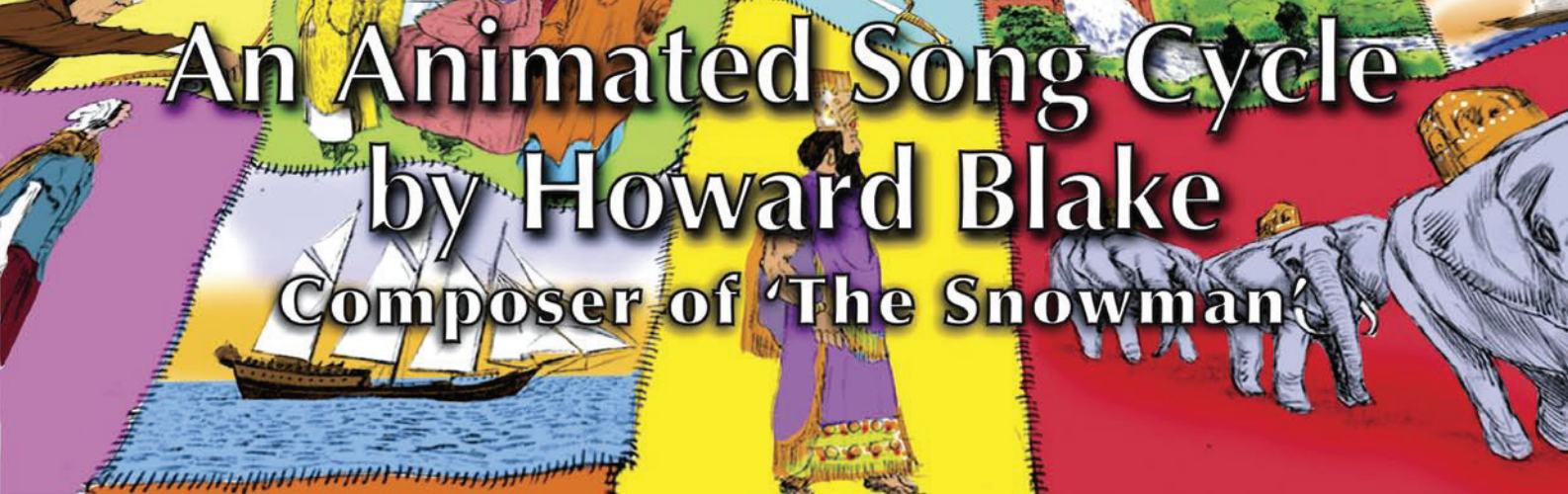


THE COUNTERPANE

An Animated Song Cycle
by Howard Blake
Composer of 'The Snowman'



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What is 'The Land of Counterpane'?

Poems by

Robert Louis Stevenson

PROLOGUE

The poet and novelist **Robert Louis Stevenson** (1850-1894) was a sickly child confined to his bed, the covering of which was a vivid patchwork quilt, at that time known as a 'counterpane'. The pictures on it led him to flights of imagination, which he later recalled in his collection of poems, 'A Child's Garden of Verses'. Ten of these poems were used to create this sequence of songs for children's chorus and orchestra which relate the extraordinary progress of the young genius from sickness and despair to an overwhelming success as a writer by the discovery and development of his amazingly vivid imagination that was to produce the immortal adventure yarns 'Treasure Island' and 'Kidnapped' and the iconic psychological thriller 'Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde'.

