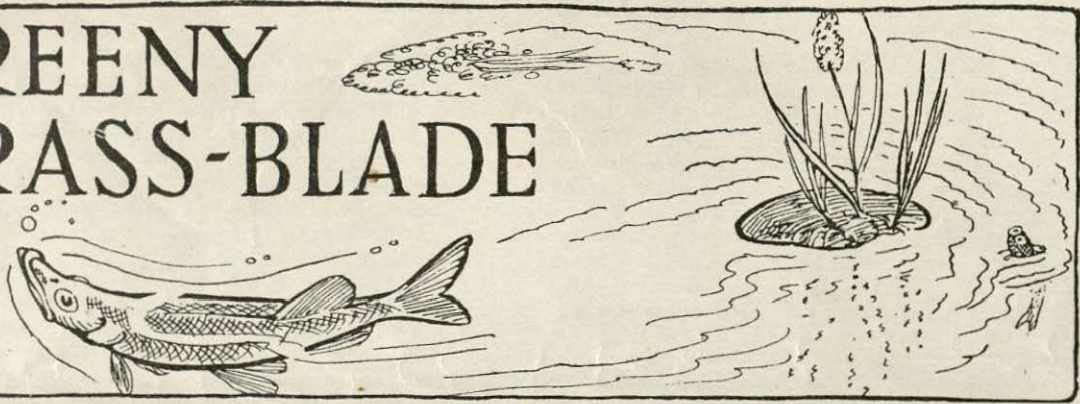


GREENY GRASS-BLADE

AND THE REST



By FRANK BAKER

DOWNHEARTED

THE little girl who had said 'Oh, Mummy! Look at that beautiful grass!' didn't stay very long. Her mother said to her, 'Come along now, Maisie, or you'll get cold standing by that water!' So Maisie had to go.

When she had gone Greeny felt very lonely, and very sad. He wished that he had somebody to care for him as that lady called 'Mummy' cared for the little girl Maisie. He wished he were back again at Greenfields with his brothers and sisters. He even thought that he would like to have Grumpy back again, although he *was* a dreadful grumbler. Greeny was downhearted. He thought that nobody wanted him.

For a day or two he wondered if Minnie Minnow would come back. He would have been pleased to welcome even Percy Pike! Then the water in the river began to get lower. Even if they had come now they would have been too far away to talk properly. They would have had to shout to each other, and it's very difficult to keep your patience if you have to shout at people instead of talking to them. But the fishes didn't even come to the top of the water to look at him, let alone to speak to him. They were there all right. Greeny could see Percy, looking like a great black submarine, lurking in his shadowed hiding-place, ready to pounce out on unsuspecting young fishes like Minnie, who were happily playing about in the gleaming water. They were all right by themselves. They didn't want *him*! Nobody wanted *him*! No, nobody! Greeny really was downhearted.

He decided that he wouldn't spend quite so much time and energy in growing, and making Stone Island look beautiful. He thought that it was all a waste of energy. Nobody noticed it! He was of no use at all! The little girl Maisie had clean slipped out of his mind.

So, instead of working himself, he started looking round and watching other people working. The more he saw, the more downhearted did he become.

First of all he looked at the bank on the right side of the river. Daisy Daisy was peeping at him over the top of the river bank. 'Oh!' said Greeny, 'if only I were a Daisy! How hard I

should work! I should be useful then! Boys and girls would want me, to make me into daisy-chains.' He sighed. 'But I'm only a Grass-Blade, and of no use at all.'

Just then, as if to prove his words, some children came scampering along the right bank. They threw themselves down on the ground and started picking daisies. One of them added Daisy to her bunch. Then they all ran off, shouting and laughing as they went. And not one of them noticed the envious little Grass-Blade on Stone Island.

Then Greeny turned to look at the left bank of the river. He saw Frances Forget-me-not, tiny and blue, but very beautiful, hiding shyly near the water's edge. 'Oh!' said Greeny, 'if only I were a Forget-me-not! Life would be worth living then. Lovers would pluck me and give me to their sweethearts as a token of their love. And I should be very precious to my mistress.' He sighed. 'But I'm only a Grass-Blade, and of no use at all.'

At that moment, as if to show him that he was quite right, two lovers came strolling slowly along the river bank, their arms entwined. Seeing the pretty little blue flower, the young man stooped down and plucked it. Then he pinned it to his sweetheart's frock.

After this Greeny thought that he wouldn't look at the banks any more. So instead he looked upwards. But even in the air there was something which made him feel more downhearted. Hanging over the water was a big tree. 'Oh!' said Greeny, 'if only I were a Tree! If I were a big, strong Tree I should be *ever* so useful! I should be able to give shade to tired travellers, or be a mooring-place for boats.' He sighed again. 'But I'm only a Grass-Blade, and of no use at all.'

Before Greeny had time to finish his sentence he was startled by a noise. It was a boat knocking against that very Tree! A man jumped out, and started tying the boat to the Tree. Greeny sighed again.

