THE ROSY CLOUD
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"SO CATHERINE TOOK BICHETTE OFF TO THE PASTURE"
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THE ROSY CLOUD
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THE ROSY CLOUD
A GRANDMOTHER'S STORY

CHAPTER 1.

Catherine was a little peasant girl in France. She could neither read nor write, but was a great chatterbox; inquisitive and fickle, but not headstrong. Her daily task was the care of her three sheep.

Soon after Christmas each of her three sheep gave her a little lamb. Two fine strong ones, and one so little, so tiny, that you could almost believe it to be a little white rabbit. Catherine's mamma, whose name was Sylvanie, despised the poor little lamb, and said it was a pity the thing ever was born, because it would never live to grow up, and, even if it did, would never be worth the grass it ate.

Such speeches as these distressed Catherine greatly, because she thought the tiny lamb was prettier, and
she loved it better than all the others. She was determined to take the best care of it, and named it Bichette.

She took so much care of it that she almost killed it with kindness. She was too fond of it, and caressed it too much, carried it in her arms, and let it sleep in her lap. Now puppies and kittens love to be petted and played with; but lambs, after they have been well fed, like to be let alone, to sleep when they feel so disposed, and to wander wherever they please. Sylvanie sometimes told Catherine that, instead of growing larger, her lamb grew smaller every day, because it was handled too much; but Catherine didn't care, because she wanted the lamb to stay little always; indeed, if she could have carried it in her pocket she would have loved it all the better.

Every day the mother sheep were led to the pasture, two hours in the morning and three hours in the afternoon. The two strong lambs were very reasonable when their mothers were absent; they seemed to suppose that they had gone abroad to find some milk. Bichette was either more impatient or else hungrier, for when her mother left her she bleated so pitifully, that it almost made Catherine cry.

The lambs were not allowed to go to the meadow.
They were too young, and the grass was too damp; but Catherine begged so hard to take Bichette that Sylvanie finally said: "You can do as you please! If the lamb dies it will be no great loss; in fact I would like to be rid of it, for you do nothing but play with it, and can think of nothing else. You take the sheep out too late and you bring them back too soon, just in order to keep Bichette constantly with her mother. Take her along with you, come what may."

So Catherine took Bichette off to the pasture, and all the time she was there kept her rolled up in her apron, for fear she would take cold. That was all very well for two days, but by the third day she was tired of being a slave to a beast, and began to run about and play in the meadow as she used to do. Bichette didn't worry on that account, neither did she grow any bigger, remaining a little stunted animal.

One day Catherine spent most of her time looking for birds' nests in the bushes instead of watching her sheep. Toward evening she discovered a blackbird's nest, wherein were three little birds already fledged. The baby birds were not at all frightened, for when she put out the end of her finger toward them and imitated the mother bird's cry, they opened their
yellow beaks as wide as possible, and showed their pink throats.

Catherine was so delighted with the little birds that she carried them off, nest and all, and did nothing but chatter to them as she drove her sheep homewards. It was not until the next morning she discovered Bichette had not returned to the sheepfold. She had been forgotten, left in the field all night. Perhaps the wolf had eaten her. Catherine was very angry with the blackbirds who had caused her to be so negligent. All her old love for Bichette returned, and, with tears running down her cheeks, she ran off to the meadow to seek the dear lost lamb.

It was in the month of March. The sun was not yet up, and a thick white vapor hung over the pond that was in the middle of the field. After having explored all the hollows and hedges, Catherine approached the pond, fearing that poor Bichette had fallen in and was drowned; then she saw something that astonished her greatly, for this was the first time she had ever been to the pasture so early in the morning.

The vapor, that had hung low and hidden the pond, began to melt away in the sun's warm rays, to roll itself into fleecy white clouds, and to rise toward the tree-tops; some of the clouds even seemed to get
tangled among the branches of the willow-trees and stay there, others would fall on the sand, and seem to shiver with cold as they touched the wet grass. Catherine could almost believe that she saw a flock of sheep, but she was not seeking any sheep except her poor Bichette, and Bichette was nowhere to be seen; so in despair she sat down on a stone, covered her head with her apron, and wept.

Fortunately, a child’s distress does not last very long, and Catherine soon got over her fit of weeping; looking up, she saw that all the fleecy clouds had risen above the tree-tops, and, changed to a beautiful rose color, were floating high in the air, getting nearer and nearer to the bright sun, who seemed to be drawing them to himself and absorbing them.

For a long time Catherine watched them as they melted away and vanished, and when she looked down again, what did she see but Bichette, either asleep or dead, on the other side of the pond.

She ran quickly, and without stopping to think whether the lamb were alive or dead, picked it up, put it in her apron, and hurried away home as fast as she could go; but as she ran along she was astonished to find how little the creature weighed—there seemed to be nothing at all in her apron. "How thin poor Bichette has grown in just one night!"
said she, but she did not unroll the apron for fear the lamb would take cold.

When she came to the turn in the road, who do you think she met? Why, no other than petit Pierre, the son of Joyeux, who made wooden shoes for all the peasants. He came running toward her, carrying something in his arms. What do you suppose it was? It was Bichette, bleating with all her might.

"See, Catherine!" said he, "here is your lamb that I have brought back. She strayed in around my sheep yesterday evening when you were showing me your blackbird's nest. You wouldn't give me a single one of your young birds, but I am kinder than you; for when I found that Bichette had followed one of my sheep, thinking it was her mother, I let her stay all night in our sheepfold, and this morning I hurried to bring her back, for fear you would be distressed at having lost her."

Catherine was so happy that she kissed petit Pierre, made him come home with her, and gave him two of the young blackbirds; which so pleased him that he went off dancing for joy.

It was only after she had seen how contented Bichette and her mother were at meeting each other again that Catherine remembered her apron, and
wondered what could be in it. She certainly thought she had put a lamb in it. What could it have been?

She was very curious to find out, but also rather scared, so she decided not to unroll the apron until she got upon the roof of the sheepfold, which sloped down to the very ground on one side, and was covered with a thatch of straw. It was a very pretty place up there on the roof, for the wind had blown flower seeds on it, and they had sprouted in the thatch and were all in bloom. Many an afternoon in summer Catherine had taken a nap up there in the bright sunshine, to make up for the sleep she lost by having to rise so early in the morning; so then, she climbed up on the deck, as the peasants call it, and began very cautiously to untie her apron.