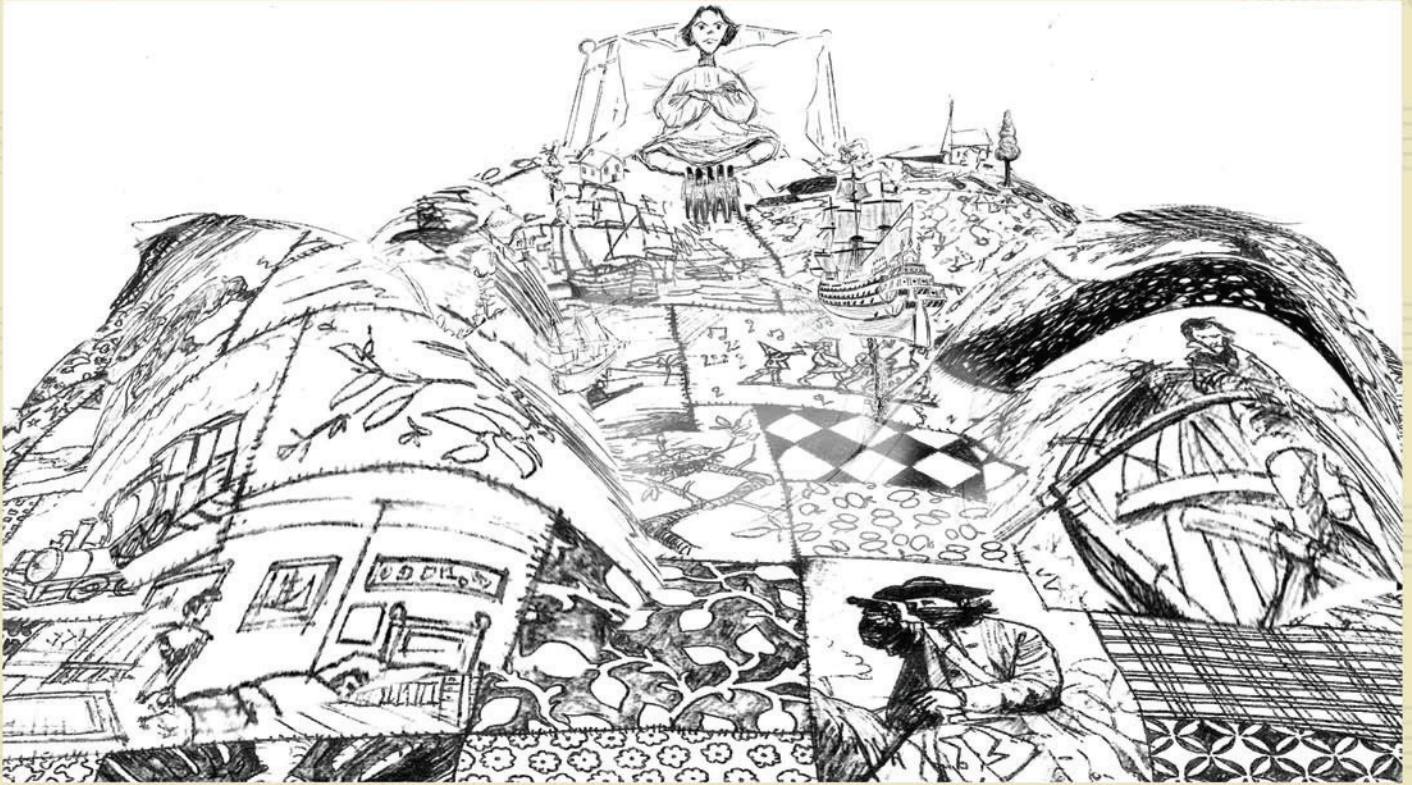
Composer and music director **Howard Blake** (1938 -) is best-known for having written the music for the much-loved children's animated film of 'The Snowman' including its universally-known hit-song 'Walking in the Air'. The film is perhaps the longest-running Christmas television classic of all time and will achieve its 32nd year of prime-time broadcasting in 2014. Howard also developed 'The Snowman' into a full-length stage show which has run in the West End for sixteen consecutive years and is now signed for a further ten. The project could be seen as a contender to follow in 'The Snowman's' footsteps and is likely to find a similarly wide audience.



The pictures on the counterpane provide the inspiration for a series of episodes following the vivid imagination of the child. The concept is a new and unique avenue to explore the possibilities of animated film. The script consists of songs, each of which tells a story engaging the viewer in the child's fantasies. Building on the concept which he developed to such great effect in *The Snowman*, Howard Blake makes a new and unique use of animated film in which the songs and their lyrics provide a dynamic script.

Prologue

Music by
Howard Blake



We are in mid-19th century Edinburgh and the elegant interiors of 17 Heriot Row, the Stevenson family home. The seven year old Robert Louis Stevenson (Louis) is confined to bed with doctor and Mrs Cunningham (his nanny) shaking their heads in despair. They leave and Louis rummages under the sheets and pulls out two toy soldiers. He stands them up on the counterpane which has turned into a landscape, revealing toy ships, trees and houses, with Louis appearing like a 'giant great and still that sits upon the pillow-hill.'

(Spoken over music by RLS as a man)

*When I was sick and lay a-bed
I had two pillows at my head
And all my toys beside me lay
To keep me happy all the day*

*And sometimes for an hour or so
I watched my leaden soldiers go,
With different uniforms and drills
Among the bedclothes, through the hills;*

*And sometimes sent my ships in fleets
All up and down among the sheets;
Or brought my trees and houses out
And planted cities all about.*

*I was the giant great and still
That sits upon the pillow-hill,
And sees before him, dale and plain,
The pleasant land of counterpane.*

Windy Nights

Main title over- 'The Land of Counterpane' as RLS scrutinises a square of the quilt depicting a masked highwayman galloping on a horse. While the titles have been running the day has become overcast and the night has been approaching. RLS lifts the square of the counterpane and the highwayman gallops forth from the folds of the quilt. As he does so the folds become the banks of grass, gullies and uneven pathways under rain, wind and glittering moonlight. He is riding to intercept a stage-coach on a perilous cliff road by the sea. He seizes the reins of the coach-horses and brandishes his pistols. The travellers throw up their hands in horror and reach for their jewels and valuables. Zoom into the highway-man's face to find it is the boy, RLS! In a vivid flash of lightning RLS sees militiamen are galloping to the rescue. In the nick of time he spurs the horse away hotly pursued through streams and thickets until he is on the edge of a black, rocky precipice. The militia-men are closing in on him, shots are fired. RLS leaps his horse into the turbulent sea. We see him falling with fear and excitement at the impossible danger. But as he falls the cliffs became the walls of his bedroom and the sea becomes the folds in his sheets as he slides back into bed. He smooths back his hair and looks guiltily over his shoulder as his mother enters. He rapidly puts his head down and pretends to be fast asleep. Unfortunately he can't prevent a sneeze (from all the rain) and his mother fusses over him, seeing that he is very flushed (from all that riding) and appears to have a cold. She pulls up the counterpane to keep him warm and we see the highwayman as an innocent pane folding back into the quilt. She turns down the wick of the night-light and creeps out of the room. Fade to black.



Whenever the moon and stars are set,
Whenever the wind is high,
All night long in the dark and wet
A man goes riding by.
Late in the night when the fires are out Why
does he gallop and gallop about?

Whenever the the trees are crying aloud,
And ships are tossed at sea,
By on the highway, low and loud
By at the gallop goes he.
By at the gallop he goes and then
By he comes back at the gallop again.



