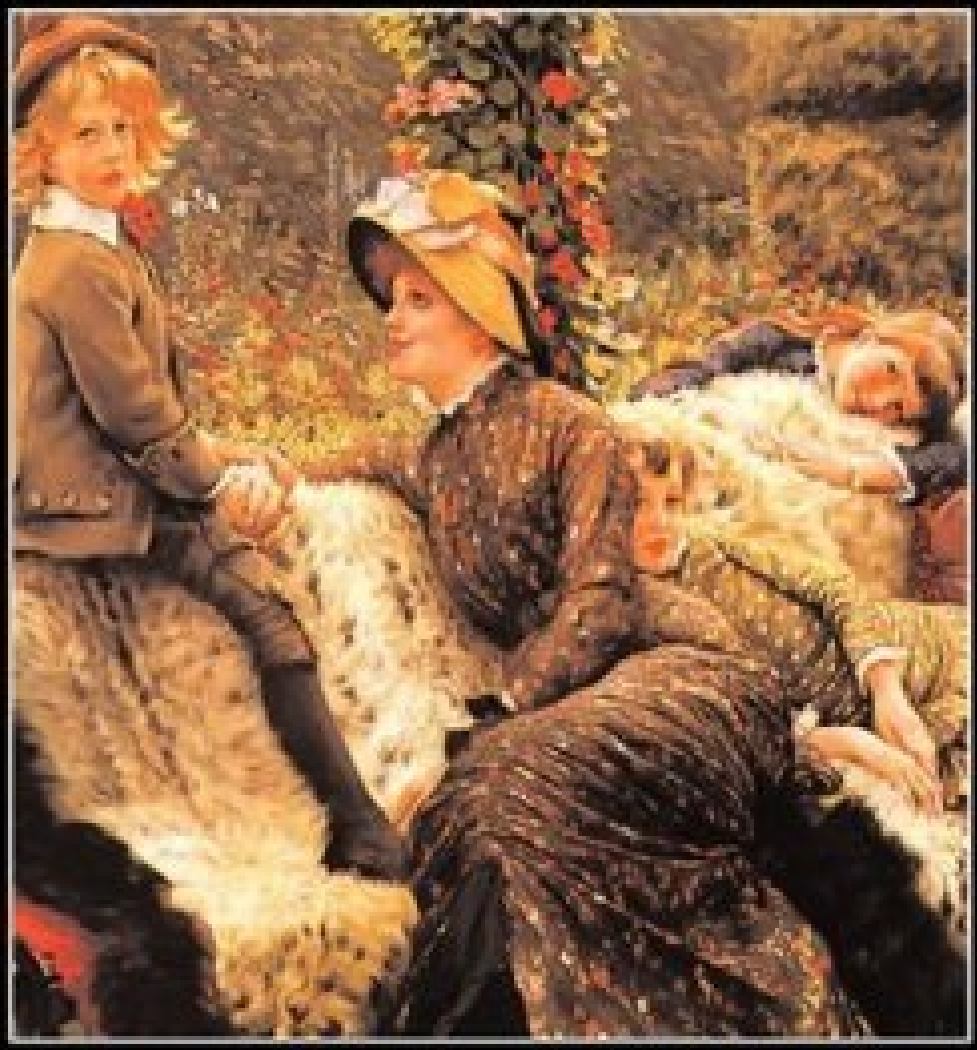

A Christmas Posy

Illustrated Edition

Mrs. Molesworth

DODO PRESS

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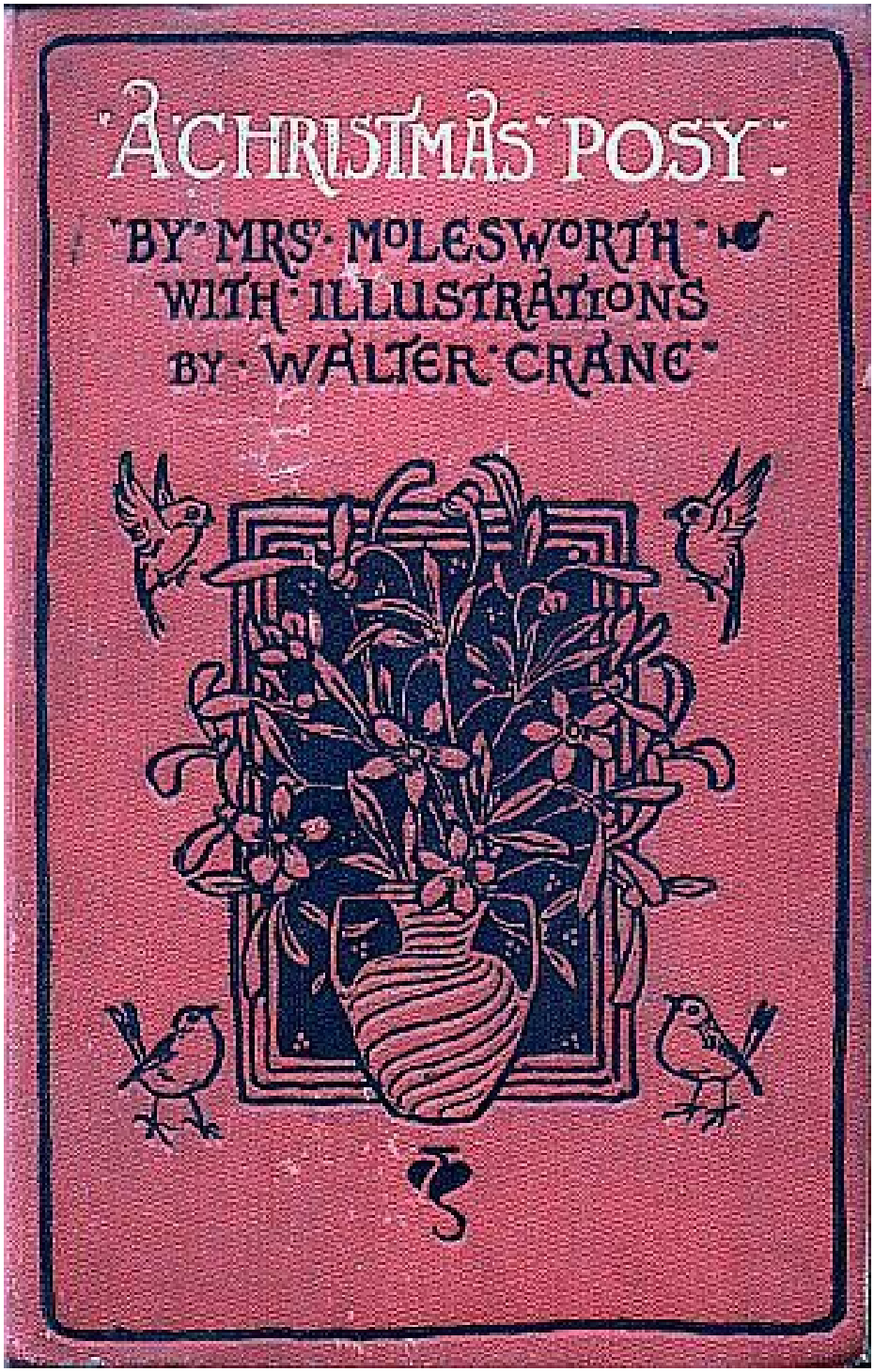
A CHRISTMAS POSY
BY MRS MOLESWORTH
WITH ILLUSTRATIONS
BY WALTER CRANE

GRANDMOTHER DEAR'S OLD WATCH

"Come out here for a moment, Sylvia," she called th her sister; "we can see her as far as the corner" P. 2

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1888

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[v]

TO
MY TWO LITTLE FRIENDS

TWIN-SISTERS

[vi]

London, *29th February 1888*.

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GRANDMOTHER DEAR'S OLD WATCH

A FRAGMENT

Part I

"Those never loved
Who dream that they 'loved once.'"—E. B. Browning.