What in the world could be in it?
CHAPTER II.

It was a blue cotton apron, made out of an old one of her mother's. Neither very pretty nor very clean; but if just then any one had offered Catherine to exchange it for a handful of silver she would not have consented, so curious was she to find out what it contained.

At last she opened it and found—nothing at all. She shook it, and nothing fell, but she seemed to be all at once surrounded by a white misty cloud like smoke, and in less than a minute there was floating above her head one of the pretty, round, fleecy clouds that she had seen over the pond. First it was white as snow, then soaring higher it became golden, then pink, and at last as red as the most beautiful rose. It floated up above her head, then it went higher than the walnut-tree, and at last sailed high up in the bright sunshine.

Catherine never stopped to think how strange it was that she had carried a cloud in her apron. She only knew that it was very pretty, and that she was
"IT FLOATED UP ABOVE HER HEAD"
very sorry to see it fly away so quickly. "Ah," she cried, "you ungrateful thing! Can't you even play with me awhile and thank me for putting you back in the sky?"

Then she could hear a faint, clear voice, which came from the rosy cloud, and sang a pretty song—but the words she could not understand.
CERTAINLY Catherine could not understand a word—but she continued to listen and to watch the cloud as it rose higher and higher and finally broke up into ever so many little pink cloudlets and melted away.

"Now," said Catherine, "you would go up to the sun, and he has eaten you up, as he devoured all those clouds in the meadow. If you had stayed here with me I would have kept you safe in my apron, or I could have put you in the garden under the big apple-tree, where it is nice and cool; or on the trough by the well, since you like to sleep over the water. I never had a cloud to take care of, but I could have learned how, and I'm sure I could have made you live longer. Now you will only be blown to pieces by Master Wind or eaten up by Master Sun." Catherine waited to hear if the cloud would answer her, and she heard far off a twittering like little birds, but it was impossible to distinguish what they said; so she waited until she could neither see nor hear anything
more of her beautiful rosy cloud, but could only hear her mother calling her to breakfast.

"Mamma," said she, "I want to know something."

"What is it, my daughter?"

"What do the clouds say when they sing?"

"The clouds never sing at all, little stupid, they mutter and growl when the thunder gets into them."

"Ah, good gracious!" said Catherine, "I never thought of that. I hope the thunder will not get into my little pink cloud."

"What is that you are talking about?" said Sylvanie.

"The little pink cloud that was in my apron."

"Now just stop talking such nonsense," said Sylvanie, "for you know I don't like to hear it. It might do for a baby of two years old, but you are getting too big to be so silly."

Catherine did not dare to say anything further, and as soon as breakfast was over skipped off to the fields again. She still had one little blackbird, which she carried off and played with for an hour or two; but as she had risen so early in the morning, she was sleepy and lay down in the meadow and fell fast asleep. She was no longer afraid of losing Bichette,
for she had left her with the other lambs in the sheep fold.

When she awoke, as she was lying on her back, she could see nothing but the sky, and there above her head was the little cloud, as rosy as ever, the only one in the clear blue sky of a summer's day.

"It is very pretty all the same," said Catherine, who was only half awake, "but how far away it is. If it is singing now, I can't hear it. Oh, I wish I could be up there, too! I would see all the world and could float about in the air and never feel tired. If it had only taken me up there I could go close to the sun and find out what it was made of."

The little thrushes sang away in the hedge and Catherine fancied she heard them making fun of her, saying, "Fie-fi-fi! what curiosity!" They stopped their singing very quickly when a great hawk appeared overhead, and flew in circles around the rosy cloud. The little birds hid under the leaves and trembled with fear.

"Ah!" said Catherine, "it serves them right for laughing at me. If I were on the back of that great bird, I could fly after my pink cloud and get it again."

By this time she was quite wide awake, and remembered what Sylvanie had said to her about her foolish talk; so she took her distaff and set to her
spinning, determined not to think of the cloud any more, but every few moments she would give an upward glance at the sky.

The hawk had flown away, but the cloud was still there.

"What are you staring at so hard, little Catherine?" said a man, who was passing along through the meadow.

It was Father Bataille, who had just cut down a tree in the next field. He was carrying it home on his shoulders, and he leaned to rest himself against a willow-tree, for his load was heavy.

"I am watching that little pink cloud," replied Catherine, "and I want to ask you, who have travelled about and know so much, why it stays up there all alone and doesn't move a bit."

"Ah, daughter," said the old man, "when I was a sailor and sailed on the sea, I would have called that cloud a weather-breeder, and said 'twas a bad sign."

"Sign of what, Père Bataille?"
"SIGN of a great storm, my child. When we see a cloud like that at sea the sailors say, 'Look out for a squall.' Such a pretty little cloud! As soft and white as a little sheep; you could almost pick it up and tuck it away under your arm. And right away it grows big and black, and spreads all over the whole sky,—then look out for yourself! Lightning, thunder, great bursts of wind, and the mischief and all to pay. Every one to his post, and save the ship if you can."

"Ah, good gracious!" said Catherine, "could my pretty little pink cloud become as naughty as that? I hope not."

"In this part of the world and at this time of year cyclones are very rare; besides, to my mind, there is never any real danger on land. All the same it is very queer, your rosy cloud."

"Why queer, Father Bataille?"

"Why? Because it is queer, and it looks nasty. Anyway, I mean to hurry and get my wood brought
in before night. I have three loads of branches to bring in yet."

He started off, and Catherine tried to go on with her spinning, but, as she couldn’t keep her eyes off the cloud, the spindle grew no larger. She fancied the cloud did, though, and changed its rose color to a purplish hue. It was no fancy. The cloud became blue, and then of a bluish slate color; at last it was inky black, and had spread itself over the whole sky. Darkness came on suddenly, and finally thunder was heard in the distance.

At first Catherine was quite amused to see her little cloud becoming so great and strong. "I was sure it was no ordinary cloud," said she. "The sun could not swallow it up, and now the little rosy cloud is going to eat up the great round sun. And to think that only awhile ago I was carrying it all rolled up in my apron!"