Singing

Fade in morning light through the window-blinds. Louis finds a picture of an organ man in the counterpane. He has a highly-decorated pipe-organ with all sorts of different characters painted on it. A painted bird comes to life, singing and flying up into a tree. But the 'tree' turns out to be the yard-arm of a large sailing-ship. We pan down to find a sailor singing and coiling rope on the deck. We pan further as if passing along a frieze of images. A junk passes and we see Japanese children singing on a bridge. Beneath a Moorish archway two Spanish children dance flamenco. The organ man is winding the organ on top of which is a tray of match-boxes for sale. We move in to see that it is actually Louis who is the organ man. It starts to rain and he pulls up his scarf against the rain - actually Louis' bedsheets. He is still wearing a bowler hat. A box of matches lies on the bedside table.



*Of speckled eggs the birdie sings And
nests among the trees;*

*The sailor sings of ropes and things In
ships upon the seas.*

*The children sing in far Japan, The
children sing in Spain;*

*The organ with the organ man Is singing
in the rain*



Where Go the Boats?

Mrs Cunningham pulls open the blinds and Louis sees that he's still got one of the matchboxes from the organ man's tray. As she leaves the room he sees in the counterpane a picture of a boat on a little country stream. He takes a match from the box and pushes it through the cover, putting on a piece of paper as the sail. The picture starts to flow along with the sound of the rain and Louis (growing small) climbs into the match-box boat and starts to drift serenely through an idyllic world of giant water plants and dragonflies. But the stream broadens and starts to become dangerously full of rapids. Louis becomes increasingly alarmed as he realises he's approaching a waterfall which he cannot avoid. He grabs at what looks like a bouy but it is in fact a fisherman's float. He is yanked out of the river, avoiding the waterfall, but is dumped into what we see is a copper bathtub. Mrs Cunningham is pouring steaming soapy water all over him from a large jug!



*Dark brown is the river,
Golden is the sand.
It flows along for ever ,
With trees at either hand.*

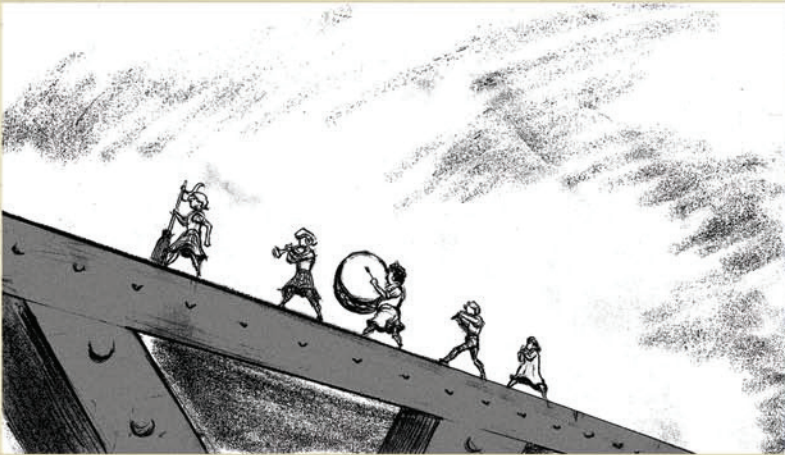
*On goes the river
And out past the mill,
way down the valley,
Away down the hill.*

*Green leaves a-floating,
Castles of the foam,
Boats of mine a -boating-
Where will all come home?*

*Away down the river,
A hundred miles or more,
Other little children
Shall bring my boats ashore.*

