BLUE PETER

By D. L. THWAITES
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A tale of the forest, a little boy, and his pine cone goblin friends.

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ON A BIG MOSSY LOG STOOD THE GOBLINS
"We are such stuff as dreams are made of—
And our little life is rounded with a sleep!"

—Shakespeare
Way in the cool depths of the far blue hills stood a cottage where a little boy lived with his Mum and Dad. He was a lovable little fellow, with little legs that looked almost too weak for his very round tum. He was always happy and full of fun and the twinkle in his big dark brown eyes just showed what an imp he was.

He loved to play under the pine and gum trees which grew around the cottage. His Daddy used to take him gathering pine cones for the fire, and when they reached home Peter would stand them up and pretend they were little men.

It was great fun for Peter when his Daddy would sit down and tell him all about the different kinds of pine trees on which the cones grew. Peter never tired of listening, because like his Daddy he loved trees.

One night, when Peter had been tucked up in bed, he asked for just one more story about the pine cones, but before his Daddy had finished Peter became drowsy and was soon fast asleep.
Everything was quiet and it must have been nearly morning when Peter heard a little voice calling him. He sat up and to his great surprise saw a cheeky little cone goblin peeping around the door. Peter jumped up quickly and wanted to pick the little chap up, but the goblin stepped back and said, "You love our pine trees, Peter, would you like to come and meet my cousins? They would love to tell you all about themselves."
Peter was excited and said he would love to come. He slipped his little blue pants and jersey on as quickly as he could, and followed the little goblin out of the cottage.

He led Peter down a path covered with moss, ferns and bluebells growing on each side. Peter had never been down that way before. It seemed like fairyland. He thought to himself, "I must remember my way, then I can come again and bring my Mummy and Daddy." On they went, walking on the soft green moss, and Peter could see his little goblin friend just in front of him.
Green ferns reached as high as Peter himself. He started thinking he might get lost only for that little goblin, but then, where was he? He looked and the cone goblin was nowhere to be seen! He wasn't in front of him any more and Peter became very frightened.

"Don't worry, little boy," said a kindly old lizard nearby. "Keep on that track. It is narrow and others look greener, but keep on that way."

Peter went on a little further, then he came to a creek with its smell of damp sand and water-cress. Sitting on the bank near him were two bunnies with their arms around each other.

The bunnies were near some toadstools and were looking hard at something; when Peter saw what they were looking at he nearly fell into the creek with surprise.

There on a big mossy log stood his little friend the cone goblin; around him were seven other goblins all looking hard at Peter and wondering who he could be.

One little fellow was dangling from a long strip of bark that was hanging right down from a high gum tree. Peter just stood in silence and stared.

"Don't be afraid, Peter; I am
Monty Pine," said the little goblin, who had shown him the way, "and these are all my cousins; we will tell you all about ourselves and be very good friends."

At first they all wanted to scamper away, but Monty told them that Peter was a kind little boy who would not hurt them, so they all crept back and sat in a row on the log and Peter and the bunnies sat on a stone to listen to their stories.

Monty Pine said, "My Grandfather used to grow in the big mountains in California; nowadays we are planted in many countries because we grow quickly and our wood is soft; saws and nails go through it easily. They make floors, and boxes in which lovely apples and oranges go to market."

Ben Bunya, a true Australian, biggest of them all, started in his gruff old voice to tell his story.

"I come from Queensland, my tree grows very tall. I am as big and heavy as a water-melon and perch right up at the top. In our cones there are rows and rows of sweet nuts. The Australian blackfellows would walk miles to their own trees to gather the nuts for food when they ripened each year."
Blue Peter was thrilled with these stories and moved up closer as Ken Kauri came out from behind a tree and showed himself. Peter then found that this shy fellow also came from the big mountains of Eastern Australia.
Ken Kauri was a very happy chap and spoke with a clear voice, "The wood from my tree is so soft and smooth that school boys can carve patterns and all kinds of useful things out of it with their pocket knives. Some of my cousins grow high up among the mountains in the cold snow country of New Zealand, but in the warmer mountains of Queensland, where pineapples and bananas grow, we are much bigger."

Ken Kauri then walked over to the long strip of bark hanging from the gum tree and, shaking it, he said:

"Now, Master Murray Pine, you are also a little Australian chappie; slip down here and tell our new playmate, Blue Peter, what your history is."

Obediently Murray Pine slipped down his bark rope onto the log and bowed to Peter.

"We are strong and tough," said Murray Pine, "and many of my folk live along the River
Murray in the sandy country.

"Lots of bunny rabbits make their homes in the soft sandy ground around our roots. People have many uses for our wood on farms, but there is much hot dry weather where we come from and we always like to hear stories from our tired friend, Droopy Cedar, down there, because he comes from cool mountain valleys."

"Yes," drawled Droopy Cedar, "our mountains of India are the highest in the world. We are grown in Australia for our beauty in the coolest parts of people's gardens, and graceful, drooping fellows we are."

Then he yawned, "I'm tired of talking; Peter, you ask Freddie Fir, sitting on that leaf up there, why he is here and I will have another sleep."