Just then there came a flash of lightning, and Catherine was so frightened that she hurried to get her sheep together and drive them home.

"I was getting alarmed about you," said her mother, "there is a fearful storm coming on; I never knew one to gather so suddenly or to threaten to do so much harm."

It certainly was a terrible storm. The hail broke
the windows of the house, the wind carried away the tiles from the roof and the lightning struck the great apple-tree in the garden. Catherine was anything but brave; she was ready to hide under the bed from fear, but she could not help saying, "Oh, you wicked red cloud! If I had known how bad you were I would never have let you out of my apron."

"Dear! dear!" said Sylvanie, "the poor child is out of her head." "Bah!" said one of the neighbors, "it is the storm that has bewildered her; she will be all right to-morrow."

And so she was when the next day came, for the sun rose as brightly as ever, and Catherine was as bright as the sun. She rose early and climbed up on the roof of the sheepfold, which, being lower and more sheltered than the house, had suffered no injury. The pretty flowers on the roof were lifting their heads once more, and seemed to say, "Dear, good Father Sun, have you come back? Bon jour, we are always so frightened when you hide from us."

Catherine, too, was so happy to see the sun again that she would have said bon jour like the flowers, but she was afraid he was angry with her for setting free the naughty cloud that had given him such a battle. She did not dare to ask her mother if one can please or displease the sun, for Sylvanie had so
often scolded her for her foolish imaginations that she determined to have no scoldings in future.

So she thought no more of the rosy cloud, but turned her attention to the little blackbird, which amused her for several days, until it died from being fed on bread crumbs and cream cheese. Catherine wept bitter tears over the blackbird, but soon consoled herself with a sparrow that was finally eaten by the cat. Another bitter grief. She was disgusted with pets and decided to go to school, where she became a diligent scholar. Next she began to take great interest in her spinning, and, by the time she was twelve years old, had become a sweet, amiable girl and a very clever spinner.
CHAPTER V.

ONE day about this time, her mother said to her:
"Daughter, would you like to take a little journey and see a far country?"

"Oh! I certainly would," replied Catherine. "I have always wanted to see the country where everything is blue."

"What are you saying? There is no blue country."

"Oh, yes, there is, for I see it every day from the roof of the sheep-cote. All around is our country, which is green, but way beyond and outside of our country there is another which is all blue."

"Ah, now I see what you mean; that country only seems blue because it is so far away. But you shall go and see for yourself. Your Grand-aunt Colette, whom you have never met, because she went away from here thirty years ago, lives over there on the mountain, and wishes greatly to see you. She is very old now, and lives all alone, as she never married. I fear she is poor, and you must be sure not to ask for anything, but try and be useful to her."
I am afraid she is lonely; besides, she might fall ill and die without any one to care for her, so I mean to try and persuade her to return home with us, if possible, for it is my duty."

Catherine had a faint recollection of hearing her parents speak of "la tante Colette." She had never paid much attention to what they said, nor did she much care, yet the idea of a journey was delightful; to see a new place, to travel in the diligence would be so exciting. She was really as curious as ever, and we do not blame her, for she was simply eager for knowledge.

So she and her mother started off in the coach, travelled all day and all night, and awaked the next morning in a new world, that is to say, among the mountains. Sylvanie thought the country very ugly. Catherine, on the contrary, thought it beautiful, though she didn't dare to say so.

When they had climbed down from the stage-coach (or diligence, as it is called), they inquired for the road to the village where the Aunt Colette lived, and were shown a pathway almost as steep as the roof of Catherine's sheepfold. "That is the only road to the place. Just go straight up the hill," said the driver.

"Do you call that a road?" said Sylvanie. "A
body need have four feet, like the goats, to get about in this part of the world. This is your beautiful blue country, Catherine, and I hope you like it.”

“I think it is very beautiful,” said Catherine, “and besides, it is blue. Just look up at the top of that mountain.”

“What you see is snow, you stupid child, and when you get close, it is not blue, but white.”

“Snow in summer-time?”

“Yes, because up there 'tis so cold that the snow never melts.”

Catherine was sure that her mother must be mistaken, but she didn’t like to contradict her. She was impatient to find out if what she saw really was snow, and scrambled up the mountainside almost as fast as a little goat, though she had only two feet and not four.

When they finally reached the village (Sylvanie tired out and Catherine breathless), they were told that the Aunt Colette never stayed there in summer-time. She belonged to the parish, however, and her house was not very far off.

Then they were shown, high up on the mountainside, a chalet whose roof was covered with great stones. The house was almost hidden by the pine-trees. “There is her home,” said the villagers; “it
"THEY HAD NO NEED OF A GUIDE, FOR THERE WAS BUT ONE PATHWAY"
is only about an hour's walk up the hill." Sylvanie's courage gave out, for she saw that they had only come about half-way, and the steepest part was yet to be done.

She feared that Catherine would not be able to climb so far; the place seemed so wild and ugly to her that she almost decided to descend again to the plain, and return to her own country without ever letting the old aunt know that she had made an attempt to pay her a visit. Catherine, however, was full of courage and neither tired nor afraid, so, when they had refreshed themselves by a good lunch, she persuaded her mother to continue their up-hill journey.

They had no need of a guide, for there was but one pathway. Even though they could have found one they would not have had much pleasure in his society, for the peasants all spoke a patois of which Catherine and her mother could only understand a few words.

At last, though the road was dangerous, they arrived safely at the chalet. It stood on the edge of a sloping green field which was not fenced in, but surrounded by a forest of pine-trees, and protected by a wall of great rocks.

Above the black rocks the snow began, and higher
up was the glacier, glittering with its blue and greenish ice crystals. It seemed to touch the very sky.

"Now at last we are really in the blue country!" exclaimed Catherine, "and if we only climb a little higher we would get up into the sky;" and suddenly she remembered something that she had forgotten for a long time.

The idea of getting up among the clouds had reminded her of the pretty pink cloud she had once caught in her apron; and she was so enchanted by the sight of the blue glacier as to have quite forgotten Tante Colette, of whom she had been thinking all the journey, wondering what she would be like, and if she would be cross or kind.
CHAPTER VI.