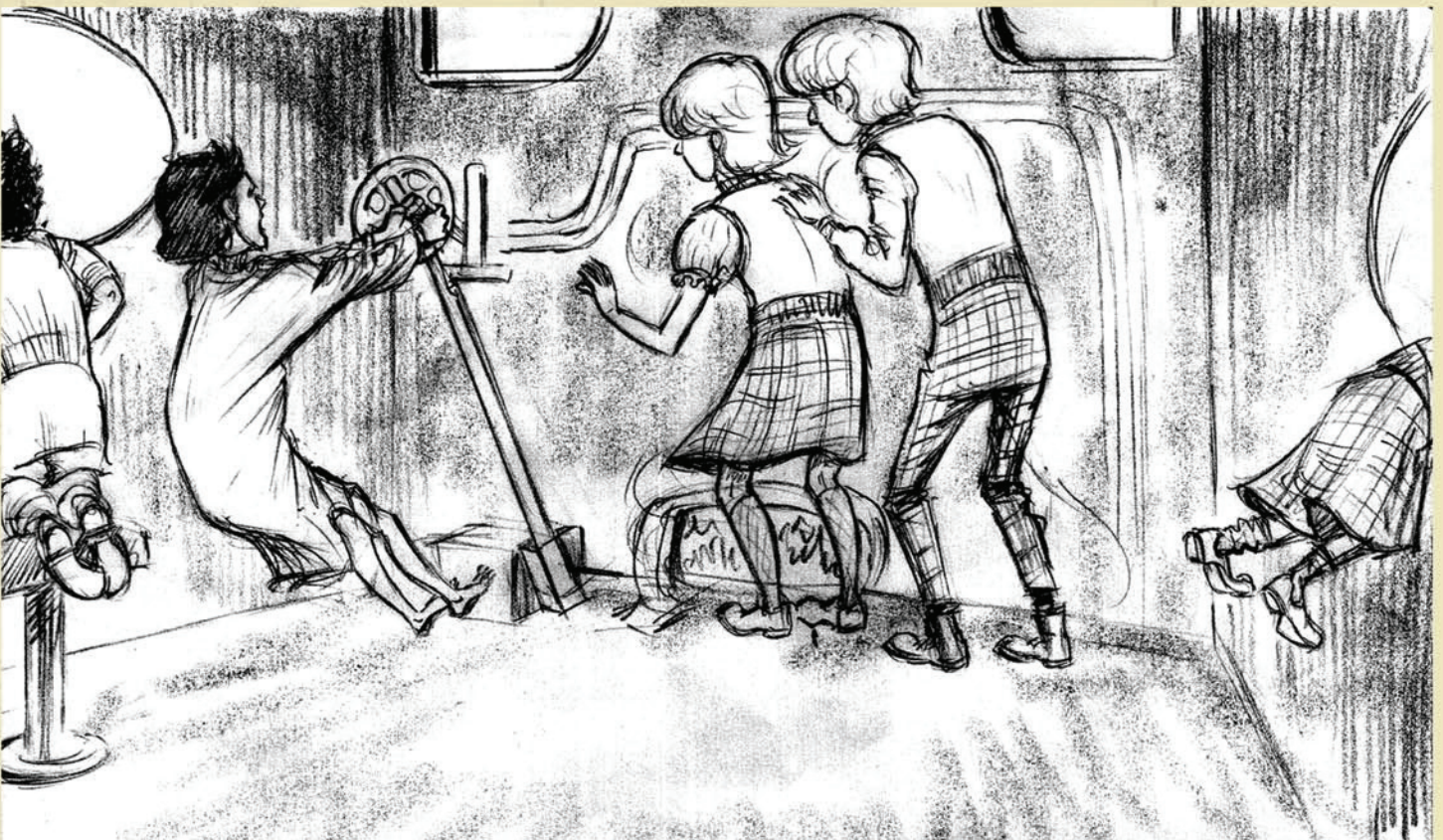


Marching Song



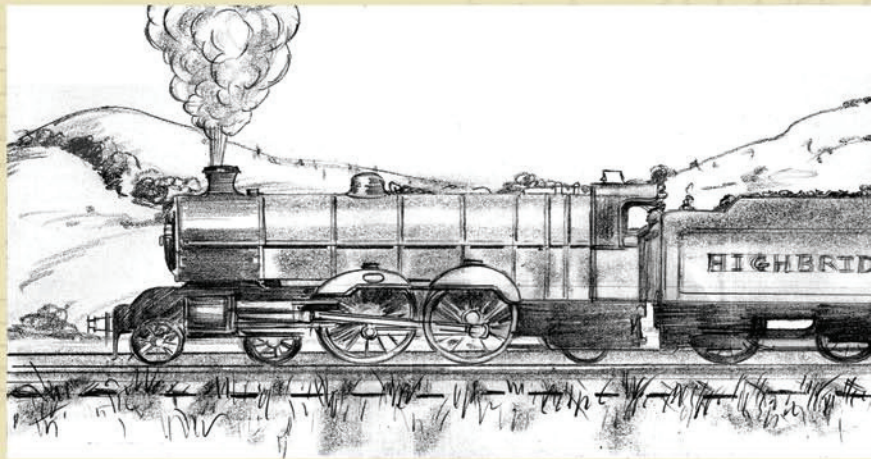
*Bring the comb and play upon it Marching here we come!
Willie cocks his highland bonnet, Johnnie beats the drum.
Mary Jane commands the party Peter leads the rear
Feet in time alert and heavy Each a Grenadier!
All in the most martial manner Marching double-quick
While the napkin like a banner Waves upon a stick!*

As Mrs. Cunningham bustles off, Louis picks up a comb and paper and plays a snatch of Scottish music. A tiny childrens' band marches out of and up the counterpane. Mary Jane leads them holding up a broom with a napkin tied to it, Johnnie beats a drum, Willie plays a comb and paper, and Peter brings up the rear waving a flag. The motley five are silhouetted on the top of a 'ridge'. We see that they are marching along the extreme top girder of the Firth of Forth railway bridge, but blissfully unaware of this. From hundreds of feet below we hear a steam train whistle and the five look down in horror to see an express train (The Flying Scot?) roaring along towards them belching great clouds of smoke, which billows up around them so that they can't see where they're treading. They tumble and slide down one of the steep angles of the bridge, crashing into the cabin. The train driver is pushed out by Johnny's bass drum, but somehow transforms his fall into a magnificent swallow dive into the river far below.