"You won't be long any way, dear Auntie?" said Sylvia with a little sigh. "I don't half like your going. Couldn't you wait till the day after to-morrow?"

"Or at least take me with you," said Molly, Sylvia's younger sister, eagerly.

Auntie hesitated—she glanced up at as much of the sky as could be seen through the lace-shrouded windows of their pretty Paris *salon*—it was already beginning to grow dusky, for though only half-past three, it was the thirty-first of December, and a dull day—and then turned with decision towards the door.

"No, dears," she said; "I shall go more quickly alone. Sylvia's cold would be none the better for going out so late, and I would rather you, [2] Molly, stayed with her. So good-bye, darlings; I shall not be long."

"I should not like to think of poor Sylvia sitting alone in the gloaming, to-day of all days," said Auntie to herself as she made her way down the three flights of handsome marble stairs which led to their *appartement*. "I can see she is very sad—remembering how different it was this day last year. And dear Molly's good spirits are an inestimable blessing. Ah, my darlings, I may do my best, I *will* do my best, but I cannot make up to you for grandmother;" and with the tears in her eyes, and many a tender thought in her heart, Auntie made her way along the street.

The two girls were watching her, though she did not know it. There was a tiny balcony outside the window on to which Molly stepped almost as soon as the door had closed on Auntie.

"Come out here for a moment, Sylvia," she called to her sister; "we can see her as far as the corner"—for the street was one of the wide handsome avenues in the new part of Paris, and there were few passers-by. "As far as the corner," therefore, it was easy to distinguish Auntie's figure in its deep mourning dress—not *quite* so erect or active as it used to be, for Auntie was no longer young, and this year, so nearly ended now, had brought her the greatest sorrow of her life—as she quickly made her way. [3]

"Dear Auntie," said Sylvia; "I wish she were back again. I am sure we could have done without money for a day."

"*Two* days it would have been," corrected Molly; "the bank will be closed to-morrow, you know."

"Of course I know that," said Sylvia, a little testily.

"And there are some people coming to be paid, and Auntie never likes to keep any one waiting," continued Molly imperturbably. "If Auntie had only taken me with her——"

"How absurd you are!" said Sylvia. "You speak as if Auntie were a baby, or as if no one could take care of her but you—no, dear," she broke off hastily, "I should not speak like that. I don't mean to be cross—but oh, Molly, how we do miss grandmother," and the quickly rising tears in the pretty eyes raised to her sister's face at once subdued any resentment Molly may have felt. She bent her tall figure—for, though nearly two years younger, she was taller than her sister—and enveloped Sylvia in a loving hug. [4]

"My darling," she said—the mass of fair hair, which, even at eighteen, she found it no easy matter to keep in order, mingling with Sylvia's soft clustering chestnut locks; "my darling—of course we do—but, Sylvia, we must try to be happy. Think how *she* always said so. And next year—next year may be happier. Papa and Ralph are almost sure to be with us again by this time next year."

"*This* year has certainly only brought us sorrow," said Sylvia

mournfully; "I wish Auntie had not gone out. I have a presentiment something will go wrong."

"Don't be fanciful, dear; Auntie will soon be back. Come in and let us get ready a cosy tea for her, and finish the old year as cheerfully as we can. And oh, Sylvia—your cold!—and you've been out on the balcony without even a shawl."

No wonder these girls loved their aunt. Since their infancy their grandmother and she had replaced to them the mother they had never known—and the father who was but seldom able to be with them. And now the grief, the inexpressible grief of having lost that dearest of grandmothers had deepened and strengthened the affection of the three for each other. Their life was somewhat lonely at present. Grandmother had died in the south, at the pretty villa which, [5] after so many years passed in it, had come to seem "home." But she had wished her grandchildren to return to England, their real home; there, before long, to be rejoined by their father and elder brother at present in the East. And they were spending this winter in Paris—"on the way," as it were—for the benefit of Sylvia's drawing and Molly's music; and partly, too, perhaps, because the old home in the south, *without* "grandmother dear," would have seemed too unbearably desolate.

The curtains were drawn, the fire blazed brightly, the lamp on the *console* at the side of the room threw a soft pleasant glow on the dainty table set out temptingly for "afternoon tea," which, notwithstanding their long residence in France, Auntie and her nieces were very fond of. And with the little exertion of making all as bright and pretty as they could, the girls' spirits had come back.

"It *does* look nice," said Molly approvingly, as she stepped back towards the door to judge of the general effect. "How I do wish dear grandmother were here to see how neat and nice it looks. I really do think, Sylvia, that I am getting to be very 'handy,' and to have a good deal of taste in nice little ways—just what grandmother used to wish [6] for me;" and the candour and honesty in her fair face as she

innocently expressed her little bit of self-approval made Sylvia turn away so that Molly should not see the smile of amusement it was impossible altogether to repress. For Molly's open satisfaction with herself when it seemed to her that she deserved a little encouragement, was one of the funniest things about her still.

"Yes, dear, it does look very nice," said Sylvia. "And——Can that be Auntie's ring already?" she broke off. "How very quick she has been."

And almost before she had finished the words the door was thrown hastily open, and Auntie was beside them. But what an Auntie! Pale, looking older by ten years than when she had left them, breathless, her lips for a moment trembling so that she could not speak. The girls' warm words of welcome died away as they gazed at her in terror.

"Auntie, Auntie dearest, what is it; oh, what is it?" they exclaimed, while visions of every possible and impossible misfortune—a telegram with bad news of papa or Ralph taking front place as the worst of all—rushed before their imaginations with the inconceivable rapidity with which such speculations picture themselves at such times of excitement. Auntie struggled for self-control. [7]

"No, no—not bad news," she whispered at last, in answer to some all but inaudible breath which had perhaps escaped the poor children's lips. "You must—oh, you must forgive me. It was all my own fault. I should not have gone."

"Oh Auntie, Auntie," cried Molly, by this time in sobs, "what is it then? Have you been run over?"

"How could Auntie be here if she had been?" said Sylvia, hardly able to help smiling, even in the midst of her fright, at the Molly-like question. "But oh, Auntie, do try to tell us."

Auntie was a little calmer by now. She looked up with a piteous expression in her still white face.

"My dears, my dears," she said, "you must not be vexed with me, and yet I feel that you have a right to be so. I have had such a misfortune—I have lost—just now, on my way to or from the bank, I don't know which—I have *lost* dearest mother's—your grandmother's old watch! And with it the locket that was always attached to it, you know—the one with *her* great-grandfather's and his daughter's hair."

"I know," said Molly, "gray hair on one side and bright brown like Sylvia's on the other. Oh, Auntie, Auntie—*poor* Auntie." [8]

And Sylvia flung herself down beside poor Auntie and burst into tears of sympathy. It was sweet to Aunt Laura, even in the midst of her acute distress, to feel that their first thought was not for the loss itself—much as it could not but touch them—but of sorrow for *her*.

"Grandmother's old watch—grandmother dear's old watch," repeated the two girls, as if they could not believe it. The old watch they remembered all their lives, whose face was almost as familiar to them as that of grandmother herself—the watch and locket which seemed almost a part of her—it was terrible, it was too bad to be true!

"How did it happen?" said Sylvia, trying to choke down her tears. "Tell us more, Auntie. Can nothing be done? You don't think it was stolen?"

"No—I feel sure I dropped it. I remember now that it was not securely fastened. That is what vexes me so terribly—to think it was my own fault! Oh, Sylvia—oh, Molly, when I saw it was gone I felt as if I should go out of my mind! It was just as I came out of the bank that I missed it, but it may have dropped some minutes before. I was hesitating as to whether I should have time to walk home, or if I should take a *coupé* so as to get back to you quicker, my dears——" [9]

"And we had made all so cosy for you—such a dear little tea—just look, Auntie;" and herself casting a glance round at their pretty preparations, Molly's tears flowed afresh.

