

MURIEL. Oh Grandfather can it be my fault?

GRANDFATHER. (*takes her face in his hands*) Happy child! Careless water sprite. One day when little Muriel is older she will understand how she made Grandfather suffer, and the old wounds, here closed, open again.

MURIEL. (*clasps her hands*) and must I never never go, Grandfather?

GRANDFATHER. Never, little mouse. (*Muriel drifts towards the door*) Where are you going to child?

MURIEL. (*solemnly*) I am going to look at my father's photograph.

GRANDFATHER. Ach! (*mysteriously*) Fatal, fatal child. But if the bloom must disappear let mine be the tender hands. Come here Muriel. (*Muriel kneels beside him, clasps her hands and gazes at him*) The time has come then when my little Muriel must know why it would be useless for her to go out into the world, and why the world will have none of her roses and violets and pretty parsley, but must hide with Grandfather within the Laurels, under the laurels. (*standing*) The man in the double frame is *not* your father, Muriel. Draw closer. How the little hands tremble—those shining eyes. (*mysteriously*) Mr Tchek is not our first lodger Muriel. Once upon a time another lived in Mr Tchek's room—the first that ever burst. You follow me, Beating Heart?

MURIEL. Yes Grandfather.

GRANDFATHER. And your mother was just the same age as you, just as tender to the old man who was not so old then.

MURIEL. But only getting on, getting on.

GRANDFATHER. Time passed until one fine day Florence and the first lodger went away and after a long time when Grandfather was all alone he found (*groans*)—how shall I tell her—a basket under the laurel hedge with a baby and a bottle and a bonnet in it.

MURIEL. (*radiant, flings her arms round him*) The baby was *me* Grandfather.

GRANDFATHER. (*clasping her to his heart*) My treasure is a love child.

MURIEL. (*awed*) Just like Jane. (*leaves his arm*) But did Mother never come back, Grandfather?

GRANDFATHER. Never. Other* grass was green and water flowed. Never came back. (*they sway to and fro clasped in each other's arms. Suddenly the door opens and Florence bursts in in a travelling cape, followed by Jane carrying a bag*)

FLORENCE. (to Jane) Pay my taxi. (*rushes forward*) Father!

GRANDFATHER. (*horrified*) Florence!

FLORENCE. No, don't get up, my old, feeble, broken, white-headed old Father.