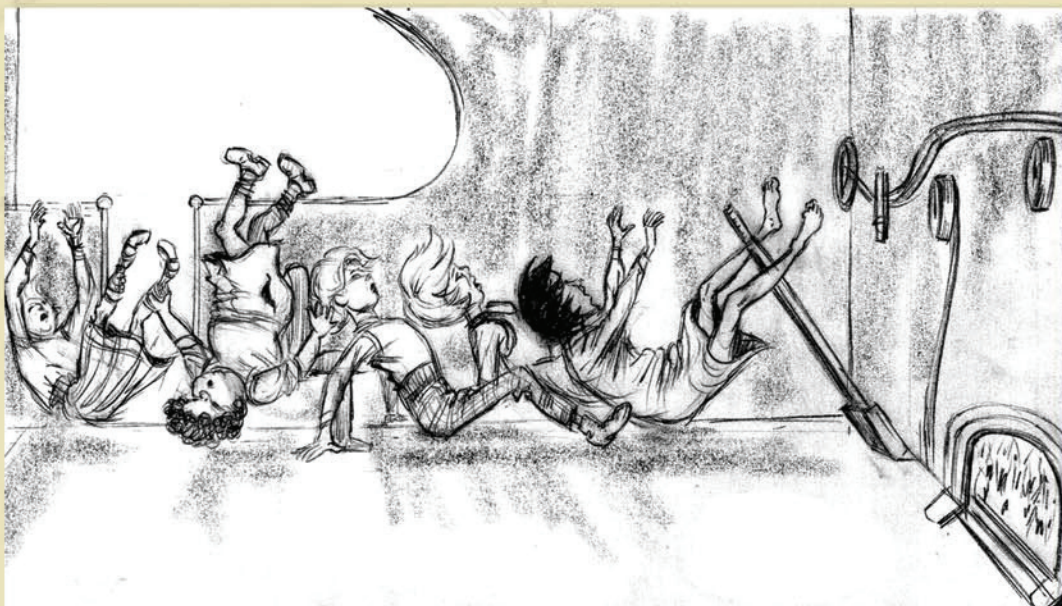
From a Railway Carriage

Louis finds himself in the steam- engine's cab, which is now out of control and without a driver. With the help of the other four who have landed with him, they wrestle with the controls as the train travels down a gradient out of the bridge and into the Scottish countryside. We see horses and cattle and 'painted stations whistle by'. A child scrambles and clambers, gathering blackberries and a tramp stands and gazes at the passing train. On a village green a young girl is making daisy chains and a cart trundles frantically over a level crossing in the nick of time. Louis gradually gains control of the train and with a huge heave the children pull on the brake all together. The train moves away from us dwindling into the distance. Louis is back asleep in bed as we hear a forlorn, distant railway whistle.



*Faster than fairies, faster than witches,
Bridges and houses, hedges and ditches;
And charging along like troops in a battle,
All through the meadows the horses and
cattle;
All of the sights of the hill and the plain
Fly as thick as driving rain;
And ever again in the wink of an eye,
Painted stations whistle by.*

*Here is a child who clambers and scram-
bles,
All by himself and gathering brambles;
Here is a tramp who stands and gazes;
And there is the green for stringing the
daisies!
Here is a cart run away in the road Lump-
ing along with man and load; And here is
a mill and there is a river; Each a glimpse
and gone for ever!*





Night and Day

Mrs Cunningham enters his room and notices specks of soot on Louis' face. Where did they come from? Brilliant late evening sunshine is pouring through the tall windows as she settles him down for the night. She moves over to the window to draw the curtains but is distracted and leaves the bedroom without doing so. Louis is fast asleep but leaves his body in bed and his slepwalking shadow passes straight through the window and finds itself in an enchanted garden. As darkness falls, the film gradually becomes black-and-white.

*When the golden day is done,
Through the closing portal,
Child and garden, flower and sun,
Vanish all things mortal.*

*As the blinding shadows fall,
As the rays diminish,
Under evening's cloak, they all
Roll away and vanish.*

*Garden darkened, daisy shut,
Child in bed' they slumber-
Glow-worm in the highway rut,
Mice among the lumber.*



Night and Day (cont)

We see his parents lit by candlelight hovering over his sleeping body whilst his shadow walks blithely through plants and flowers. Dawn breaks, birds start to sing and Mrs Cunningham yawns as she opens the garden door. All the wonderful flowers in the garden regain their colour and Louis 'conducts' them like an orchestra taking a bow as if it's the last night of the Proms. His shadow flows back into the house rejoining his still sleeping body.



*In the darkness houses shine,
Parents move with candles;
Till, on all, the light divine
Turns the bedroom handles.*

*Till at last the day begins
In the East a –breaking,
In the hedges and the whins
Sleeping birds a –waking.*

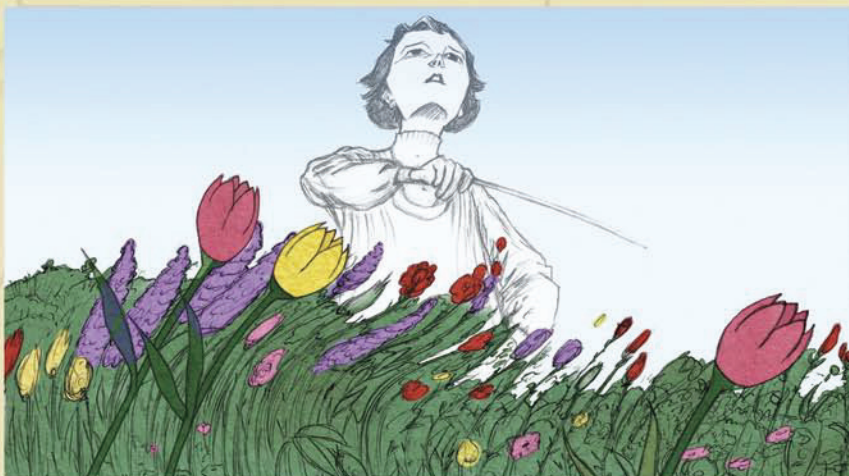
*In the darkness shapes of things,
Houses, trees, and hedges
Clearer grow, and sparrow's wings
Beat on window ledges.*



*Then shall wake the yawning maid;
She the door will open-
Finding dew on garden glade
And the morning broken.*