Peter was just thinking what a lazy old goblin Droopy was when there was a loud buzz; they all looked up and saw Daryl, the dragon-fly zooming towards them. The goblins were all startled and poor Freddie Fir tried so hard to get out of the way that he fell off the log into the creek—splash! and had to be dragged out by his big ear.
While the other goblins were helping him to dry himself, Peter heard the two bunnies talking about their coach and saying they would be late home for breakfast if it didn't come very soon. Peter was beginning to wonder when he would see his Mummy and Daddy again and whether this was all a dream. Freddie Fir was dry again and Peter heard him say:

"Well, long ago we all lived in the cold wet mountain valleys of India. We like the sparkling raindrops clinging to our needles like diamonds, and dense fogs to blow through our branches."

An old forest of fir trees is still growing in the country
where Santa Claus first came from, but in those days he was called Saint Nicholas.

"That was where the little old men called gnomes first came from, too," said Freddie Fir. "What mischief they got up to; they were worse than us for playing tricks on people, but in those days—" Bang! Bang! Snap! Rumble! Patter—Patter—Patter! went something. Peter and the goblins looked around and there, coming along a track through the titree and bracken fern was a little wooden cart with two shafts pulled by a lizard.

He was running very fast and was saying to himself, "My word, those bunny boys will be cross with me for being so late."

"Oh!" thought Peter, "that's why he's in such a hurry. It's the bunnies' coach;" Then the cart stopped just near the bunnies, in they jumped and away they drove, without saying a word to the goblins.
Peter thought that they were too shy to talk and wondered if Bert Beetle would get run over, as he was on the rabbits' track. Bert Beetle had just passed "Toadstool Villa," the ants house.

"He will jump out of the way," said Ben, in his gruff voice. "Those rabbit lads never will learn manners!"
"Manners! What are manners?" piped up a little chap with long ears, who was standing on a tree-fern.

"Oh," said old Ben, looking at Peter, "this is our little Cedric Cypress; he is a well-mannered little chap, but he does not know what the word 'manners' means!" Then said old Ben to little Cedric, "'Manners' means to act and speak nicely to all, no matter who they are. Now tell Blue Peter your story."

In a tiny voice this little goblin said that he came from sunny California and that his trees were tall dark fellows like great needles. He had some very graceful relations called Lawsons, with flat leaves that looked like lace.

Peter was not so shy now and pointing to a little goblin standing on the log, who was holding Ben's ear with one hand and a leaf with the other, he said, "You are the only one left that I haven't heard from. Who are you and what is your story?"

This bright little chap with big ears told Peter that his trees grew in England and Russia before they came to Australia and that his name was Larry Larch. "Our light green needles are soft and pretty in their little bunches," he said, "but they all go yellow in autumn and drop."
"What were we doing here before Peter came to see us?" said Ken Kauri.

"Ah! Ah! Ah!" yawned Droopy. "I may be half-asleep, but I don't forget like you fellows. We were on our way to see the new baby 'possum in that gum tree down by the waterfalls."

You know, the little 'possum that that kookaburra was laughing about because of his big black eyes and the way he stares."

"Yes," said Murray Pine, "let's go." So off they all
trooped one behind the other, led by Ben, down a rabbit-track under some spreading bracken fern. There was Ben, Freddy, Ken, Larry, Cedric, Monty, Murray, Droopy and, last of all, Peter.

"Well," said Peter to himself, "this is the funniest thing I have ever been in—I do wish my Mummy and Daddy could be here to see us—but then how strange it all is," he thought, as he walked along behind the goblins past lovely tree-ferns and around great black butts of towering gum trees.

"Ha! Ha! Ha! He! He! He!" someone was laughing, and Peter saw a sleepy lizard standing on the doorstep of his log house. He was laughing heartily and enjoying the pranks of the goblins as they passed him. Murray Pine asked Mr. Lizard, "How much further have we to go; this acorn is getting very heavy?"

"You’re nearly there, if you are going to see Terry Possum," said the lizard. "Yes," said Peter, as the old sleepy darted forward and caught a fly. "That was smart work," said Peter; "I didn’t know you could jump as quickly as that."
Soon they came to an open place where three big white gum trees were standing close together. They had huge trunks and shaggy bark, and the green grass all around made it a lovely place to play. Peter started playing hide-and-seek with the goblins around the gum trees, and couldn't those goblins run! Even little Murray and Cedric could always race Peter to the home tree. Peter soon got tired of that and he told the goblins that if they all went into the scrub and found some bark he would make them a little house like a blackfellow's wurlie.
“Ought to be easy for a fit man like me; I’ll strip all the bark off that log,” said Big Ben, pointing.

“No, we can do some; we’ll show you we have got muscles,” piped up Cedric and Murray.

“We will all do our bit, then it’s easy,” said Ken; “and what would Peter think if we were lazy.”

Well, they very soon had a big heap of bark stacked up in
front of Peter, who was sitting down plaiting kangaroo grass while he was waiting. Peter collected a few sticks and stones and soon had a lovely little bark hut built, with the help of the goblins. Then Peter made some brown paint out of mud and water and painted two words—“Scrub Hut”—on the inside of a piece of bark over the door. They thought that they would have a big stone for a table, so they soon found one.

