

KALEIDOSCOPE

Eleanor Farjeon

Illustrated by Edward Ardizzone

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About the Book

Anthony grew up in the loveliest place in the world - his father called it the Eye of the Earth. But to Anthony, the 'eye of the earth' was the old mill-pond near his home - a place of mystery and enchantment. Anthony's childhood was full of happy moments, and sometimes strange ones, for he had been touched with magic as soon as he was born . . .

A wonderful and timeless collection of stories, beautifully illustrated by renowned artist, Edward Ardizzone.

Eleanor Farjeon

KALEIDOSCOPE



Illustrated by

EDWARD ARDIZZONE

RHCP DIGITAL

*To Stanley from Eleanor for Christmas 1963 with love
always.*



Foreword

At a time when I was writing more books for grown-ups than for children, I had for a friend a man ten years older than I was. We often talked about our early days, and related incidents, I of my childhood in London, he of his in Somerset. We told things of very different kinds, not only because his memories, earlier than mine, were those of a little boy and mine of a little girl, but because I had grown up in a town and he in the country. The things he remembered had happened to him in the weather that blows around hills and grass and clear water, and the people he lived among were villagers whose knowledge and superstitions were born of that same weather. The little boy's father was their rector, a man of great learning and common sense, whose sermons were full of truth spoken in words that shrewd and simple people could follow. Coming out of church one Sunday morning, the little boy's best friend, the village carpenter, said, 'Ah, my dear, your feyther's a witty man.' By 'witty' he meant not humorous, but wise. This saying pleased the child's father, whose deep love of words went down to the roots where they grow flowers for the English tongue. From his cradle days the child heard both good sense and good poetry in his home. They criss-crossed his young mind, and one was as real to him as the other. What he spoke of to me in his middle years was not so often tales of his childhood as childhood's moments of bright happiness and eager expectation, or of acute vexation or disappointment; and because from birth he was full of poetry, everything he said was touched with magic. These ardent moments stayed in my imagination,

and out of their seeds grew the stories I wrote and called *Kaleidoscope*.

They made a small book, complete in itself; but before they were published I tried to combine with them another set of fantasies, which really had nothing to do with my friend's recollections, or with him. They sprang out of adult events which are past and forgotten. The events of childhood do not pass, but repeat themselves like the seasons of the year. Before *Kaleidoscope* went out of print I knew that its two halves had never belonged. Today I have no hesitation in keeping only the half in which my friend sowed the seed. His name, by the way, was not Anthony. We agreed that his own name should remain a secret.

I did, however, give a clue to his identity on the dedication page, by which the friends who knew him best could recognize him. That secret can be told now. One summer day, when he was three years old, 'Anthony' was nowhere to be found. The household made an anxious search for him. He was run to earth at last among the pea-sticks in the kitchen garden, stripping the young peas from the vines, and eating them, pods and all. From that day 'Pod' became his family nickname. It is still the name by which we who loved him remember him.

ELEANOR FARJEON
1963

Hampstead.

THE EYE OF THE EARTH



1

The Eye of the Earth

ANTHONY GREW UP in the loveliest spot in the world. His Father always said it was the Eye of the Earth. The first time Anthony heard his Father say this he was so little that the words were just sounds without a meaning. Some sounds had meanings already; 'mee-ow!' meant pussy, and for a long time anything as soft as a pussycat, the plush cushion for instance, or the sealskin on Mother's coat-sleeve. And the sound of a spoon on a plate meant something to eat; and songs hummed very softly meant going to sleep, or if sung louder they meant dancing up and down on

somebody's knee; and the sound of splashing water meant having a bath. But words themselves did not mean things to Anthony the first time he heard his Father say, 'My dear, this is the Eye of the Earth.' He was on his Mother's arm, and his Mother and Father were standing at the door of the house on the hill-side, looking down the sloping orchard to the mill-pond. It was a day in spring. The noble rolling hill-sides swept down into the valley and up again, so deep that the hollows were full of quietness and solitude, yet so broad that they were full of light. The big roads lay over the hill-tops where they could not be seen; but these grand green flowery slopes that seemed both steep and gradual, whose large curves folded upon themselves and overlapped, hiding one valley bottom from the next, and making the brown brooks rush round many corners—these mighty slopes that shut away the world but not the sky, had no big roads among them, only lanes, linking one valley with its neighbour, and binding together the little villages and farms that rested on their sides. Because the hills were so high, the tallest roofs, and even the tallest trees, of these homesteads and hamlets did not show against the sky, but only against the green grass rolling above them, up, up, until they touched the blue air and the clouds. Looking across from one hill-side to another, the far away villages seemed only like clusters of mushrooms crouched upon the slopes. One such village lay midway up the hill behind Anthony's home; from the village a lane wound downward to the old stone house standing alone above its orchard full of fruit trees. The orchard occupied a gentle slope, at the foot of which the land became a shelf, long, flat, and narrow, before it dropped rather steeply into dimpled stream-fed hollows. This shelf of land under the orchard was filled almost from edge to edge with smooth, bright water. There never was a mill-pond so still and shining. It was a table of water, set in a frame of iris blades and kingcup leaves. Here and there a very small growth of water-loving

bushes hid the nest of a moorhen; and as the table of water stretched away from the lane it presently dwindled to a beautiful forked stream, the upper arm of which went singing on into the lonely hills, while the lower arm gurgled in small cascades into the valley. The V-shaped region held by the fork of the stream was all ups-and-downs, some dry, some waterlogged, shaded with islands of trees, among whose roots numberless streamlets foamed and trickled; a region of perils, spells, and adventures. A never-broken spell rested, too, on the still mill-pond; it lay in a motionless trance, holding a thousand sleeping secrets, which might at any moment be surprised. The Enchanted Princess—was she the golden iris at the brink, or the swift moorhen, skimming the surface on a streak of silver?