*There my garden grows again
Green and rosy painted,
As at eve behind the pain
From my eyes it fainted*

*Up!' they cry, 'the day is come
On the smiling valleys;
We have beat the morning drum;
Playmate, join your allies!'*





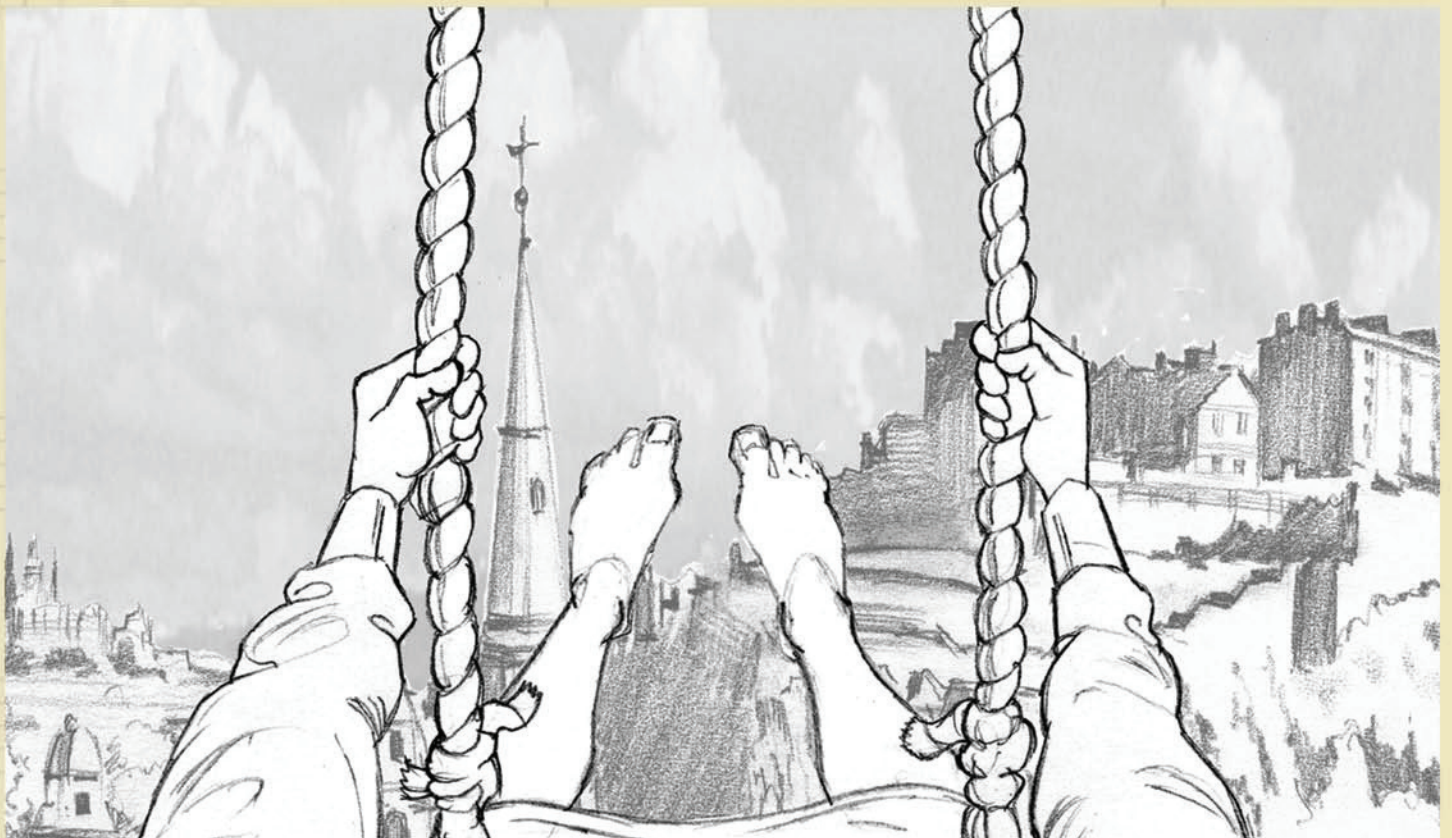
The Swing

Louis wakes and yawns as Mrs Cunningham tries to rearrange his pillows. He sees a picture of a swing in the counterpane. As he looks at it Mrs Cunningham gives him a bit of a push. The ropes come into his hands and he swings off into the air, soaring high above the garden wall, high above Edinburgh and apparently high above the countryside beyond. At last he falls back into his bed and off onto the floor.

*How do you like to go up in the air,
Up in the air so blue?
Oh I do think it's the pleasantest thing
Ever a child can do!*

*Up in the air and over the wall,
Till I can see so wide,
Rivers and trees and cattle and all
Over the countryside-*