"I had a presentiment," said Sylvia. "But go on, Auntie."

"And I looked at my watch—I mean, I was going to do so," continued Auntie, "and found it was gone. Of course I ran back to the bank, but it was not there. I rushed up and down the street and asked everybody I saw—I even went into some of the shops—I am afraid I must have seemed quite dazed. Then my only idea was to get back to you, so I called a *coupé* and——" here poor Auntie broke down again.

"And is there nothing to be done?" repeated Sylvia.

"The coachman," said Auntie, "the coachman advised me to go to the 'commissaire de police' nearest to where I lost it. I have the name of the street. So now that I have seen you, I will go there at once," and she rose as she spoke. "Take my bag, Molly dear," she added, handing it to her. "The money is in it." [10]

"It is a good thing *it* wasn't lost too," said Molly, whose spirits were already beginning to reassert themselves. "But, Auntie, you must have some tea before you go. It is *quite* ready."

Auntie, whose hand was already on the door, was beginning to refuse when Sylvia interrupted. "Yes, Auntie dear, you *must*," she said. "And while you are taking it, it will give me time to get ready."

"You, my child! I will not let you come—with your cold too."

"My cold is very little, Auntie dearest; I must come—I should come," she added pleadingly. "You can't go about by yourself, so upset as you are too. *Grandmother* told me I was to take care of you. Yes, Molly dear, I know you would go, but I am a year and nine months older," continued Sylvia, rising to the dignity of her nineteen years. "It is right I should go."

She gained the day, and so did Molly, to the extent of persuading her aunt to swallow a cup of tea,—what a different tea-taking to that they had been looking forward to!—and in five minutes Auntie and Sylvia were driving along the streets which the former had but so

lately passed through.

"Poor Molly," said Auntie. [11]

"She will be getting up her hopes and expecting us to bring back good news," said Sylvia. "Well, we *may* find it, Auntie. They say honest people *sometimes* take things at once to the nearest police-office."

But this small grain of hope was quickly crushed. The "commissaire de police" was civil, but not encouraging. The ladies would do better to wait a day or two and then apply to the "Préfecture de Police," in other words, the central office, where waifs and strays of private property, should they chance to fall into honest hands, were pretty sure to be eventually deposited.

"A day or two," repeated Auntie, appalled. "Can I do nothing at once?"

He shrugged his shoulders. "That was as Madame chose. It would do no harm to write at once, describing the lost articles and giving her address. But as for hearing of them at once, that was more than improbable. It was the eve of the New Year—the worst day of all the year on which to have such a misfortune; everybody respectable was busy with their own affairs; and yet there were lots of beggars and such like about the streets. If—even supposing," as if the supposition were of the wildest—"that the watch had fallen into honest hands, a [12] week or ten days would probably pass before Madame would have news of it."

"And if it were deposited *here*," said Auntie timidly—"that does sometimes happen, I suppose?"

"If it were deposited here, it would be as if it were not here," said the commissaire sententiously. "That is to say we should send it on to the Préfecture. I have not even the right to tell you if it is at this moment here or not, though to give you pleasure," he proceeded with unconscious sarcasm, "I will declare to you that it is *not*."

"Then there is no use my returning here again to inquire?"

"Not the least—write to the Préfecture making your statement, and call there four or five days hence—no use going sooner," said the commissaire with a wave of his hand in token of dismissal. So Auntie and Sylvia, with sinking hearts, turned sadly away.

"Little does he understand what four or five days of suspense seem to me," said Auntie.

"To *us* too, dear Auntie," said Sylvia, squeezing Auntie's arm under her cloak as they made their way home through the now dark streets, Auntie preferring to walk now that there was plainly no more to be done that called for haste. [13]

"That is the worst of it—I have made this New Year time still sadder than it need have been for you two, my darlings."

It was hard to go in with no good news for Molly, whose spirits, as Sylvia had foreseen, had already risen to the point of feeling sure her aunt and sister would return triumphant, treasure-retrove in hand! But even now she was not disconcerted. "A week or ten days," she repeated, when she had heard all there was to tell; "ah, that shows, Auntie dear, we need not give up hope for ever so long."

She had need of her good spirits for herself, and the others too, during the days that followed. It would be impossible and wearisome to relate all that Auntie did and tried to do. The letters to "all in authority" in such matters, the visits to the Préfecture de Police, to the company who took charge of printing and posting handbills promising rewards for the restoring to their owners of lost objects, to the famous "Montde Piété," the great central pawnbroker's of Paris, even——For a week and more Auntie and the two girls, so far as it was possible for them to help her, did little else than exhaust themselves in such efforts, seizing every suggestion held out by sympathising friends, from the *concierge* to their old friend the white-haired Duchesse de St. Gervais, who related to them a long and interesting but slightly irrelevant story of how a diamond ring of her [14]

great-grandmother's had been found by the cook in the heart of a cauliflower just as she was about to boil it for dinner!

"I really think," said Auntie weariedly, as she threw herself down on the sofa after an expedition to the office of the most widely read Paris daily paper, where she had spent a small fortune in advertisements, "I really think quite half the world is constantly employed in finding, or rather searching for, the things that the other half is as constantly employed in losing. I could fill a three-volumed novel with all I have seen in the last few days—the strange scenes, the real tragedies of feeling—the truly wonderful mechanism of all this world of functionaries and offices and regulations. And some of these people have been really so kind and sympathising—it is astonishing—one would think they would be too sick of it all to have any feeling left."

"I am sure *anybody* would be sorry if they understood that it was dear, *dear* grandmother's watch—and even if they knew nothing, any one would be sorry if they saw your poor dear sweet little unhappy face," said Molly consolingly. [15]

But though her words called forth a rather wintry smile from Auntie and Sylvia, it was with sad hearts that all three went to bed on the night of the ninth day since the loss.

Part II

Up ever so many pairs of steep winding stairs, somewhat later that same evening, in a small barely furnished little room in one of the busiest and most thickly inhabited parts of Paris, a young woman with a baby on her knees was seated in front of a small fire. It was cold—for, alas, in the dwellings of the poor want of fresh air and ventilation does not mean *warmth*—and now and then she stirred the embers, though carefully, as if anxious to extract what warmth she could without exhausting its source.

"I must keep a little fire together for Bernard," she said to herself.

"He is late this evening. Perhaps I had better put the little one to bed —still it is cold for her, for it would not yet be prudent to lay her beside Paul, though he is so much better. What a blessing he is so much [16] better, my poor little boy! One should not complain, even though it is hard to think of what this fortnight's illness has cost, fifty francs at least, and my work in arrears. And to think of that watch lying there useless all this time! Not that I would have Bernard sell it, even if we dared. But still I can understand the temptation were it a thing one *could* sell, to many even poorer than we. To-morrow, if there is still no advertisement in any of the papers, I really think I will no longer oppose Bernard's taking it to the police, and giving up all hopes of any reward, and even of the satisfaction of knowing its real owner has got it. For they say lost objects sometimes lie at the Préfecture for years, and it does not look as if the person it belongs to was very eager to get it back, otherwise it would have been advertised or placarded. Perhaps it is some one very rich, who has many watches; and yet—that old locket with the date of more than a hundred years ago, so simple too, evidently preserved as a family relic, and the watch too, old, though still so good, as the watchmaker next door assured Bernard, worth quite two or three hundred francs. Perhaps the owner is very distressed about it, but still three or four hundred francs could not possibly be to him or her what they would be to us [17] just now! Why, even *one* hundred would get us nicely round the corner again!"

For Madame Bernard was a sensible little woman with no exaggeration about her. But it is growing colder, and still her husband does not return. She must gather the remnants of the fire together, and baby at all costs must go to bed, and if Bernard does not soon come she herself must go too. She cannot risk catching a bad cold herself just as Paul is recovering from an attack of bronchitis. And she is turning to open a door leading into the one bedroom of their *appartement*, when the well-known sound of a latch-key in the door of the tiny vestibule arrests her.