AUNT COLETTE was tall and pale, with soft white hair, and a face that was still beautiful in spite of her age. She did not appear at all astonished at the sight of Sylvanie. "I almost expected you, for I dreamed about you and your child last night," she said, as she kissed her. "Let me see if she looks as she did in my dream."

Catherine approached; Aunt Colette gazed at her with great gray eyes that seemed to read her through and through; then, after a kiss, she said, "I am glad, very glad, that this dear child has come to see me."

When the travellers had rested she showed them all over her home.

The house, that had seemed so small when seen from afar, was really a large one, and was built of beautiful pine wood, and very substantial. The great stones on the roof were placed there to prevent its being shaken or blown away by the fierce winds of the winter. Inside everything was as clean as clean could be, and the furniture was waxed and polished until it was a pleasure to look at it. There were a great
many pots and pans of shining copper, and the beds were of white pine, with soft mattresses of hair and wool, good linen sheets, and warm, clean blankets, for it was never too warm so high up in the air. A bright little fire was always burning on the hearth, for firewood was plenty, as many of the forest-trees belonged to Aunt Colette, as well as the green field where she pastured her fine cows, a few sheep, and a little donkey. Aunt Colette kept a small boy who took care of her beasts, and a maid who looked after the house, did the cooking, and went on errands; for Aunt Colette lived very comfortably, sending twice a week to the village for bread and meat; in fact she was very well off for a peasant, and Sylvanie, who had never suspected as much, and had come with offers of assistance, felt quite abashed before a person of so much importance.

Catherine also was confused at finding her aunt so well off, and also at discovering her to be a woman of so superior an education. Seeing her so amiable and good, her heart warmed toward her, and she felt as though she had known her all her life.

From the very first day Catherine had no hesitation in asking all manner of questions, and soon learned that her aunt had been the companion of
an old lady, had nursed her in her last illness, and had received a legacy which was enough to support her comfortably.

"But my dear old lady was not rich," said Aunt Colette, "and I could not live as I do were it not for my own work and industry."

"You mean that you sell the fine cattle you raise?" said Sylvanie.

"My cows help to support me," said Colette; "but how do you think I got the money to buy them, and to buy the field where they graze, and to build the barns to shelter them? Can you guess, little Catherine?"

"No, my aunt."

"Do you know how to spin?"

"Oh, certainly, ma tante, as old as I am, I would be very stupid not to know how to spin."

"Can you spin very fine thread?"

"Well, — yes, rather fine."

"She is the best spinner in all the neighborhood," said Sylvanie, proudly. "She can spin anything you give her."

"Can she spin a spider's web?" said Aunt Colette. Catherine thought that very funny, and laughed.

"I never tried," said she.

"Let me see how well you can spin," said the
great-aunt; and she gave Catherine an ebony distaff and a pretty spindle made of silver.

"How pretty they are," said Catherine, as she looked at the distaff, straight as a reed, and the spindle as light as a feather; "but to spin, you must put something on the distaff, you know."

"When one is clever, one can always find something to spin," said her aunt.

"I don't see anything here to spin,—not even a spider's web, for your house is so neat there is not one to be found."

"And out-of-doors? Don't you see anything, from where you stand in the doorway, that you could spin?"

"No, ma tante; for the bark of the trees would have to be beaten out, and the wool on the sheep's backs must be carded before it can be put on the distaff. The only thing that looks fit to spin is one of those fleecy white clouds up there above the glacier; they look like great balls of cotton."

"Well! how do you know that nobody can spin a cloud?"

"Ah!" said Catherine, "I beg your pardon, but I didn't know it could be done." And she gazed in wonder at her aunt.
CHAPTER VII.

"CANN'T you see that your aunt is making fun of you?" said Sylvanie.

"Excuse me," said Tante Colette, "but do you know what the peasants hereabouts call me?"

"I do not, nor do I understand much of their patois. They may be laughing at me for all I know."

"I am not joking. Call little Benoit, who is over there in the arbor, arranging the dinner-table. He speaks good French; ask him what folks call me."

Sylvanie called Benoit and said to the boy: "What nickname do the country folks give to my aunt, Madame Colette?"

"By your leave, madame, she is called the Tall Cloud-spinner."

Sylvanie repeated her question to the little maid servant, who gave the same answer.

"How wonderful," said Catherine, "to spin a cloud! Now I am sure that I really once caught a cloud — once, when I was a tiny bit of a girl,
I—" Seeing her mother look at her very severely, as though she were saying, "Now, don't begin that old tale again," she hesitated.

Madame Colette wished to hear the whole story, and Sylvanie said, "Excuse the child, my aunt. She is so young yet, and she really can't get that adventure out of her head."

"But I haven't yet heard the story. What were you going to say, dear?"

"Dear aunt," said Catherine, with tears in her eyes, "I am not making fun of you,—I shouldn't dare to,—but mamma will never believe that I tell the truth. Really and truly, when I was little, I once caught a pretty white cloud in my apron and brought it home with me."

"Well, to be sure!" said Tante Colette, showing neither surprise nor anger.

"And what became of it, child? Did you try to spin it into thread?"

"No, I just let it fly away, and it turned all rose color, and even sang a song to me as it floated off."

"And did you understand the words of the song?"

"No! not a word! But then I was so young."

"After it flew away did it not turn to a storm-cloud?"

"Oh, yes, my aunt; it blew the tiles off our roof,
“WHAT COULD BE IN THE LITTLE CHEST, WHOSE KEY AUNT COLETTE HELD IN HER HAND?”
and broke down our beautiful great apple-tree that
was in full bloom."

"See what comes of picking up an ungrateful
cloud," said Madame Colette, very seriously. "We
should never trust such a fickle thing as a cloud, nor
waste our affections on people who don't know their
own minds. A cloud! 'Tis the most unstable thing
in the world. But, see now, dinner is ready. You
must be hungry. Come, sit down to the table and
have some soup."

The dinner was very good, and Catherine did it full
justice. The cheese and cream were delicious, and
for dessert there were honey cakes of Aunt Colette's
own making. Sylvanie and Catherine thought they
never had tasted anything so good.