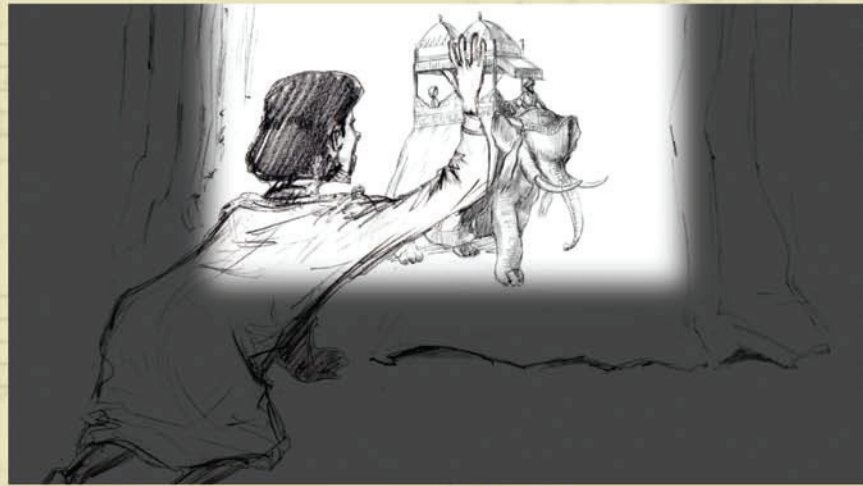
*Till I look down on the garden green,
Down on the roof so brown-
Up in the air I go flying again,
Up in the air and down!*



Young Night Thought

There is a long stream of walking people depicted at the end of the counterpane. They start to move and RLS starts to watch them - a multitude of people from every age and race imaginable. RLS joins the parade, nodding greetings to Babylonian kings in fantastic jewels, Chinese mandarins, Indian Maharajahs, Quakers in big hats and Romans in togas.

The procession enters what appears to be a cave, disappearing down a slope into shadow. RLS is left alone. On the final held note 'sleep' we see that the 'cave' is a giant fish's mouth and he has gulped the whole procession.



*All night long, and every night,
When my mamma puts out the light,
see the people marching by,
As plain as day, before my eye.*

*Armies and emperors and kings,
All carrying different kinds of things,
And marching in so grand a way,
You never saw the like by day.*

*So fine a show was never seen
At the great circus on the green;
For every kind of beast and man Is
marching in that caravan.*

*At first they move a little slow'
But still the faster on they go,
And still beside them close I keep
Until we reach the town of Sleep.*





Looking Glass River

The fish jumps causing a huge splash and RLS finds himself under water, swimming along with the fish, who's now the same size as himself.

Visuals follow the text.

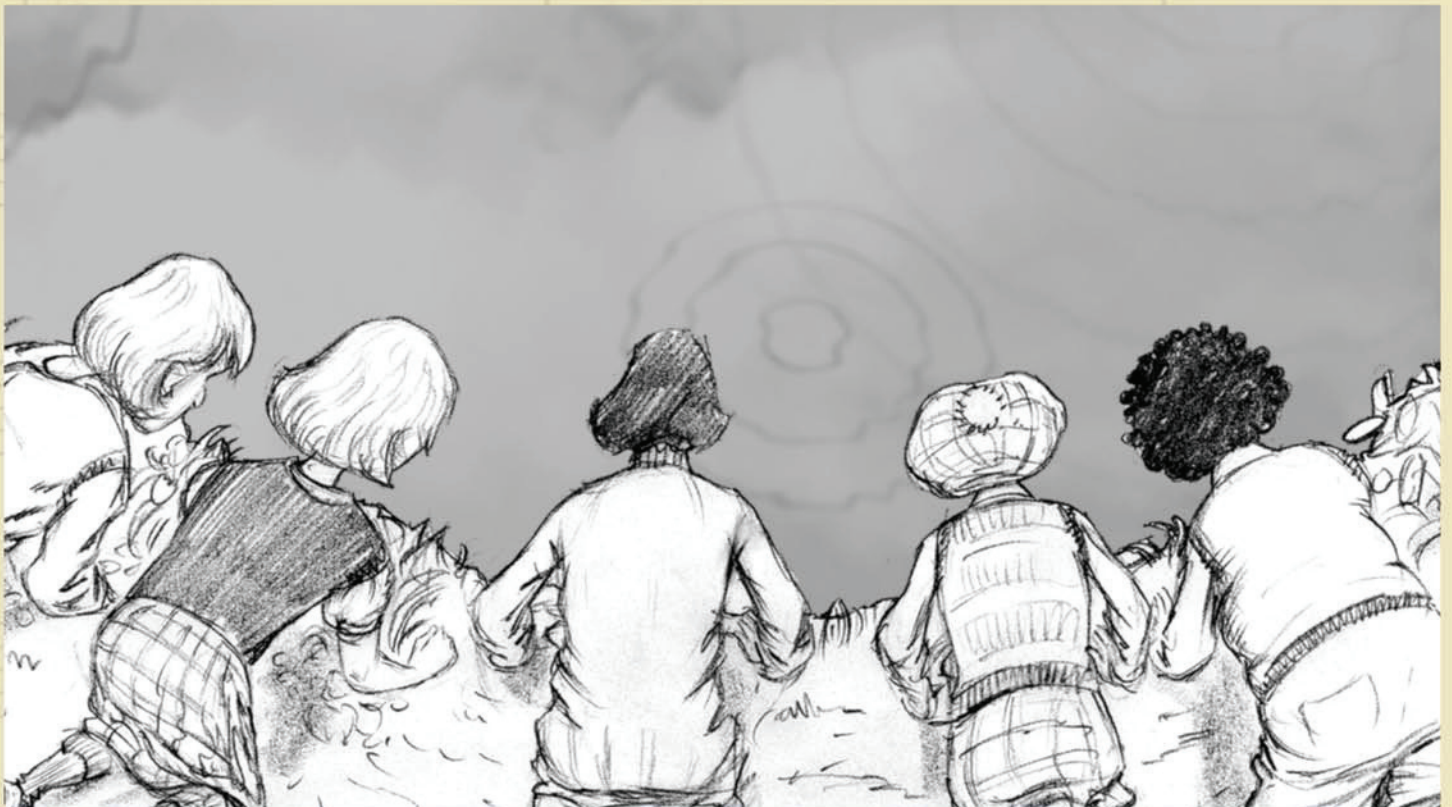
*Smooth it slides upon its travel,
Here a wimple, there a gleam-
O, the clean gravel!
O, the smooth stream!*

