**Bad girl.**

**From Very Short Stories by W K Clifford.
Age Rating 6 to 8.**

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**She was always called the bad girl, for she had once, when she was very little, put out her tongue at the postman. She lived alone with her grandmother and her three brothers in the cottage beyond the field, and the girls in the village took no notice of her. The bad girl did not mind this, for she was always thinking of the cuckoo clock. The clock stood in one corner of the cottage, and every hour a door opened at the top of its face, and a little cuckoo came out and called its name just the same number of times that the clock ought to have struck, and called it so loudly and in so much haste that the clock was afraid to strike at all. The bad girl was always wondering whether it was worse for the clock to have a cupboard in its forehead, and a bird that was always hopping in and out, or for the poor cuckoo to spend so much time in a dark little prison. "If it could only get away to the woods," she said to herself, "who knows but its voice might grow sweet, and even life itself might come to it!" She thought of the clock so much that her grandmother used to say-- "Ah, lassie, if you would only think of me sometimes!" But the bad girl would answer-- "You are not in prison, granny dear, and you have not even a bee in your bonnet, let alone a bird in your head. Why should I think of you?"**

**One day, close by the farm, she saw the big girls from the school gathering flowers. "Give me one," she said; "perhaps the cuckoo would like it." But they all cried, "No, no!" and tried to frighten her away. "They are for the little one's birthday. To-morrow she will be seven years old," they said, "and she is to have a crown of flowers and a cake, and all the afternoon we shall play merry games with her." "Is she unhappy, that you are taking so much trouble for her?" asked the bad girl. "Oh, no; she is very happy: but it will be her birthday, and we want to make her happier." "Why?" "Because we love her," said one; "Because she is so little," said another; "Because she is alive," said a third. "Are all things that live to be loved and cared for?" the bad girl asked, but they were too busy to listen, so she went on her way thinking; and it seemed as if all things round--the birds, and bees, and the rustling leaves, and the little tender wild flowers, half hidden in the grass--answered, as she went along-- "Yes, they are all to be cared for and made happier, if it be possible."**

**"The cuckoo clock is not alive," she thought. "Oh, no; it is not alive," the trees answered; "but many things that do not live have voices, and many others are just sign-posts, pointing the way." "The way! The way to what, and where?" "We find out for ourselves;--we must all find out for ourselves," the trees sighed and whispered to each other. As the bad girl entered the cottage, the cuckoo called out its name eleven times, but she did not even look up. She walked straight across to the chair by the fireside, and kneeling down, kissed her granny's hands.**