After dinner, as night was coming on, Madame
Colette lighted the lamp and brought out a little
chest, which she placed on the table. "Come here,
dear," said she to Catherine, "and I will show you
why folks call me The Cloud-spinner. Look in the
chest, Sylvanie, and you will learn how I have made
my little fortune."

What could be in the little chest whose key Aunt
Colette held in her hand? Catherine was dying of
curiosity.
CHAPTER VIII.

THERE was something so white, so soft, so light, and so like a cloud, that Catherine gave a cry of surprise and Sylvanie became quite pale, for she began to imagine that Aunt Colette might be a witch or a fairy.

But it turned out to be but a mass of the finest linen thread, spun so fine, so fine, that you would not have dared to touch it, nor even to breathe on it, for fear of getting it tangled.

"Ah, how beautiful!" exclaimed Catherine. "Dear Aunt Colette, did you really spin that delicate thin thread? You are the best spinner in the world, and all the rest of us are only twisters of twine."

"Yes, I spun it all, and every year I sell several chests of just such thread. Perhaps you noticed on your journey that all the women are lace-makers, making those beautiful laces that cost so much money. I furnish them with this fine thread; not all of them, for there are many others who spin lace thread, but none can make thread like mine, which costs ten times as much as theirs. Mine is all be-
spoken in advance, because with it the women can make the finest and most expensive laces. When I die they will not be able to get any more like it. I am getting old and my secret will die with me, unless you would like to learn it, Catherine."

"Oh, my good aunt!" cried Catherine, "if you only would teach me, not for the sake of the money I might earn, but because I would be so proud to do such beautiful work. Tell me your secret, please, please do."

"Right away, in just one lesson?" said Aunt Colette. "Well, well, as I said before, you must begin by learning to spin the clouds."

So saying she closed the little chest, and, after kissing Sylvanie and Catherine, went into her own room. Her guests slept in the living-room, where there was also a cot for the little maid servant, Renée.

As Renée's bed was quite close to Catherine's, the two children whispered together a long time before they went to sleep. Sylvanie was too tired out to listen to them. Catherine asked a thousand questions about her aunt's secret. Had Renée ever found it out? "There is no secret," said Renée, "except to be very patient and very skilful."

"Ah, but one must be very clever to fasten a cloud
on to a distaff without letting it float away, and then
begin to draw it out into a thread—"

"That is not the hardest part of it, for first you
have to make the cloud."

"What! Make a cloud?"

"Why, yes, it must be carded!"

"Card a cloud! What with? How is it done?"

Renée didn't answer, for she had gone to sleep.

Catherine tried to follow her example, but she was
too excited; so she tossed about with her eyes wide
open until the candle burned out, and there was
nothing left of the fire but a few coals glowing on
the hearth. She then noticed that there was a ray
of light shining on the upper part of the wall, and,
raising her head, saw that it proceeded from the
crack of the door at the top of the staircase, and
showed that there was still a light in the room to
which Aunt Colette had retired for the night.

Catherine could not resist the desire to find out
what was going on in that room; so, creeping bare-
footed over to the staircase, she mounted it, step by
step, with great precaution, for it was built of wood
and very old, and she feared its creaking. As she
was very light she succeeded in climbing to the top
without making any noise, and in peeping through
the crack of the door.
CHAPTER IX.

SHE saw only an empty room. It was very neat and nice, and there was a little lamp burning on the hearth; but no one was there, and she crept down-stairs again rather ashamed of herself, for she knew that she had been playing the spy on her kind aunt, and attempting to discover a secret that she was unworthy to know. She got back into her bed, and was so unhappy, that when at last she got to sleep she had bad dreams.

When she awakened the next morning she vowed that in the future she would control her idle curiosity, and wait patiently until her aunt chose to trust her with all her secret. When she was dressed she went with Renée to milk the cows, after which they were driven to the pasture. It could scarcely be called a field, as it was but a sloping, uncultivated bit of ground on the mountainside. It was a beautiful spot. A clear, sparkling stream of cold water, formed by the melting of the glacier, followed the hollows of the rocks, and at last leaped in a beautiful cascade to the green meadow below. Catherine,
who had never seen any waterfall except the mill-dam, was dazzled by the bright diamonds as they glittered in the sunshine. She was afraid to cross as Renée did, leaping from rock to rock; however, after an hour or so she became accustomed to the sight of the water, and amused herself for some time by skipping from one side to the other of the pretty waterfall.

She had the greatest desire to climb up as high as the glacier, and Renée showed her just how high it was safe to go without fear of falling into a great crack, or crevasse, and taught her the way to walk so as not to slip. Before the day was over Catherine had become quite brave, and had even learned several words of the mountain patois.

She found everything new and delightful, and was so enchanted with the mountain as to feel a real distress when Sylvanie spoke of returning to her home the next day. Aunt Colette was so kind, so indulgent, too! Catherine loved her even more than she loved the mountain.

"Daughter dear," said Sylvanie, "I see only one way of making you happy, and that is to leave you here with your great-aunt. She wishes very much to have you stay, and promises to teach you to card and spin as well as she does herself; but as to do that
takes time and patience, and knowing how changeable you are, I have said no. Still, if you think you would be happy here and would like to learn, I will let you stay. You have already learned to spin as well as I do, perhaps you can do much more, and become as rich and as useful as your aunt. You may decide for yourself.”

Catherine's first thought was to kiss her mother, and say that she never wished to leave her, but the next day she hesitated, for Sylvanie said that one should never neglect an opportunity of becoming instructed in any useful art.

The following day Sylvanie began again on the same subject: “We are but poorly off. Your sister has already three children, and the eldest brother has five; I am a widow, and am growing old. If you had a good education, and were rich, how much you could do for us all! It would be the making of the whole family. Stay here with Aunt Colette, who loves you already; she overlooks your little faults, and is disposed to make much of you. Besides, you like this place, you think it beautiful. In three months I will come for you, and if you are unhappy and wish to return home, I will take you back with me. Who knows but that Tante Colette means to make you her inheritor!”
Then Catherine wept at the thought of leaving her mother. "You stay here, too," she said, "and I promise to become the best spinner that ever was seen."

But Sylvanie was homesick. "If I had to live in a country like this," said she, "I should die or else go crazy, and how would you feel then? Would it not be better to know that you were growing up to be wise and rich and a help to us all?"