"Bernard, at last!" she exclaimed with a sigh of relief.

A man, young still, though older than she, entered. He was thin and pale and poorly clad. But his face was intelligent and pleasant, and he had an undoubted air of respectability. And to his wife's accustomed eye, late as it was and tired as he should have been, his face had a flush of excitement on it which half prepared her for news of some kind.

"At last," he repeated. "Yes, I am very late, but I will not grumble as [18] I did this evening when we were told we must work overhours, for it is thanks to the lateness that I have—prepare yourself, my girl—I have found the owner of the watch!"

"The owner of the watch!" repeated his wife. "How? where? But you had not the watch with you? You have not given it back? Not without——" and the little woman hesitated; her husband seemed so pleased, so excited. "If possibly it is a poor person," she reflected, "Bernard is quite capable of giving it back with delight for nothing but a word of thanks! Yet what would not forty, nay, even fifty francs be to us just now." Still she did not like to say anything to damp his pleasure. But he read her misgiving—he had perhaps a little enjoyed teasing her!

"Calm yourself, my child," he said, though Madame Bernard was certainly much less excited than he; "it is all right. When I said I had found the owner, I meant to say I know *where* to find him, or her. Twenty minutes ago I knew as little as you do at this moment. But coming along the Boulevart, suddenly the light of a gas-lamp flaring up a little fell on a yellow paper on the wall—had it been in the daytime I should never have seen it, it was so badly placed—'fifty [19] francs reward.' I scarcely thought I would stop to read it at first; how many yellow posters have I not read these last few days! But in an instant 'watch' caught my eyes. Here is the description;" and he drew out a shabby pocket-book in which he had copied it word for word. "You see it is our old friend, and no other—'English watch, locket, *souvenir de famille*, etc. Owner to be found at 99 Avenue Malmaison.' So off I go to No. 99 to-morrow morning as early as I possibly can."

"And you will be very careful, Bernard," said his wife. "Give it up to no one but the owner himself."

"And make sure of the reward, eh, my girl?" said he, laughing. "Yes, yes—you may trust me. I know fifty francs will not fall to us badly just now. And if it is a rich person I shall take it with a clear conscience, for I really have worked to find the owner."

And in very much better spirits than they had been since the beginning of little Paul's illness, the poor young-couple betook themselves to their night's rest.

One person at No. 99 Avenue Malmaison had not known what a good night's rest was for some time. Poor Auntie! she was beginning [20] to feel that she must make an effort to resign herself, and to throw off the excessive depression which the loss of "grandmother's" watch was causing her. It was not fair, she argued, to make Sylvia and Molly suffer for what she and she alone deserved to be blamed for. So she tried to look more cheerful than she felt. I don't think her efforts deceived the two pairs of sympathising young eyes, but the sisters nevertheless understood and appreciated them, and felt that they too must put on a braver face than came quite easy. So to all outward appearance the trio had recovered their usual bearing. And Sylvia and Molly, as was only natural, went to bed and slept soundly, though never without a last waking thought of "Poor Auntie! oh, if the watch *could* but be found!" while the watch's owner tossed about in wakeful distress. The more she tried to look bright in the day, the more impossible it seemed to forget her troubles in the temporary oblivion of a sound sleep. "It is really wrong of me to fret so about the loss of any *thing*," she would say to herself. "I seem more overwhelmed than even during the first few terrible days after mother's death. Though after all, *were* those first few days terrible? Just at the first when the [21] door seems still as it were half-open, and we feel almost as if we could see a little way *in*, where our dear ones have gone—no, those first days are *not* the worst."

And somehow, as she said so to herself, there seemed to fall over

Auntie a feeling of calm and peacefulness such as she had known little of for long. Then came before her the remembrance of "grandmother dear's" sweet, quiet face as she had seen it the last time, in the beautiful calm of holy death. "It is *wrong* to fret so, my child," the well-known voice seemed to say. And listening to it Auntie fell into a quiet and profound sleep.

It was curious—a sort of coincidence, I suppose, one would call it—that this peaceful sleep came to poor Auntie just at the moment at which Bernard, on his way home, espied by the light of the flaring gas-lamp the yellow poster with its "fifty francs reward" in big black letters!

When Auntie woke she saw at once by the light that it was much later than her usual time. But she felt so quiet and peaceful and rested—almost as one does on waking from the first real sleep after an illness—that she tried to fancy she was still half-dreaming, and that it could not yet be time to get up. A slight noise—a *very* slight noise it was—at the side of her bed made her at last, though reluctantly, open her eyes again and turn slightly round. Quick ears and watchful eyes were on the alert— [22]

"Oh, Auntie—Auntie dear—you are awake at last. You have had a nice sleep?"

"Very—a very sweet sleep, my darling," said Auntie, smiling, for the last night's impressions were strong upon her. She was not going to make herself unhappy any more about that which could not be cured.

Molly's bewildered eyes turned towards her sister.

"She looks so happy," she whispered. "Can she know, can she have heard us talking?"

No—she had heard nothing—but *something*, some indefinable instinct now seemed suddenly to awaken her suspicions.

"Molly—Sylvia!" she exclaimed, starting up. "What is it? What are

you saying? It cannot be——" But before she had time to say more she was interrupted.

"Yes, it *can* be—it *is*," they called out. And something, a softly shining something, round and smooth, with a smaller shining thing attached to it, dangled above her eyes. [23]

"The watch, Auntie—grandmother dear's own old watch, and the locket! A man—such a nice civil poor man—found them, and has brought them back, while you were still asleep."

"And we could not bear to waken you. You looked so tired and white, and were sleeping so quietly. But it was all right," Molly hastened to assure her. "We lent the money—the fifty francs reward, you know—and he was so pleased, poor man. I am afraid he is *very* poor."

"He asked for a certificate—a little note to say he had been honest in bringing it back," added Sylvia. "But we thought, and so did he, that it would be better for you to write it. So he is going to call again—to-morrow or the day after in the evening—it is such a long way off where he lives, he says."

"What good will the certificate do him?" asked Auntie, stroking and smoothing her dear watch all the time.

"He said it might get him promoted in the office where he works," said Molly, "And he says the watch is a *very* good one—he took it to a friend of his who is a jeweller. So you see, Auntie, though he couldn't have sold it here—you remember they told us it was impossible to sell jewellery that isn't one's own here, as one has to tell all about where one got it and all that—he might have kept it for himself." [24]

"Or sent it away to be sold somewhere else," said Sylvia.

"Oh yes, no doubt he could have done something with it, if he hadn't been really honest."

"And yet so poor," said Auntie thoughtfully. Then she looked again at the watch with such a loving gaze that it brought tears to the girls' eyes.

"Oh, Auntie darling, *how* nice it is to see you looking like yourself again," said Molly. "It seems almost, doesn't it," she added in a lower voice, "as if its coming back were a little message from grandmother?"

How different appeared everything that happy day! How bright the sunshine, even though but some pale wintry beams struggling through the cold gray sky; how nice everything they had to eat seemed—was it, perhaps, that the kind-hearted cook in her sympathy took unusual pains?—how Auntie smiled, nay, laughed right out, when Molly suddenly checked herself in saying something about what o'clock it was, forgetting that it was no longer a painful subject! How grateful they all felt to be able to go to bed in peace without the one ever-recurring, haunting thought, "If the watch could but be found!" [25]

And with the night came another thought to Auntie.

"Sylvia and Molly," she said the next morning, "I have been thinking so about those poor people—the man who found the watch I mean—and his family," for he had told them he was married and had children. "I do feel so grateful to him. I feel that I must go and see for myself if they are so very poor. You have the exact address?"

"Oh yes," Molly replied, "we wrote it down. But oh, Auntie dear, you *will* let us go with you."

Auntie hesitated a little, but yielded in the end.