“This will do,” said Larry. “Right, all lift,” said Ben—then sixteen little knees bent and little arms tugged. Up came the heavy flat stone. “Drop it and run!” yelled Peter.

The little fellows dropped the stone back into its hole and all ran in fright.

“There was a great big scorpion under that stone,” said Peter. “I think we had better go.”

Just then two gorgeous coloured parrots flew over; they were chattering very loudly to each other and seemed to be talking at once.

“They are saying something about a hare,” said Monty. “I can understand parrot language and those birds have seen a cruel fox sneaking after a poor old hare.”
"We must warn him," drawled Droopy.

"Yes, yes," said a chorus of voices from the others, so off they set to find the hare.

"Will Mr. Hare be in his burrow, Ben?" asked Monty.

"No, hares never dig a burrow like rabbits do," said Ben,

"they just squat under a bush and when they run it takes a strong wind to catch them."

The goblins and Peter were all spread out in line searching the scrub for the poor hare.

Peter said, "Well, Ben, if Mr. Hare can run like the wind, however will the wicked old fox catch him?"
"Ah," said Ben, "the old fox might take a short cut; he will be cunning and use all the tricks he knows."

"Perhaps he doesn't know THIS trick," said Peter. "My Daddy told it to me. All you have to do is to sit on the ground near where the foxes live and give some long shrill whistles. Mr. Fox hears and thinks it is some poor little bunny rabbit in trouble which he could easily catch—so up comes Mr. Fox and you've got him!"

"That sounds good," said Ben; "we'll try that. We must save Mr. Henry Hare from going into the pot for old fox's tea if we can."

Just then there was a Thump! Thump! Thump! and a Swish! and the poor frightened hare rushed past the goblins and was out of sight in the bushes in a flash.
"I don't like foxes," said Larry, as they all stared at the swaying bushes where the hare disappeared.

"We’ll catch him," said Ben. "Over there in the creek is a big pool and over the pool is a long thin log. We’ll go and sprinkle dry sand all along the log."

They did this and then Ben said, "Now all you fellows hide while Cedric goes to the other side of the creek by another track. I will wait on the bank under the log with a big stone."

Little Cedric did as he was told and when he got there he hid in some ferns and set up a long shrill whistle. The old fox heard the whistle and turned away from the right track.

On he came, trot, trot, trot, trot—straight for the log. He only got half way over when there was a loud chorus of yells from the goblins and Splash! went the old fox into the deep black pool. He went right down under, and when he came up he could just reach the bank. His eyes were fixed on Ben—Whump!—Ben’s big stone came down right on the cruel old fox’s head, and that was the end of him.

The happy goblins now set off to find Mr. Hare and tell him the good news. They had not gone far when they found him tired out, hiding under a bush,
shivering with fright. He was so grateful when he heard the old fox was dead that he asked them all to sit down and he would find them something to eat and they would have a party.

He went away and soon returned with his pockets full of
blackberries, crab apples, wild cherries, and cranberries! They all sat down and each put a wide stringy bark leaf in front of him for a plate. They talked about ants, grass-hoppers, bees, scorpions, lizards, and butterflies, and had a real picnic lunch together.

It was Monty who started off again down the track, and
soon they were out in the dense scrub where the billy buttons and orchids grow. They came to the home of Mr. Terry 'Possum in the thickest of the trees.

"Here he is," shouted Cedric.

"I saw him first," squeaked Murray.

"He's sitting on a bough," said Monty.

"What big black eyes he has," drawled Droopy.

"Look at his long tail," said Larry.

"Please don't frighten the lad," said Ken.

"I'm going to get on his back," said Freddie.

"You'll do nothing of the sort," growled Ben. "There's too much talk, find the 'possum some nuts; actions speak louder than words."

So all the goblins went different ways into the woods and soon returned with all sorts of nuts.

Old Ben said, "Little Terry is frightened. Let us leave him to his lunch and go back to our big gum trees in the clearing."

There they met the Kookaburra. He was still laughing and said, "Heigh Ho! Boys. Did you see the baby 'possum with his great black eyes? Eyes like saucers, I would call them. Ha! Ha! Ha! He! He! He! Ho! Ho! Ho!"
Peter thought he would love to see the Kookaburra swoop down and catch a snake, and fly up with it very high, and then drop the old snake to the ground and kill it.

All of a sudden the Kookaburra flew away and down swooped a big black eagle. Catching Peter by the belt with his strong beak, away he flew, and Peter could hear the tiny cries of the goblins as they called him back.

Then the eagle let him go, and he felt himself falling through the air, and as the gum trees seemed to be getting away he flew.
bigger and coming up to meet him, there was a bump. He found that he had fallen out of bed and his Mummy was by his side.

"Where are all those pine goblins, Mummy?" said Peter.

"You have been dreaming, little boy, and now it's time to get up," said his Mummy.

Peter sat up and rubbed his eyes. The same fat elephant was on the mantelpiece, and his precious horse was still on the floor near his bed, where he had left it.

THE END OF THE TALE.