Catherine went to bed crying, and very much perplexed, but promising her mother to do whatever she thought best.

Next morning Renée did not awaken her as usual, and she slept until nine o'clock. When she opened her eyes Aunt Colette was beside the bed and gave her a morning kiss.

"My good little Catherine," said she, "you are going to be brave and reasonable. Your mamma went away early this morning—at daybreak. She kissed you while you were asleep and bade you fare-well. She promised to return in three months, and would not wake you because she wished to spare you the grief of parting." Catherine continued to weep, and Tante Colette said, "I know that you regret being separated from your good mother, for you are a loving daughter, but try, dear, to be brave, and I promise to
do all I can to make you happy and contented. You must remember that it is a grief to your mother to leave you, and that she only does it because it seems for your advantage."

With a great effort Catherine controlled herself, dried her tears, kissed her aunt, and promised to do her best and work with a will.

"We will not begin work until to-morrow," said Tante Colette. "To-day you shall have a holiday and amuse yourself all day long."
CHAPTER X.

When to-morrow came, Catherine had her first lesson; but it was not what she expected. No secret was revealed to her; her aunt simply gave her a distaff loaded with flax, and said: "Spin all this into the finest thread that you possibly can."

The lesson was quite hard enough for a first one, for Catherine had hitherto only spun hemp to make coarse linen. She got on fairly well, but the result was so far from what she desired that she was ashamed to show it to her aunt, fearing a scolding; but she received only compliments, and was told that it was very nicely done for a first attempt, and that she would do better still to-morrow. Catherine wanted to stay and watch her aunt at work. "No," said Tante Colette, "I can never work when any one is looking on. Besides, I only work in my own room, and at your age one should not stay too much in the house. You can spin while wandering about in the meadow, or while watching the cows. Stay out-of-doors, and breathe the fresh air of the mountain. I
THE ROSY CLOUD

leave you free, because I see that you are industrious, and want to do your very best."

Certainly Catherine was not lazy, but she had a great deal of curiosity and very little patience, and to go off by herself and spin all day long was not what she had expected. She wanted to understand her aunt's secret all at once, take it in as though she were swallowing a cup of new milk.

She could see that she was making progress, that her work became better every day, for every evening she would bring home a spindle of finer thread than that of the day before; but she found the work tedious and the improvement slow, so that by the end of the week she began to be quite vexed when her aunt would praise and encourage her.

Renée, too, irritated her, always so amiable and contented, taking care of the cows, and the milk and butter. Benoit was scarcely ever to be seen, for he lived chiefly in the woods, and when he had any time to spare spent it hunting, and cared more for his dog than for any other companion. Catherine, therefore, was alone a great part of the day, seeing Tante Colette only at meal-times, as the latter retired quite early every evening to her chamber, where she worked until bedtime. As soon as Renée's head was on her pillow, she was sound asleep and snoring. Catherine
would lie in bed and give herself up to all sorts of fancies. Sometimes she would have a good cry. She feared that, unless things took a different turn, she would be gray-headed before she could spin like Tante Colette, and that when her mother came, in three months' time, she would find very little improvement in the work.

One day Catherine started out very early in the morning, for she had determined to work so well that Tante Colette would be forced to tell her the great secret. Going off among the rocks, she seated herself in a lonely place, where there would be nothing to distract her mind; but our attention can always be called away from our work, our eyes can always find something interesting to gaze on.

She glanced up at the glaciers and beheld the very top of the mountain, which until now had been hidden every day by clouds. The sky was a beautiful dark blue, and made the snowy mountain-top look whiter and more dazzling. Catherine was seized with an unconquerable desire to climb to the very summit. It was dangerous, Renée had said so, and Tante Colette had forbidden her even to attempt it, saying that it was too dangerous even for the shepherd-boys; so she contented herself with gazing on those beautiful snowy heights, which seemed so near that she
imagined she had only to reach out her hand to touch, but which were really so far away. She noticed that for the first time since her arrival among the mountains a quantity of snowy, fleecy clouds surrounded the highest peak like a pearly necklace. "How beautiful it all is!" said she, "and how I wish I could spin a thread fine enough to string those light fleecy white clouds on!"

All at once she saw on the point of the glacier a little bright red speck moving about in the sunshine just above the pearly string of clouds. What could it be—a flower, a bird, or perhaps a star?
CHAPTER XI.

"If I only had my great-aunt's silver spectacles, I would certainly be able to tell what it is," said she, "for she tells me that with those glasses she can see what eyes can never behold."

However, she had to be contented without the spectacles, and continued to gaze at the little red spot, which appeared to draw all the clouds toward itself, so that very soon it was surrounded by them and could no longer be seen. All the little clouds were now rolled into one great ball, which rested on the topmost peak, like the gilded cock on top of a steeple. In a minute or so the golden ball began to rise, and, floating in the sky, become smaller and smaller, until at last it turned a beautiful rose color, and then Catherine heard a voice as clear as crystal singing in the sweetest way, "Bon jour, Catherine, don't you remember me?"

"Oh, yes, yes!" cried Catherine, "I remember you very well! You are the pretty little pink cloud that I carried in my apron. You are my little
friend that spoke to me, and now I can understand what you say. Dear, pretty cloud, you were very naughty; you broke down our beautiful apple-tree that was in full bloom, but I forgive you! You are such a lovely color, and I love you so much!"

The cloud replied, "It was not I, Catherine, that destroyed your apple-tree, it was the thunder, a big, bad fellow who takes possession of me sometimes and makes me do all sorts of wild things; but just see how sweet and tranquil I can be when any one will treat me like a friend and be good to me. Will you not come and see me some day up on the glacier? It is not so hard to get up there as folks imagine; indeed, it is quite easy when once you decide to try. Besides, I will be there to take care of you, and if you should chance to fall, you would fall on me and I would catch you and see that you did not hurt yourself. Try and come to-morrow, Catherine; come at the break of day. I will wait for you all night long, and if you do not come, I will turn into great warm tears and there will be rain all day long."

"I will come," said Catherine, "I certainly will come."