"You will promise to let me go in first," she said, "just to see that it is quite respectable, and no infectious illness or anything that could hurt you."

Bernard hardly knew his little wife again when he got home that evening. The fifty francs had greatly cheered her the night before, but their influence could not explain the state of delight between tears and laughter in which he found her this time. [26]

"Oh, my friend—oh, Bernard," she exclaimed, "what a happy thing it was for us that you found the watch's owner and took it at once! They have been here; only fancy such distinguished ladies coming themselves so far just to see if they could be of any service to us in return for ours to them. That was how they put it—was it not touching? The old lady"—poor Auntie, I don't think she would *quite* have liked that!—"to whom belongs the watch, so good and kind, oh, so kind; and the younger ones two angels, *angels* simply, I repeat it, Bernard. And when they heard all—I could hide nothing, they questioned me with such sympathy, about Paul's bronchitis and all—they set to work to consider how best they could help us. The lady gave Paul, into his own little hand, another note of fifty francs. That will clear off everything, and make us quite as well off as before his illness; and besides that, they have a good deal of work they want me to do, that will be well paid, better paid than what I do for the shops. And they will try to recommend me to some of their friends,—what I have always wished for, to work for ladies direct instead of for the shops. Oh, Bernard, it was a happy day for us when you found that old watch!" [27]

There is no need to say that Auntie and her nieces were as good as their word.

"On the whole," said Molly, with her customary philosophy, "it was almost worth while to go through all the unhappiness for the sake of the delight of getting the watch back again, especially as it really has been a good thing for those nice poor people. But, Auntie, you will have all your dresses made with watch-pockets now, won't you?"

"Indeed I will," said Auntie with a smile, "and thank you for your good advice, my Molly. Who would think you had ever been the complacent possessor of six pinless brooches?"

At which Molly and Sylvia both laughed, though Molly blushed a

little too.

"I am really careful now, I do think," she said. "You know, dear Auntie," she added in a lower voice, "Sylvia and I, more than ever, *now*, try to do and be all that *she* wished, in little as well as in big things. Dear, dear grandmother!"

MY PINK PET

Chapter I

"For there is no friend like a sister
In calm or stormy weather——."

Christina Rossetti

It is getting to be "a good while ago" since I was a little girl. Sometimes this comes home to me quite distinctly: I feel that I am really growing an old woman, but at other times I cannot believe it. I have to get up and cross the room and look at myself in the mirror, and see with my own eyes the gray hairs and the wrinkles in order to convince myself that childhood, and maidenhood, and even middle age, are all left far behind. At these times "now" appears the dream, "then" the reality; and, strangely enough, this very feeling, I am told, is one of the signs of real old age, of our nearing the land that at one time we fancied so "very far off"—farther off, it seems to me, in middle age than in early childhood, when it is easier for us to believe[29] in what we cannot see, when no clouds have come between us and the true sky beyond.

I have been in many countries, and lived many different lives, since I was a little girl. I have been months together at sea, when dry land itself seemed almost to become a dream. I have been for long years in India, and grown so used to burning skies and swarthy faces that I could hardly believe in the reality of cool England, with its fresh fields and shady lanes; yet all these scenes are growing hazy, while clearly, and yet more clearly, there rises before me the picture of my old, old home and childish days, of special things that happened to me then, of little pleasures and troubles which then seemed very great, and in one sense really were so, no doubt, for they were great to *me*.

I will tell you about a trouble I once had, if you like. I am afraid you will hardly count it a *story*, but still some among you may find it interesting. For, after all, children are children even nowadays, when

so much more is done to make them clever and wise than was the case when I was a little girl; and the feeling that your parents and grandparents had their childish sorrows and joys, and hopes and fears and wonders, just as you have, is always a good and wholesome feeling to foster on both your side and theirs. [30]

Our home was in a small town in rather an out-of-the-way part of the country. It is out of the way still, I believe, as the railways have not gone very near it, but I know little about it now. It is many years since I was last there, and I do not think I wish ever to see it again. I would rather keep my memory's picture of it unchanged.

Our house stood at the outskirts of the little town; in front of it there stretched a wide heathery common, which extended a mile or two into the country; and over this common, at certain seasons, the west wind blew so strongly that it was, we used to say, really like living at the seaside. The sea was only six or eight miles away; sometimes we fancied the wind "tasted salt."

The house itself was comfortable and old-fashioned, and had plenty of rooms in it, which you will allow to have been necessary when I tell you that I was the youngest of nine children, most, or at least many, of whom had been brought up at home. My eldest sister was married—she had always been married, I thought, for I could not remember her anything else. My other three sisters were all more or less grown up, and the only brother at all near my own age was away at a boarding-school. So it came to pass that, though I had so many brothers and sisters, I was rather a solitary little girl. [31]

But I was not an unhappy child by any means. I had everything I wanted, even down to a tiny little bedroom all to myself; and though I was not perhaps indulged as much as some children I see nowadays, I don't think I was on that account to be pitied. My parents were quiet, and perhaps rather unusually undemonstrative; and indeed it was not then the fashion to be very familiar with one's father and mother. We always said "sir" and "ma'am" to them, and I never thought of entering or leaving the drawing-room without stopping to

curtsey at the door. How would you like that, children? My father was very particular about such matters, more so than most, perhaps, from having been many years in the army, where, I once overheard an old brother-officer say, he had been considered rather a "martinet," if you know what that means; and my dear mother, who by herself, perhaps, would have been almost too gentle to keep all her family in good order, was firm as a rock where any wish of *his* was concerned. [32]

Till I was nearly nine years old I was exceedingly fond of dolls, of which I had several of different degrees of ugliness. But about that age I was taken away for a few weeks to visit an aunt of my mother's at the seaside, and as we travelled all the way there and back in the coach, our luggage had to be much less in quantity than can now be comfortably stowed away in the van of an express train. And "Lois must leave her dolls at home" was the decision of my sixteen-year old sister Emilia, who, with my mother and myself, was to make the journey.

At first I was greatly distressed, though, being a very quiet and uncomplaining child, I said little.

"Mayn't I take one?" I said humbly to my mother. "Miss Trotter or Lady Mirabelle would take up so little room; or might I carry one in my arms?"

Emilia, my sister, was desired to look over the dolls and report on them. She did so, but, alas! most unfavourably.

"They are such disreputable-looking things," she said half-laughingly to my mother, "I should really be ashamed for my aunt to see them. She likes everything so neat, you know. And mother, Lois is really growing a great girl—don't you think it is a good time to break her of dolls?" [33]

So my dolls were left behind. I don't think I grieved *very* much over them. The excitement of the journey and the being considered a great girl by Emilia went far to console me. Besides, I had been beginning to find such big dolls rather inconvenient, as I did not care to play with

them in the common way merely. My great pleasure was in making them act the different characters in some romance of my own concoction, and I found smaller *dramatis personæ* more easily managed. Of late I had even tried to cut out figures in paper for this purpose, but I could not make them anything but grotesque and ugly, and had for some time past been "casting about" in my mind as to some less objectionable puppets.

How well I remember the first night at Sandilands! The journey I have somehow almost forgotten. I suppose it was in no way very remarkable, and it is not unlikely that I fell asleep in the coach, and that this had to do with what followed.

My great-aunt was a tiny little old lady, so tiny that small as I was myself she made me feel clumsy. Her house, too, was in proportion to herself. She received us with the greatest affection, but was so nervously anxious to make us comfortable that I could not but feel strange and shyer than usual. Notwithstanding my mother's [34] encouraging whispers and Emilia's tugs and nods, I showed myself to sad disadvantage, which was especially unfortunate, as I was Aunt Lois's god-daughter, and had been brought to see her on purpose to please her. I spilt my tea, I trod on the cat's tail, I knocked over a valuable Indian jar filled with pot-pourri, which fortunately, however, was not broken, till at last, in despair, my mother agreed to Emilia's repeated suggestion that I had better go to bed.

