. She wore a white frock edged with green, and on her yellow hair was a little green cap. In her hands she held one of the flannel flowers from Dickie's bunch. and she was weeping bitterly.

Dickie sat and stared at her. He had often read about fairies, but had never seen a real live one before. He had always thought they were happy joyful beings, and was surprised to see this one crying like an ordinary little girl.

The fairy did not see him, but kept on weeping and weeping, and every now and then she kissed the flowers, and said softly, "Poor things, poor things!"

Now, Dickie was really a nice little boy, and he did not like to see girls crying, so at last he said, "What's the matter, little fairy? Don't cry."

The fairy looked up quickly, and Dickie said again—

"Who are you? What's the matter. What are you crying for?"

"I am the fairy of the flannel flowers, and I am grieving for these poor flowers," said the fairy sadly.

"Why, what's wrong with them?" asked Dickie in surprise. "They're beauties."

"Yes, they were very beautiful, but now they're all dead. Some cruel being has pulled them out by the roots, and killed them."

At this Dickie looked a little bit ashamed, though he did think it silly to make so much fuss over a few flowers. The fairy saw the look, and said in a sharp voice, "Was it you who picked them?"

"Yes," said Dickie. Then as the fairy looked very angry, he added quickly, "they are for my sister to decorate with. I must take them home now."

"No," answered the fairy. "You must come with me."

"I can't," said Dickie, "I must go home."

"You must come with me," repeated the fairy. "I won't!" cried Dickie, and he snatched up his flowers and began to run.

"Stop him," cried the fairy in a loud voice, and in an instant Dickie felt his feet caught fast by the bracken. He fell flat on his face, while the ferns put out dozens of arms and held him so fast, that he could not move.

"Now carry him to the Queen," said the fairy, and as soon as she spoke, the wattle tree above him stretched down a long arm, and picked him up into the air. For a second the wattle held him, then tossed him across to the next tree; then he was tossed to the next and the next, till he was quite out of breath. At last a tree fern caught him and held him tight. Then, very gently, so as not to hurt the young fronds, the tree fern rolled him down into the heart of his leaves. It seemed to Dick that, as he rolled, he grew smaller and smaller, until at last, when he reached the bottom, he was only as big as the fairy.

It was just as well he had grown small, for if he had stayed big there would have been no room for him, because the heart of the tree fern was crowded with fairies. As Dick rolled in, they all looked at him, and he heard a voice say, "Here he is."

It was the fairy of the flannel flowers who had spoken. She was seated on a curled-up fern-frond, beside another larger fairy who was dressed in deep red with a crown on her head, which looked to Dick like a waratah. All round her were seated other fairies in different coloured dresses. Some wore frilly gowns of white velvet, and others were dressed in yellow satin, while some wore soft pink silk, or blue gauze, and many other kinds of dresses. It seemed to Dickie that he knew them by sight, as indeed he did really, for they were the fairies of all the bush flowers, buttercups in yellow satin, boronia in pink silk, and many others that Dickie had often picked in the bush.

They sat round on the fronds of the tree fern, and as the Flannel Flower fairy spoke they all looked very hard at Dickie.

They were so small that Dick did not feel frightened of them at first, but suddenly he remembered that he also was very small now, and then he began to look round to see if he could get out. But every leaf of the tree fern was guarded by a fairy, and there was no way of getting past. So he just stayed where he was and waited.

"This is the boy who killed my flowers," said the Flannel Flower fairy to the Queen.

The Queen bent down and looked at Dick, then asked sternly—

"Why did you kill the flannel flowers?"

"I didn't kill them," said Dickie.

"O-o-oh!" said all the flower fairies together, and the white-robed fairy said, "Why, see, he still has them in his hand."

Dickie looked down, and there was his bunch of flowers still in his hand.

"I picked them for my sisters," he said, "but I did not mean to kill them."

"Then why did you pull them up by the roots?" asked the Queen.

"I did not know it would kill them," said Dickie, beginning to cry, for all the fairies looked so stern and sad, that he felt quite miserable.

"I wanted a nice bunch, and I picked them quickly, and their roots came up, but I didn't know flowers could fe-e-el," and here he began to cry just as badly as the Flannel Flower fairy had cried.

"Little boys that don't know must be taught," said the Queen. "You must learn that flowers do feel. We live to make human beings happy, and are pleased when they pick our blossoms to keep in water and brighten their rooms. But every time you pull a flower out by the roots, that flower dies, and all its children die, and no more grow from it. And if everyone pulled up the roots there would soon be no flowers left, and the world would be a very dreary place to live in."

"I do not think," the Queen went on, "that you are a wicked boy; you are just thoughtless. But you must be taught to think of other people's feelings. Now you will learn what a flower feels like when it is pulled out by the roots."

Then she turned to the fairies, and said "Teach him his lesson."

Instantly a spiky Wattle fairy flew towards him and tweaked a hair out of his head.

It hurt very much, and Dick cried out, "Stop it!" but before he could move another fairy came, and then another, and another, and each one tweaked a hair out of his head, and each hair hurt worse than the last, till he could stand no more, and he called out to the Queen, "Oh, make them stop. Please make them stop. I'll never pull another flower up by the roots. Do make them stop."

"That will do," said the Queen, "I think he has learned his lesson," and all the fairies flew back to their places.

Then the Queen turned to Dick and said kindly, "I think you will always remember now to be kind to all living things, even if they are only flowers."

"Yes, I will," promised Dickie, and he meant it.

"Now take him back," said the Queen, and the tree fern took hold of him, and began to roll him up again.

"Good-bye," he called, as he neared the top, and all the flower fairies answered, "Good-bye, goodbye," and just as he reached the edge, the Flannel Flower fairy flew after him, and pushed a big bunch of beautiful white blossoms into his hand.

"Take these," she whispered, "they will help you to remember."

He took the flowers, and the next moment was being tossed back by the tree branches, until he reached the wattle which had first lifted him up.

In a minute he was lying amongst the ferns again, with no sign of a fairy anywhere. But there was the bunch of flannel flowers to remind him of his promise to the Queen, so he knew it could not have been just a dream.