

FRANCES BROWNE



**GRANNY'S
WONDERFUL
CHAIR**

MUSAICUM CHRISTMAS SPECIALS

Frances Browne

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ALL THE COURT CROWDED OUT TO SEE

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTORY

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In an old time, long ago, when the fairies were in the world, there lived a little girl so very fair and pleasant of look, that they called her Snowflower. This girl was good as well as pretty. No one had ever seen her frown or heard her say a cross word, and young and old were glad when they saw her coming.

Snowflower had no relation in the world but a very old grandmother, called Dame Frostyface. People did not like her quite so well as her granddaughter, for she was cross enough at times, though always kind to Snowflower. They lived together in a little cottage built of peat and thatched with reeds, on the edge of a great forest. Tall trees sheltered its back from the north wind, and the midday sun made its front warm and cheerful. Swallows built in the eaves, and daisies grew thick at the door.

But there were none in all that country poorer than Snowflower and her grandmother. A cat and two hens were all their live stock. Their bed was dry grass, and the only good piece of furniture in the cottage was a great armchair with wheels on its feet, a black velvet cushion, and many strange carvings of flowers and fairies on its dark oaken back.

On that chair Dame Frostyface sat spinning from morning till night, to keep herself and her granddaughter, while Snowflower gathered sticks for the fire, looked after the

hens and the cat, and did whatever else her grandmother bade her. There was nobody in that part of the country could spin such fine yarn as Dame Frostyface, but she spun very slowly. Her wheel was as old as herself, and far more worn-out. Indeed, the wonder was that it did not fall to pieces. So what the dame earned was very little, and their living was scanty. Snowflower, however, felt no want of good dinners or fine clothes.

Every evening, when the fire was heaped with the sticks she had gathered till it blazed and crackled up the cottage chimney, Dame Frostyface set aside her wheel and told her a new story. Often did the little girl wonder where her grandmother had gathered so many stories, but she soon learned that.

One sunny morning, at the time of the coming of the swallows, the dame rose up, put on the grey hood and cloak in which she carried her yarn to the fairs, and said: "My child, I am going a long journey to visit an aunt of mine, who lives far in the north country. I cannot take you with me, because my aunt is the crossdest woman alive, and never liked young people. But the hens will lay eggs for you, and there is barley meal in the barrel. And, as you have been a good girl, I'll tell you what to do when you feel lonely. Lay your head gently down on the cushion of the armchair and say, 'Chair of my grandmother, tell me a story'.

"The chair was made by a clever fairy, who lived in the forest when I was young, and she gave it to me because she knew nobody could keep what they got hold of better than I could. Remember, you must never ask a story more than once in the day. If there is any need to travel, you have only

to seat yourself in it and say, 'Chair of my grandmother, take me such a way'. It will carry you wherever you wish. But mind to oil the wheels before you set out, for I have sat on it these forty years in that same corner."

Having said this, Dame Frostyface set forth to see her aunt in the north country. Snowflower gathered wood for the fire, and looked after the hens and cat, as she had always done. She baked herself a cake or two of the barley meal; but, when the evening came, the cottage looked lonely. Then Snowflower remembered her grandmother's words, and, laying her head gently down, she said: "Chair of my grandmother, tell me a story".

Hardly were the words spoken, when a clear voice from under the velvet cushion began a new and most wonderful tale, which surprised Snowflower so much that she forgot to be afraid. After that the good girl was lonely no more. Every morning she baked a barley cake, and every evening the chair told her a new story. But she could never find out to whom the voice belonged, though Snowflower showed her thanks by keeping bright the oaken back and dusting the velvet cushion, till the chair looked as good as new.

The swallows came and built in the eaves, and the daisies grew thicker than ever at the door, but great troubles fell upon Snowflower. In spite of all her care she forgot to clip the hens' wings, and they flew away one morning to visit their friends the pheasants, who lived far in the forest. The cat went away to see its friends. The barley meal was eaten up, except two handfuls, and Snowflower had often looked out in hope of seeing the grey cloak, but Dame Frostyface did not come back.

"My grandmother stays long," said Snowflower to herself; "and by and by there will be nothing left to eat. If I could get to her, perhaps she would tell me what to do. Surely there is good need for me to travel."

Next day, at sunrise, Snowflower oiled the wheels of the chair, baked a cake out of the last of the meal, took it in her lap by way of food for the journey, seated herself, and said: "Chair of my grandmother, take me the way she went".

At once the chair gave a creak, and began to move out of the cottage, and into the forest, the very way Dame Frostyface had taken, where it rolled along at the rate of a coach and six. Snowflower was amazed at this way of travelling, but the chair never stopped nor stayed the whole summer day, till as the sun was setting they came upon an open space, where a hundred men were cutting down the tall trees with their axes, a hundred more were splitting them for firewood, and twenty men, with horses and wagons, were carrying the wood away.

"Oh! chair of my grandmother, stop!" said Snowflower, for she was tired, and also wished to know what this might mean. The chair at once stood still, and Snowflower, seeing an old woodcutter, who looked kind, stepped up to him and said: "Good father, tell me why you cut all this wood?"

"Where do you live," replied the man, "that you have not heard of the great feast which King Winwealth means to give on the birthday of his only daughter, Princess Greedalind? It will last for seven days. Everybody will be feasted, and this wood is to roast the oxen and the sheep, the geese and the turkeys, amongst whom there is great sorrow throughout the land."