And to bed I went, in considerable distress, though a little consoled by the kind way in which my aunt kissed me and patted me on the back as she said good-night.

I was to sleep in a small room, generally used as a sort of study. My aunt had thoughtfully arranged a little bed in it for me, thinking the only other unused bedroom, which was up at the top of the house, would be so far away from my mother and Emilia that I should feel lonely. I went to bed quietly, and, notwithstanding the strangeness of everything about me, soon fell asleep. But an hour or two later, just when my mother and aunt were sitting comfortably chatting, and

Emilia trying over some old songs on the thin-toned piano, they and the two maid-servants in the kitchen were suddenly startled by piercing screams from my room. [35]

Upstairs they all ran—Emilia arriving the first.

"What is the matter, Lois?" she exclaimed. "Have you set yourself on fire?"

I was sitting up in bed, my eyes almost starting out of my head with fright.

"The faces, the faces!" I cried. "See, Emilia, up there!"

It was a minute or two before she could see what I meant, and by that time my mother and aunt and the servants were all in the room. Emilia would have scolded me, but Aunt Lois hurried forward and soothed me, oh, so kindly, while she explained that what in my half-awakened state I had taken for two faces were nothing but two Dutch china vases, standing on the top of a high old-fashioned cabinet in a corner of the room. The door having been left slightly ajar, a ray of light from the lamp on the landing had penetrated into the room, just catching the cabinet, while leaving everything else in darkness.

I sobbed and cried for some time, but persisted in staying where I was instead of changing places with Emilia, as was proposed, now that I really knew there was nothing to be afraid of. [36]

"Brave girl!" said my aunt approvingly. "And to-morrow, for a reward, you shall have the key of the cabinet and examine it for yourself. It is filled with curious foreign shells, and if you care for them you shall have some to take home with you."

And with this delightful anticipation I fell peacefully asleep.

Chapter II

My aunt was as good as her word. The next morning, when breakfast was over, she went up with me to my little room and unlocked the cabinet. It was, as she had said, filled with lovely curious shells, of every size and shape. Some of the trays were in considerable disorder.

"You may put them straight for me, Lois, my dear," she said, "and when you have done so, you may play with them every day while you are here. And when you go away I shall give you a few. I cannot give you many, for the cabinet was arranged and given to me by my dear brother, who is dead, and I should not like to spoil the look of it. But before you go you may choose twenty to take away with you." [37]

"Thank you, Aunt Lois," I said soberly. But she must have seen by my face that I was pleased, for she added—

"And when I die, Lois, you shall have the cabinet and all the shells."

"Thank you, Aunt Lois," I said again, not indeed knowing what else to say, though I felt rather uncomfortable when she talked of dying.

After this, for some days to come, I was perfectly happy. Morning, noon, and night I was at the shells. The only trouble was that it was a grief to me ever to leave them, and of course, as I had been brought to Sandilands partly for the benefit of the sea-air, my mother could not allow me to spend all my time in one small room.

One day, just after our early dinner, I had escaped to my treasures as usual, when Emilia followed me upstairs to tell me to put on my hat and cape for a walk by the sea-shore. My face fell, but of course I did not venture to make any objection.

"Can't you bear to tear yourself away from your shells even for an hour?" said Emilia. "What a queer child you are! What can you find to play at with them; they are all arranged in perfect order long ago?" [38]

"They are so pretty. I like putting their colours together," I said, fondly touching, as I spoke, the shells of one tray, which were my

especial favourites.

"Yes, they *are* pretty," said Emilia. "How lovely that delicate pink one is, in the middle of those dark-brown tortoiseshell-looking ones! It is like a princess surrounded by her slaves."

I started with pleasure. Emilia's suggestion opened a new world to me. Here before me, in my shells, were the very puppets I had been in search of!

"Oh, Emilia!" I exclaimed, "*what* a good idea!"

But when she questioned me as to what I meant, I got shy again, and refused to explain. I was afraid of her laughing at me, and hurried away to put on my hat, more eager than ever to get back to these delightful playfellows, as I really considered them.

And what games did I not have with them! I made them act far more wonderful dramas than I could possibly describe to you, children. I went through ever so many of the *Arabian Nights* stories, with the shells for caliphs and weseers, genii, and enchanted damsels. I acted all the well-known old fairy tales, as well (or better) known in my childish days as now: Cinderella and dear Beauty and [39] Riquet with the tuft. There was one brown shell with a little hump on its back which did splendidly for Riquet. Then for a change to more sober life I dramatised *The Fairchild Family* and *Jemima Placid*, taking for my model a little book of plays for children, whose name, if I mistake not, was *Leisure Hours*.

But through all my fanciful transmogrifications I was constant in one particular: the beautiful pale-rose-coloured shell which Emilia had admired was ever my *prima donna* and special favourite. It—I very nearly had said "she"—was in turn the lovely wife of Hassan of Balsora, Princess Graciosa, and Lucy Fairchild, whom, on mature consideration, I preferred to her sister Emily, as, though not so pretty, she was never guilty of such disgraceful conduct as eating "plum jam" on the sly and then denying it! And when no special "actings" were on hand, and my beautiful shell might have been supposed to be nothing

but a shell, the pleasures of my fertile imagination were by no means at an end. The pretty thing then became a sort of beloved friend to me. I talked to it, and imagined it talked to me; I confided to it all my hopes and fears and disappointments, and believed, or pretended to myself to believe rather, that the shell murmured to me in reply sweet [40] whispers of affection and sympathy; I carried it about with me everywhere, in a tiny box lined with tissue-paper and cotton-wool; indeed it seems to me now that many, perhaps most people, if they had heard what nurses call "my goings-on," would have thought my wits decidedly wanting. But *of course* I told no one of my new fancy. I don't think at that time I *could* have done so. I lived in a happy dream-world of my own alone with "my pink pet," for that was the only "real" name I ever gave to the shell, and no longer in the least regretted Miss Trotter or Lady Mirabelle, though I often "amused" my present favourite with stories of the sayings and doings of its predecessors in my affections.

Of course my pink pet accompanied me home. There was great consultation with my shell as to the nineteen others to be chosen, and there was one moment's breathless suspense when my aunt told me to show her my selection, and I gravely did so, watching her face the while.

What if she should refuse to me the gift of the one, for which I would gladly have gone without all the others? [41]

"You have made a very modest choice, Lois," she said at last. "Are you sure you wouldn't like any others better? These are rather rare shells," she added, touching a little group of two or three that generally figured as my pink pet's maids of honour, "but these, and this, and this—are common enough."

"But this is the only one of the sort in the cabinet," I replied, reddening with vexation, for my favourite had been one of those Aunt Lois had described as "common." Actually, at the risk of losing my beautiful shell, I could not help standing up in its defence.

"Why, that's the one I thought so pretty, isn't it?" said Emilia,

coming forward. "Lois thinks it worth its weight in gold, aunt. She keeps it in an old pill-box, and——"

"You're *very* unkind, Emilia," I exclaimed angrily; "you've no business to pry into what I do."

"Hush—hush! my dear," said Aunt Lois in her fussy way, yet not unkindly, and looking at me with some curiosity. "Give me my spectacles, and let me see this remarkable shell better. Yes—you are right, your young eyes are sharper than mine, it *is* a rare shell. I think there were only two of them in the cabinet, and one must have been broken, though I did not know it." [42]

Oh, how I trembled! Supposing Aunt Lois were to say she could not spare this one precious specimen! Emilia put my thoughts into words for me, for which I did not thank her.

"If it is the only one," she said, "of course Lois won't expect you to give it to her." She glanced at me reproachfully. My eyes fell, but I did not speak.

"I would not on any account go back from my promise," said my aunt. "If the child has a special fancy for the shell, let her have it by all means, even were it far more valuable than it is."