She had scarcely uttered these words, when there came a noise as if a cannon had been fired off, followed by a rattling as of musketry. Catherine was so fright-
ened that she rushed off toward home, thinking that the wicked cloud was about to play her some mischievous trick and return evil for good. As she ran all breathless down the hill, she met Benoit coming quietly out of the wood with his dog and gun. "Did you fire off your gun just now and make that noise like thunder?" said she.

"That noise just now?" he answered, with a laugh. "That was neither my gun nor thunder, it was an avalanche."

"What is an avalanche?"

"It is the ice, which melts in the sunshine, and cracks off in great pieces. It rolls down the mountainside, carrying earth and stones and even great trees, and people too, if any happen to be in its way; but we try to keep out of its path, and 'tis very seldom that any one is unfortunate enough to be killed. You will soon get used to hearing the noise it makes, for now that the warm weather has come the avalanches will be falling every day, maybe every hour."

"I will try to get used to it; but, Benoit, tell me, did you ever go up to the high peak of the glacier? You are a strong, big boy, and are afraid of nothing!"

"No," said Benoit, "no one tries to go up on such places; but I have been as far up as the foot of the glacier and have even touched it. Not at this time
"'Did you fire off your gun just now and make that noise like thunder?' said she"
of year though, for now it is too warm and the crevasses might open at any instant."

"But, Benoit, can you tell me what is that little red speck, that we can see once in awhile on the very highest peak?"

"Ah! You can see it then, the red speck? You must have good eyes! That is a red flag, which some travellers planted up there about a month ago, to show their friends that they had arrived so near the summit. A heavy wind-storm came on, and they were forced to hurry down, leaving their flag behind them. The gale tore it from its staff, and blew it up to the top of the glacier, where it caught on a jagged bit of rock, and there it stays, waiting for another storm to tear it away."

Catherine listened attentively to Benoit's story, but her head was filled with ideas of quite another sort. She was thinking of her little red cloud, and seeing afar off her aunt, whose scarlet hood made a brilliant spot near the foot of the glacier, she darted off to meet her, forgetting in her eagerness that she had not spun three ells of thread the whole day long, to which fact her well-filled distaff and her empty spindle bore witness.
CHAPTER XII.

T was not until she was quite near her aunt that she noticed this; and now it was too late to go back. She walked resolutely up to Madame Colette and asked if she were not tired after walking on the glacier.

"When one is as old as I am," replied her aunt, "one does not get tired easily; a strong will-power carries us along, we scarcely know how. We move our feet mechanically; but I have not been on the glacier, my daughter, it is not safe at this season. I follow the less dangerous paths, and the ones I know to be secure; there are many such if you only know how to find them."

"Then it was you that I saw up there an hour ago. I saw your red hood way up there."

"What do you call way up there?"

"I don't know," said Catherine, "but I almost believed I saw you up on that highest peak above the clouds."

"What made you suppose I could go up so high? Do you take me for a fairy?"
"Dear aunt, don't be angry with me; you know there are good and bad fairies, and you might be one of the good kind. I begin to understand the language of these mountaineers now, and I often hear them say that you work like a fairy."

"They often tell me so to my face, but 'tis but a figure of speech, and I am no fairy, alas! I see that you have a lively imagination, and it is natural at your age. I should be sorry to have you as matter-of-fact as I am. Have you been spinning fairy tales all day, ma mignonne? I see that you have spun very little else."

"Alas, ma tante, I fear I have done nothing whatever."

"Don't cry, dear. All in good time; you must have patience."

"Ah! that is what you always say," cried out Catherine, almost spitefully; "you have too much patience, you treat me like a baby. If you only chose to tell me all, I could soon learn to spin."

"What! Do you reproach me? As though I were keeping a secret from you. I declare to you that I know of but one way to learn. There is no secret that will take the place of perseverance. You are sulking. Come, tell me what notion you have got in your fanciful brain."
"Yes, I will tell you all," said Catherine, and she seated herself on a great mossy stone beside Madame Colette. "I did something I ought not to have done, and it weighs on my conscience." Catherine then told her aunt how she had risen in the night and peeped through the crack in the door. "To be sure, I saw nothing at all and learned nothing, but that is because you were not in your room. Had you been there I should have played the spy on you and found out your secret."

"You would have discovered no secret," said Madame Colette, "for I have none. If you had gone through my chamber and kept on up to my workroom, which is over it, you might have seen me carding flax, and making what we call the clouds. As it is unhealthy to do such fine work in the house, on account of the tiny particles of flax which are inhaled, and fill the lungs and nostrils, I do this work in an open loft, where the air can circulate freely and carry the fine bits of flax far away, where they can do no one any harm. Tell me now, Catherine, why are you always thinking about clouds and talking about them? Do you fancy that when I speak of clouds I mean the clouds in the sky, when I am only talking of the fine soft down that I get from carding the flax, and which the country folks call a cloud,
because it is so soft and so light that there is nothing to equal it but a fleecy cloud?"

Catherine was very much ashamed to find how stupid she had been, and what a wonderful fabric she had built on so frail a foundation. Still she remembered her vision of the rosy cloud, and, hoping for an explanation, she told the whole story to her aunt.

Madame Colette listened patiently to the end without interrupting the child or ridiculing her. Instead of scolding her and bidding her be quiet, as Sylvanie would have done, she became quite thoughtful and interested in the reveries of her little niece. After a few moments of silence, she said: "I see that you love all that is strange and wonderful, but take care. I, too, was once but a fanciful child and dreamed of a rosy cloud, and afterward, when I was a young girl, I saw one. There was gold on its shoulder, and a beautiful great white feather on its head."

"What are you saying, ma tante? Your cloud wore a coat and a feather?"

"It is but a figure of speech, my child. I meant that it was a very brilliant, beautiful cloud, but that was all."

"It was inconstancy, a beautiful dream, nothing more, and was followed by a tempest, so that one
unhappy day I was left crushed to the ground, like your flowering apple-tree, and learned to put no more trust in faithless clouds. Beware of them, my child, especially of those that are rose-colored; they give promise of fair weather, and carry the lightning in their bosom. Come, take up your distaff and spin awhile, or better still, take a good nap and work afterward. We must never be discouraged. Dreams melt away, work remains."

