



## Short Stories for Children: v. 3

*Walter de la Mare*

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The publication of Short Stories for Children celebrates the fiftieth anniversary of Walter de la Mare's death. It is also the culmination of a major literary enterprise. For many people, Walter de la Mare (1873-1956) is as great a writer of fiction as of poetry. But, the majority of his short stories, of which there are a hundred, have long been unavailable. Short Stories brings them all together in three volumes in the first comprehensive collection to be published. The third and last volume, Short Stories for Children, starts with Broomsticks and Other Tales of 1925, with its twelve stories, and continues with The Lord Fish of 1933 with seven stories. It includes three distinctive stories, 'Pigtails, Ltd', 'The Thief' and 'A Nose', that have never been reprinted since they originally appeared in Broomsticks. Quirky, disparate, unpredictable, acutely observed, sometimes frightening, and often preoccupied with states of mind and personal identity, these stories have much in common with the adult stories. Some of them are peopled with giants, witches, kind elves, evil and spiteful fairies, and imprisoned maidens in castles, but most are not. We find ourselves in railway trains, a mansion in the City of London, another Elizabethan one in a mysterious tract of country, a remote farm house near the sea, a waterlogged forest, a drawing-room being watched by a fly; and, among other things, we encounter a wise monkey, a haunted cat, a fish magician, a baron transmogrified into a donkey, a thief desperate to be burgled, a man who believes he has a wax nose, and a godmother celebrating her 350th birthday. As in de la Mare's poems, everyday reality may at any time become undercut by disturbing uncertainty and dark, though not always malign, forces. A full understanding of the poems and stories is impossible without knowledge of both. Vivid and timeless, Bold's original woodcut designs and Rex Whistler's original engravings have been used to illustrate the two parts of the book. Punch on the children's stories: 'Whether Walter de la Mare is writing of scarecrows or piccaninnies, cats, fish, very old ladies, an admiral with a magic jacket or a godmother who could offer three centuries of life, he is enchanted and enchanting. There is a wisdom as well as magic -or perhaps one should say a magical wisdom.' TLS on Short Stories 1895-1926 and Short Stories 1927-1956: 'What strikes one most about [them] is how truly peculiar they are... it is good to see these dark and disquieting stories back in print.' Martin Seymour-Smith in Scotland on Sunday on Short Stories 1895-1926: 'He was so..."great" that, like all the greatest, his greatness functions as an assumption that goes hardly even recognized...the chief emotion is, as it should be, one of immense gratitude.' Lord David Cecil: 'Beautiful, enigmatic and disquieting stories.' Angela Carter: 'De la Mare is a master of mise-en-scene...Prose with the most vivid and unsettling intensity, which resembles some of what the surrealists were producing in France...' Contents of Short Stories for Children: (1) Broomsticks and Other Tales (1925): Pigtails, Ltd; The Dutch Cheese; Miss Jemima; The Thief; Broomsticks; Lucy; A Nose; The Three Sleeping Boys of Warwickshire; The Lovely Myfanwy; Alice's Godmother; Maria-Fly; Visitors. (2) The Lord Fish (1933): The Lord Fish; A Penny a Day; The Magic Jacket; Dick and the Beanstalk; The Scarecrow; The Old Lion; Sambo and the Snow Mountains.

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