I could hardly speak, so great had been my suspense, but I whispered "Thank you, Aunt Lois," in a husky voice, and I fancy by the way my aunt again looked at me that she saw there were tears in my eyes. And the next day we went home.

Chapter III

After this I grew fonder than ever of my pink pet. But at the same time I was more careful than before to let no one know of my queer fancy. Emilia's remarks had alarmed me, for I had had no idea that she had [43] noticed my treasure. I could not bear being laughed at, and I intensely dreaded my brothers getting hold of the story and playing me some trick which might deprive me of my favourite. I never played with my

shells except when I was quite alone, and deeply regretted there being no key to the lock of my room, by which I might have secured myself against intruders. But as I had always been in the habit of playing a great deal by myself, and had always, too, been quiet and reserved, no one took any special notice of me or my occupations, particularly as every one in the house was just then much occupied with preparations for the approaching marriage of my second sister, Margaret. So I spent hours and hours by myself—or rather not by myself, for I had for my companions far more wonderful beings than were ever dreamt of anywhere save in a child's brain, and with my pink pet went through more marvellous adventures by far than Munchausen himself.

One day I was playing as usual in my own little room, when the door suddenly opened and Emilia and Margaret came in. They were both laughing. I started up in terror and threw my handkerchief over [44] the little group of shells, who had just been performing a tournament on a cane-bottomed chair, on the seat of which, with an old piece of French chalk, I had marked out the lists, the places for spectators, and the daïs of honour for the queen, represented of course by my rose-coloured shell.

"What are you doing, Lois?" said Emilia.

"Nothing, at least only playing," I said confusedly.

"We didn't suppose you were doing anything naughty," said Margaret. "Don't look so frightened. Let us see what you are playing at."

I hesitated.

"Come now," said Emilia laughingly, "do let us have it. You had got as far as—let me see what was it, 'Oh ladye fair, I kneel before thee,' wasn't that it, Margaret?"

I turned upon her in sudden fury. But before I could speak, Emilia, not noticing my excitement, had snatched away the handkerchief from the chair, and with mischievous glee picked out my pink pet.

"See, Margaret," she cried, "this is the 'ladye fair,' Lois's familiar."

I had found my voice by now—found it indeed; it would have been better had I remained silent. [45]

"Oh, you mean girl!" I exclaimed. "Oh, you bad, wicked sister! You've been listening at the door; am I not even to be allowed the privacy of my own chamber?" I was growing dramatic in my excitement, and unconsciously using the language of some of my persecuted heroines.

"Lois," cried Margaret, "do not excite yourself so. We did not listen at the door, but you were speaking so loud, I assure you it was impossible not to hear you."

Somewhat softened and yet inexpressibly annoyed, I turned to Margaret, unfortunately in time to see that it was only by the greatest efforts she was controlling her laughter. My words and manner had been too much for her, anxious as she was to quell the storm.

"I will bear no more," I said passionately. "Unnatural sisters that you are to jeer and mock at me. Give me my shell, Emilia. How dare you touch it?"

Startled, and really a little frightened by my manner, Emilia silently held out the shell. I snatched at it, how it was I never could tell—whether she or I dropped it I know not, nor do I know whose foot trod on it, but so it was. In the scuffle my treasure fell to the ground; my [46] pink pet was crushed into a little heap of shell dust.

"Oh, Lois, dear Lois, I am so sorry," exclaimed Emilia, all her mischief and glee at an end. But I did not speak. For a moment I stared at the fatal spot on the floor, then stooping down I scooped up as well as I could the fragments of what had been so dear to me, and hiding them in my hand rushed from the room, still without speaking. I really hardly knew what I was doing; afterwards I remembered hearing Emilia say in a frightened tone—

"Margaret, what can we do? I never saw Lois like that before. Can she be going out of her mind?"

I thought I *was* going out of my mind. Even now, children, old woman as I am, I cannot bear to recall the misery of that time. I ran out into the garden, and lay with my face hidden in an old deserted arbour, where I trusted no one would come to seek me. I had put the "ashes" of my favourite into the pill-box, and held it in my hands while I cried and sobbed with mingled anger and grief. The afternoon went by, but no one came to look for me.

"It must be nearly tea-time," I said to myself, though reluctant to own that I was hungry. "No one cares what becomes of me." [47]

Just then I heard a step approaching. It was Emilia.

"Oh, Lois!" she exclaimed; and I could tell by her voice that she had been crying. "I have been looking everywhere for you. Oh, dear Lois, do say you forgive me?"

"No," I said sullenly, turning from her and pushing away her outstretched arms, "I will *never* forgive you."

And this was my only reply to her repeated words of sorrow and affection, till at last in despair she went away. Then, knowing that my retreat was discovered, I got up and went into the house, up to my own room. I sent down word by one of the servants that my head ached, and I did not want any tea, and my mother, judging it wiser from my sisters' account of me not to drive matters to extremity, let me have my own way. She came up to see me, and said quietly that she hoped my head would be better to-morrow, but that was all, and I encouraged nothing more, and when Emilia came to my door to say good-night, I would not answer her.

The next day things were no better. By this time my continued crying had really made my head ache more badly than it had ever [48] ached before. I got up and dressed, but had to lie down again, and thus I spent the day; and when my sisters came in to see me I would

not speak to them. Never, I think, was child more perfectly miserable; and though I gave little thought to that part of the matter, I can now see that I must have made the whole household wretched. And yet by this time I was doing myself the greatest injustice. I was no longer angry with Emilia. I was simply sunk in grief. My pink pet was crushed into dust; how it had happened, or who was to blame, I did not care. I was just broken-hearted.

I think it must have been the evening of the second day after the tragedy of the shell that I was sitting alone in my little room, when there came a tap at the door. "Come in," I said listlessly, never for a moment supposing it to be any one but the housemaid. The door opened and I glanced up. My visitor was Aunt Lois. I had forgotten all about her coming, though I now remembered hearing that she was expected a week or two before Margaret's marriage.

"Aunt Lois!" I exclaimed, starting up, but when I felt her bright kindly eyes looking at me inquiringly, I grew red and turned away; but she came forward all the more eagerly. [49]

"So my poor little girl," she said, "I hear you have been in great trouble."

I did not speak—I began to cry quietly.

"And some one else has been in trouble too," she said; "you have made Emilia very unhappy."

I raised my head in surprise. "Emilia!" I repeated; "she doesn't care. She only laughed at me."

"She *does* care, Lois," said my aunt. "She has tried to tell you so several times."

"Yes," I said confusedly, "she did; but I didn't think anybody cared *really*."

"No, you have been thinking of no one but yourself, Lois; that is the truth, dear. But now listen to me, and don't think I am going to laugh at

you. I understand how you have been feeling. Once, when I was a little girl, I was very nearly as miserable about the loss of a—guess now—what *do* you think?"

I looked up with interest.

"I don't know," I said; "was it a pet bird, or something like that?"

"No," replied Aunt Lois, "nothing half so sensible. I don't think you could guess. It was nothing but a little sugar mouse, which I had had for some weeks, till at last one day, forgetting that it was only sugar, I left it so close to the fire that it melted. But many times in my life I have thought of my poor mouse with gratitude, Lois. It taught me some good lessons. Can you guess what they were?" [50]

"Not to care too much for things, I suppose," I said.

"Not *exactly* that. I don't think 'caring' ever does us harm; but *what* one cares for, that is the thing. You will understand in good time."

I looked up again, thoughtfully this time.

"I think I do understand, a little," I said. "You are so kind, Aunt Lois."

"I don't like to see people unhappy if I can cheer them," she said. "Do you, Lois?"

I did not reply.

"Shall I call Emilia?" she said. "You can make *her* happy again."

"Please," I whispered.