*Sailing blossoms, silver fishes,
Paven pools as clear as air-
How a child wishes
To live down there!*

*We can see our coloured faces
Floating on the shaken pool
Down in cool places
Dim and very cool;*

*Till a wind or water wrinkle,
Dipping marten, plumping trout,
Spreads in a twinkle
And blots all out*

*Patience, children, just a minute-
See the spreading circles die,
The stream and all in it
Will clear by-and-by.*



The Land of Counterpane

The stream has become clouded with the ruffling wind and we have lost sight of the fish. When the water clears (on the final long- held note) RLS is clutching the counterpane fish picture. He throws it aside a little impatiently, (he's feeling very well!) He gets out of bed and starts to get dressed, taking a lot of trouble, as if he's unused to doing so, cleans his teeth, brushes his hair, pulls his socks and ties his shoe-laces. He looks back fondly at the vivid magic counterpane and cam. examines it. Then he turns and walks downstairs towards the French doors to the garden.

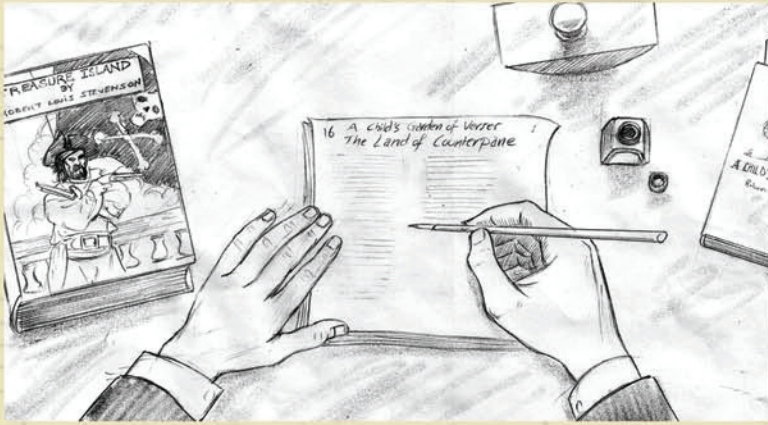


*When I was sick and lay a-bed I had two
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day*

*And sometimes for an hour or so
I watched my leaden soldiers go,
With different uniforms and drills Among
the bedclothes, through the hills;
And sometimes sent my ships in fleets All
up and down among the sheets;
Or brought my trees and houses out And
planted cities all about.*

*I was the giant great and still
That sits upon the pillow- hill,
And sees before him, dale and plain, The
pleasant land of counterpane.*





Epilogue: To Any Reader

We watch the boy walk out into the garden and see his delight in being able to walk and jump and run, to throw a stone into the pond, chase a pigeon, climb the wall and look over. Finally he moves towards the swing. Behind him is the house and we see a figure seated in a first floor window. As we move in we see it is actually Robert Louis Stevenson as a man. His adult voice is heard speaking the epilogue. We see his hand writing *The Land of Counterpane* at a desk by the window. We can glimpse books and book covers of '*Treasure Island*, *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* and *A Child's Garden of Verses*. He watches the child (himself as a boy) sitting on the swing in the garden below and gently taps on the windowpane. The child does not hear. When we look back, the child has vanished, leaving the garden empty.



As from the house your mother sees
 You playing round the garden trees,
 So you may see, if you will look
 Through the windows of this book,
 Another child, far, far away,
 And in another garden play.
 But do not think you can at all,
 By knocking at the window, call
 That child to hear you.
 He intent is all on his play-business bent.
 He does not hear; he will not look,
 Nor yet be lured out of his book.
 For long ago, the truth to say,
 He has grown up and gone away,
 And it is but a child of air
 That lingers in the garden there.



'The Land of Counterpane'

An animated song cycle

Poems by Robert Louis Stevenson (1850-1894)

Script, music and direction by Howard Blake

Drawn and art directed by Mark Reeve

Mark Reeve is a London-based illustrator and concept artist. After studying at Kingston Art School he drew and sculpted for television's 'Spitting Image' and Jim Henson's 'Creature Shop'. He has illustrated a graphic novel for DC Comics, designed the characters for ITV's 'Headcases' series and was political cartoonist for The Mail On Sunday. He has also exhibited as a portrait painter and collaborated with Howard Blake on a previous animation project.

Animation directed by Emmett Elvin

Emmett Elvin is the son of distinguished animator David Elvin who gave him his first taste of the art by doing trace and paint for Tony Hart's 'Pink Man'. He has since worked in animation with major producers such as Sony Entertainments, Fox Kids, Microsoft, Compaq and L'Oreal.. He is also the author and illustrator of more than a dozen bestselling books on art and cartooning. Since 2005 he has worked in successful collaboration with Mark Reeve.

Duration 26 minutes

Soundtrack and soundtrack album recorded by Philip Hobbs

David Rintoul (the voice of Robert Louis Stevenson)

The Scottish Chamber Orchestra Leader: Christopher George

The Choir of the Mary Erskine School with treble voices from Stewart's Melville College and Junior School

Produced and conducted by Howard Blake

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