The mill-house, with its big dank mossy wheel, abutted on the lane below the orchard; it was always icy cold, that dark groove between the buildings, where the mill-wheel lurked with its black dripping boxes; sometimes churning and turning, sometimes motionless, and each box carrying its secret. But a wizard's wheel of magic, not a fairy's, Anthony thought, when he began to think. There was something a little frightening about the great wheel dripping in the shadows. He did not linger long there, but passed down to the gate beside the mill-house which led to the ledge of grass that ran beside the oblong pond. You could walk by the flat pond on this flat ledge, and to a child the outer edge of the green walk was a precipice, falling sharply into the hollows laced with streams, and thick in spring with primroses—other flowers too, but primroses more than any. The mill-house gate was the way in for men. But jammed against its hinge, supporting it, was a cleft willow-tree. The great split in the roots, and the two rotting woody caves formed by the hollow trunk, did not prevent the tree from growing leaves. Children squeezed through the gap, and in summer the leaves shimmered over their heads as they got through, but in winter the tree seemed not so friendly to

them. Suppose one day the tree should catch you fast? This thought came sometimes to Anthony as he crept through, in his little boyhood. But it was the only way in to the magic of the mill-pond. If you went through the gate, you would miss something.

By this time Anthony had often come to hear his Father's words: 'This is the Eye of the Earth.'

Before he understood it all, the word 'eye' had got its meaning for him. That clear shining spot with which his Mother looked at him, and into which he looked to see his Mother, was her eye. His Father, standing at the house-door saying, 'This is the Eye of the Earth,' took in all he saw as he said it: not only the orchard where the speckled chickens pecked, and the black and pink pigs rootled, and the ducks waddled down hill to the water; not only the shelf of water set in gold and purple flowers, with the moorhen darting like a shooting-star over the surface; not only the streams beyond it and below it, and the many wooded islets full of promise; not only the few lovely acres which were the family domain: he took in the whole valley as he said it, and the villages on either slope, and the net of lanes with all the flowers and creatures that were in them.

But to Anthony, from the moment the words had a meaning, the earth's eye was the mill-pond, shining up at him like his Mother's eye through the orchard blossom as he looked down from the house, inviting him to come, come close, come closer, and look through that beautiful eye, and see what it saw in heaven, and what it held in earth.



2

Baa and 'Lla

ANTHONY HAD A nurse called Baa. At least, he called her Baa, though her name was really Barbara. She had been with him almost ever since he was born, and in the early days at bath-time, when he lay wet and kicking on Barbara's knees, she rolled him up in the soft warm towel, and chattered to him as she dried him, and pulled his toes.

'Who's Barbara's ducky? *Qua-quaa!* says the duck. Who's Barbara's lammy? *Ba-baa!* says the lamb. Who's my dove? *Croo-croo!* says the dove. Who's my wee calf? *Moo-mooo!* says the calf, *moo-a-moo-a-mooo!*

Then she would eat him up with kisses.

After a time Anthony began to say the sounds after her, '*Qua-quaa! Ba-baa! Croo-crooo! Moo-mooo!*' and Barbara called his Mother to come and hear how clever he was. And one day, when they weren't playing the game at all, his Mother came to the door and said, 'Barbara!' Then Anthony wriggled on his nurse's lap and said, '*Ba-baa!*' and they laughed and thought him cleverer than ever. After that he always called Barbara 'Baa!' and so did everybody else.

Some people begin life with no nursemaids, but Anthony began life with two. His Mother had wanted a little girl to give her a hand with things, Anthony among them, and Mrs Biddley in the village knew Mrs Ramble in the village across the valley, who had a sister in the village over the hill, who had a big family. 'Sons and darters,' said Mrs Biddley; 'some o' the darters might suit.'

'Will you ask Mrs Ramble to ask her sister?' said Anthony's Mother.

Mrs Biddley did so, and in due course two plump little damsels presented themselves. They were just the same height, and had just the same noses, and if one hadn't had blue eyes instead of brown, you couldn't have told the difference.

'Did you want a nurserymaid, ma'am?' said one of them.

'Yes, my dear. You are—?'

'Mrs Ramble's nieces, ma'am.' Both little girls dropped quick little curtseys, and Anthony's Mother smiled at them, and asked the blue-eyed one, 'What is your name?'

'Ella, please, ma'am.'

'And yours?'

'Barbara, please, ma'am,' said the brown-eyed damsel.

'And which is the nurserymaid?' asked Anthony's Mother.

There was a moment's pause, and then they said, 'We're twins, ma'am.'

'Twins,' repeated Anthony's Mother.

'Yes, please, ma'am.' And the little girls dropped two more curtseys.