Catherine began to spin while listening to her aunt, but she felt very sleepy. Little by little her eyes closed, her distaff began to seem heavier than usual, and finally it slipped from her fingers and fell to the ground.
“CATHERINE BEGAN TO SPIN WHILE LISTENING TO HER AUNT”
CHAPTER XIII.

SHE was suddenly shaken as if by an earthquake. Aunt Colette stood before her, and for the first time appeared to be very angry. Her scarlet hood was turned back over her shoulders, and her white hair floated round her handsome pale face like a halo. "You have gone to sleep, then, lazy girl? I gave you the choice, and you have chosen. You prefer dreaming to working. Get up, then, and follow me. You wish to learn my secret. Your wish shall be fulfilled."

Catherine arose, and, still half asleep, followed Tante Colette. She could hardly keep up with her, for the old lady walked swifter than the wind, and mounted with incredible speed a great staircase all built of emeralds and sapphires. They soon reached a glittering palace of diamonds, and, after walking over an ermine carpet and through crystal arches, found themselves on the roof of this wonderful edifice. "Now we are on the upper glacier," said her aunt, with a malicious laugh. "You must be brave enough to climb with me to the topmost peak. Catch
hold of my dress, and do not be afraid. The rosy cloud awaits you up there, and you have promised it to come."

Catherine seized Tante Colette's skirt, but soon found herself slipping on the ice. Aunt Colette said: "Take hold of the cord, hold tight, and fear not."

So saying, she held out a thread, so fine as scarcely to be visible. Catherine took hold of it, however, and though she pulled with all her might, it did not break.

In this way they arrived at the very summit of the glacier. When they had attained to the highest icy peak, Tante Colette seized Catherine's distaff, and planting it in the soft snow, cried out in an angry tone: "Since you are determined not to spin, you shall sweep."

With these words she handed Catherine an enormous broom, as bushy as a great pine-tree, which seemed, however, to be as light as a feather.

"Now, then," she cried, in a terrible, loud voice, "sweep! sweep!" and with that she pushed her off the mountain-top.
CHAPTER XIV.

Instead of falling down onto the rocks below, Catherine found herself floating in the air, suspended by the fine cord that she had rolled around her arm. She could walk on the clouds as easily as on the soft grass of the meadow.

"Sweep!" called out Madame Colette. "Sweep all those soft clouds into one great ball, and bring it to me. Don't leave a single one behind, for I need them all."

Catherine swept, swept with all her might, but could never work fast enough to please her aunt, who kept on screaming to her: "Faster! faster! better than that! Quick, quicker! Farther, farther! Do you suppose I mean to send you a cart and oxen to gather in those clouds?"

Catherine rushed hither and thither in the air, brushing before her great heaps of clouds with her immense broom. In an instant she would have made clean work of the whole sky. "Bring me the whole pile of them," cried Dame Colette; "push, push them here. I need them every one."
Catherine pushed and rolled the whole of them into a mass like an enormous snowball, so large that it covered all the top of the glacier.

"Now you must come back and help me. Wait, though, until I put on my spectacles," and she placed her large silver-rimmed glasses on her great beak of a nose.

"What is this?" said she. "I don't see your little pink cloud. Did you mean to deceive me? Do you suppose I intend to let him escape? Go instantly and catch him, and be careful not to let go of him this time."

The rosy cloud gave Catherine a famous chase. Here, there, everywhere blown about by the breeze, it was just about to disappear, when Catherine threw the end of the fine thread, by which she was suspended in the air, over the mischievous thing. He knew he was caught, and flew right into Catherine's apron, where, in a sweet, plaintive voice he began:

"Little blue apron that saved me before,  
Dear little apron, come save me once more!  
Good little Catherine, hide a poor sinner,  
Don't give me up to the terrible spinner."

Catherine returned to her aunt. She had tied her apron tightly up in a knot, and hoped that Madame Colette would not notice it. The old lady was very
excited, and clearly ready for business. She was standing before the great mass of snowy clouds, with her carding-combs in her hands, combing and carding them into fine wadding ready for the distaff. She worked so swiftly that the whole pile was soon carded, and as Catherine stooped over to take up some of the beautiful downy stuff in her hands, the little blue apron came untied and the rosy cloud fell in with the rest.

"Aha, you scamp!" cried out Tante Colette, seizing it with her sharp-toothed carding-combs. "You fancied I would not catch you at last. Get down into the pile; rosy as you are, you shall be carded and spun just like the rest."

"Aunt Colette! Please, Aunt Colette! Have pity on my little pink cloud. Please be merciful and don't spin my pretty cloud."

"Put it on your distaff," said Tante Colette. "There, it is carded already; now get to work this instant and spin it into a fine, fine thread, and quick, quick! Do you hear me?"

Catherine took up her distaff and, closing her eyes so as not to see the agony of the poor cloud, began to spin. She heard its sighs. Its voice grew weaker and weaker. She tried to throw down the distaff and run away, but her hands seemed glued to the stick
and she could not open them. A faint light dazzled her eyes; she opened them wide, and found herself stretched on the mossy stone beside her aunt, who was sleeping soundly.

L. of C.
CHAPTER XV.

SHE sat up and shook Madame Colette, who quickly waked up and gave her a kiss. "Well, well!" said she, "we have been a lazy pair, to be sure, lying here sound asleep, both of us, on this mossy old rock! Did you have a dream?"

"Yes, that I did, Aunt Colette! I dreamed that I could spin as well as you. But what do you suppose I was spinning? My little red cloud."

"Dear child," said Aunt Colette, "I may as well tell you that I spun mine long ago. The rosy cloud, it was my caprice, my fancy, my evil genius, my hard fate. I put it on my distaff, and good, honest, hard work turned my trouble into such a fine, delicate thread that I never felt its weight. Follow my example. The clouds will pass over us all; but we can be brave. When they come, put them on thy distaff, child, and spin them so fine that no storm can gather round thee."

Catherine did not understand exactly what Aunt Colette meant, but she never saw the rosy cloud again. When in three months time her mother came to see
her, she could spin six times better than at first, and after a few years she became as skilful as Aunt Colette, to whose fortune she succeeded at last and became famous among the lace-makers as The Little Cloud-spinner.

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