Then the man walked up and down along the bank, as if looking for something. When he came back to the boat he said 'Where is your old stone!' Greeny noticed then that there was a little girl

Greeny Grass-blade

in the boat. She was leaning over the edge, and pointing. She was pointing at him!

'Why, there, Daddy!' she said. 'Right in the middle of the stream!' Greeny recognized her voice with a thrill. It was the little girl Maisie!

The man called 'Daddy' looked at Greeny on Stone Island. Then he grunted. 'Why, Maisie, I thought you said that there was some beautiful grass on the stone! There's only one blade!'

'Oh, yes, Daddy!' she replied. 'But it is a beautiful one, isn't it? Please get it for me! I do want it for my garden!'

Greeny shivered with excitement. Somebody wanted him! He *was* of some use! He was going to a garden! He was not at all frightened when he saw Daddy get a big spade out of the boat. He had never seen a spade before, but when Daddy dug it underneath Stone Island, and he felt himself moving, he thought that it must be what they called an 'earthquake'. Daddy went round to the other side of Stone Island, and lifted that a little as well. 'Another earthquake!' thought Greeny. Then Daddy came back to where he had started. He dug his spade deeper, deeper. Then he started lifting, lifting.

Immediately all the little water-drops that had been lying around the edges of Stone Island began gurgling, and grumbling, and grousing.

Daddy didn't understand water-language, however, so he went on lifting Stone Island. At last he managed to get it balanced on his spade, and lifted out of the river. Then he placed Stone Island, with Greeny clinging on tightly, in the back of the boat and rowed home. When they got home he took Stone Island to a shady little corner. There Greeny saw Maisie's garden. Wasn't he excited to think that not only was he *seeing* a real garden, but he was going to *live* in one! He, Greeny Grass-Blade, of Greenfields, Anywhere, living in a garden! Living with flowers and vegetables! Being looked at by humans! It was wonderful! He had never dreamed that such a thing could be possible for *him*. Why, they really must *want* him, to go to all that trouble. He *was* of some use, then, after all!

Stone Island was soon put in position in the garden. Daddy dug a hole, while Maisie went in to have her tea. All the time he was digging he was talking to himself. 'Fancy all this fuss over a dirty old stone with only one grass-blade growing on it!' he said. 'Still, I must admit that it looks a healthy grass-blade. Must be that river-water that makes it so green. But our Maisie is a nuisance, dragging me all that way just for this. But she's a darling, bless her, and she *does* like to see things made beautiful.' Then, after placing Stone Island in the hole which he had been digging, and patting down the loose earth with his big, horny hand, he said, 'Well, we'll see if *that* will suit Her Ladyship!' And off he went to have *his* tea.

After tea Maisie came out to have a look at her new treasure. Greeny was very surprised to find that she understood plant language, and could

talk it as well. He *was* excited when she started talking to him, saying that she hoped that he would like his new home, and that she would try to be kind to him. Then she introduced him to the other plants in her little garden. She knew everybody's names, and she introduced them all in a really high-class Society manner.

'Mr. Greeny Grass-Blade. The Honourable Bertie Buttercup.'

'How-do-you-do!' said Greeny.

'Pleased to meet you!' said Hertie.

Soon Greeny had been introduced to all of them, though he couldn't remember all their names. He remembered Bertie, and David Dandelion, and shy little Vera Violet, but no one else. He felt quite at home, though. They all seemed to be friendly. It was wonderful to feel that somebody wanted him. He wondered why he had been so down-hearted before. Of *course* he was useful!

Then Maisie went in to go to bed. Greeny felt tired, so he started to go to sleep. It was getting quite dark. But David Dandelion stopped him.

'I say, Greeny, you can't go to sleep yet!' he said.

'Why can't I?' asked Greeny. 'I'm very tired.'

'Well, it's like this, you see,' went on David.

'We have a rule that before we go to bed each night one of us must tell a story or sing a song. You haven't told us a story yet, so it must be your turn!'

Greeny felt inclined to say, very sarcastically, 'How *could* I have told you one before, when I've only just come?' But he just managed to smile and keep his temper, though he was very tired. 'I'm afraid that I don't know any stories,' he said.

'Well, make one up, then!' said David, 'or else sing a song.'

'Oh, yes!' said Greeny, 'I like singing. But I feel too tired to sing a *hard* song. And really I'm used to having my songs accompanied by the Ripples. But if somebody will strike a note for me I'll see what I can do.'

Harriet Harebell struck a note. Greeny hummed it, then sang 'Doh!' and started on his song. All the flowers rustled their petals for accompaniment. Greeny sang:

I thought that no one needed
A little Blade like me.
But Maisie has succeeded
In filling me with glee.

My pretty mistress Maisie
Thinks I'm worth *such* a lot,
Although I'm not a Daisy,
Or sweet Forget-me-not.

I wonder why I wondered
What was the use of me?
I must admit I blundered
To want to be a Tree!

I know that *I* am useful,
A little Blade like me!
A Grass-Blade can be juicyful,
And green as green can be!