Aunt Lois went to the door, and I heard her call my sister. She must have been waiting somewhere near, for in a moment she was in the room. She ran up to me and put her arms round me and kissed me fondly—more fondly I think than ever any one had kissed me before. [51]

"Dear little Lois," she said, "I have been *so* sorry about you. Won't

you forgive me? And I have not been a good sister to you—I have left you alone to make amusement for yourself when I might have helped you. Aunt Lois has shown me it all, and I want to begin now quite differently, so that you shall never feel lonely again."

I kissed her in return. Who could have helped doing so? There were tears in her eyes—those merry bright eyes that I had never before seen looking sad; and it seemed to me that all of a sudden I found out how sweet and pretty Emilia was.

"Dear Emilia," I said, and then touching a little knot of pale-rose-coloured ribbon that she happened to be wearing, and which seemed just to match the pretty flush in her cheeks, I whispered very low, "Will *you* be my pink pet, Emilia?"

She laughed happily. "That reminds me," she said, and out of her pocket she drew a tiny box, which she gave me. I opened it, and gave a little cry of surprise. There, in a nest of cotton-wool, there lay before me, lovely as ever, my beloved shell! [52]

"Emilia!" I exclaimed, "where did you get it? It was broken to bits."

"I brought it," said Aunt Lois. "Don't you remember my saying there had once been two of those rare shells? Emilia wrote to ask me to hunt all through the cabinet to see if possibly the other was still there; and I actually did find it. It was hidden in a very large shell, that somehow or other it had got into—one of the large shells you seldom played with."

"How kind of you, and of Emilia," I said. Then I looked at the shell again. "I should like to keep it *always*," I said, "but I won't make a pink pet of it."

And I always did keep it. It lies now in a corner of my trinket-case, where it has lain for many years, and where little fingers have often reverently touched it, when I told them it was a keepsake from the dear, merry Aunt Emilia their young eyes had never seen—sister and dearest of friends while she lived, most precious of memories when

she died. For she died many years ago; but before many years more have passed, I smile to think that God will let us be again together, and this is one of the thoughts that makes me not regret to feel that I am really growing into quite an old woman.

AN HONEST LITTLE MAN

[53]

Our Baby is very fond of coming down to dessert. I almost think it is the greatest pleasure in his small life, especially as it is not one that very often happens, for, of course, as a rule, he has to go to bed before father and mother begin dinner, and dessert comes at the end of all, even after grace, which I have often wondered at. Our Baby is four; he has rather red hair, and merry-sad eyes, if you know what I mean; and in summer, because his skin is so very fair—"quite lost on a boy," nurse says—he has a great many freckles, especially on his dear little nose. He is a great pet, of course, but not in a very babyish way—he seems too sensible for that; and he is very gentle and thoughtful, but not at all "soft" or cowardly. Our Baby has a brother—he is really, of course, brother to us all; but Baby seems to think he is only "budder" to him—a very big, almost grown-up brother, Baby considers him, for he is nearly seven! Well, one evening lately both[54] these little boys came down to dessert for a great treat, because an auntie had come on a visit, and this was the first night. They were both so pleased. "Brother" was chattering and laughing in what we call his "big man way," and Baby smiling soberly. That is his way when he is pleased, and that reminds me how we did laugh the first night he ever came down! He was so dreadfully solemn and quiet we thought he was going to cry, and father said, "That child had better go to bed, he looks so miserable;" but when I asked him if he would like to go up, he looked at me and smiled, and said, "Oh no, Cissy. He's very happy;" and then we saw he really was, only he thought looking solemn was the best of good manners, for afterwards he told "Brother" he thought "gemplemens and ladies never laughed at dinner!" But he was more at home this evening that Auntie had come, and though he did not make any noise, any one could see he was happy. He was sitting by Auntie, who was very pleased with him, and without any one happening to notice, she took a cocoa-nut biscuit from a plate in front of her and gave it to him. He took it quietly, but did not eat it, for he saw that "Budder" had not got one, and though[55] our little boys are not the least jealous of each other, they are very

fond of being what they call "egwall," and if one gets anything, he likes the other to get the same.

'AN · HONEST · LITTLE MAN'
"Him has one, zank you." p. 55

Auntie went on speaking, and did not see that Baby did not eat his

biscuit, but held it tight in his little hand. And in a minute or two mother looked round and said, "I must find something my little boys will like." Then she drew the cocoa-nut biscuits to her and chose two, a pink one and a white one—you must know there is nothing we children think such a treat as cocoa-nut biscuits—and handed them to them.

"Budder" took his and said, "Thank you, mother;" but what do you think dear Baby did? Instead of taking it, as he might easily have done, without any one's ever knowing of the other—and, indeed, if they had known, they couldn't have said it was naughty of him—he held out his hand with the biscuit already in it, and said quite simply, not the least as if he thought he was doing anything very good, "Him has one, zank you."

"Honest little man," said mother, and then Baby's face got red, and he did look pleased. For mother does not praise us often, but when she does it is for something to be a little proud of, you see, and even Baby understands that. [56]

And Auntie turned and gave him a kiss.

"You dear little fellow," she said; and then in a minute, she added, "that reminds me of something I came across the other day."

"What was it? Oh, do tell us, Auntie," we all cried.

Auntie smiled—we are always on the look-out for stories, and she knows that.

"It was nothing much, dears," she said, "nothing I could make a story of, but it was pretty, and it touched me."

"Was it a bear," said Baby, "or a woof that touched you?"

"Silly boy," said "Budder"; "how could it be a bear or a woof? Auntie said it was something pretty."

And when she had left off laughing, she told us.

"It was the other day," she said, "I was walking along one of the

principal streets of Edinburgh, thinking to myself how bitterly cold it was for May. Spring has been late everywhere this year, but down here in the south, though you may think you have had something to [57] complain of, you can have no idea how cold we have had it; and the long light days seem to make it worse somehow! Well, I was walking along quietly, when I caught sight of a poor little boy hopping across the road. I say 'hopping,' because it gives you the best idea of the queer way he got along, for he was terribly crippled, and his only way of moving was by something between a jerk and a hop on his crutches. And yet he managed to come so quickly! You would really have been amused to see the kind of fly he came with, and how cleverly he dodged and darted in and out of the cabs and carriages, for it was the busiest time of the day. And fancy, children, his poor little legs and feet from his knees were quite bare. That is not a very unusual sight in Edinburgh, and not by any means at all times one to call forth pity. Indeed, I know one merry family of boys and girls who all make a point of 'casting' shoes and stockings when they get to the country in summer, and declare they are much happier without. Their father and mother should be so, any way, considering the saving in hosiers' and shoemakers' bills. But in the case of my poor little cripple it was pitiful; for the weather was so cold, and the thin legs [58] and feet so red, and the poor twisted-up one looked so specially unhappy.

"'Poor little boy,' I exclaimed to the lady I was with; 'just look at him. Why he has hopped all across the street merely for the pleasure of looking at the nice things in that window!'

"For by this time the boy was staring in with all his eyes at a confectioner's close to where we were passing.

"'Give him a penny, do,' said my friend, 'or go into the shop and buy him something.'

"We went close up to the boy, and I touched him on the shoulder. He looked up—such a pretty, happy face he had—and I said to him—

"'Well, my man, which shall I give you, a penny or a cookie?'

"He smiled brightly, but you would never guess what he answered. Like our 'honest little man' here," and Auntie patted Baby's head as she spoke, "he held out his hand—not a dirty hand 'considering'—and said cheerfully—

"'Plenty to buy some wi', thank ye, mem;' and spying into his hand I saw, children, one halfpenny."

Auntie stopped. I think there were tears in her eyes. [59]

"And what did you do, Auntie?" we all cried.

"What could I have done but what I did?" she said. "I don't know if it would have been better not—better to let his simple honesty be its own reward. I could not resist it; of course I gave him another penny! He thanked me again quite simply; I am sure it never struck him that he had done anything to be praised for, and I didn't praise him, I just gave him the penny. And oh, how his bright eyes gleamed! He looked now as if he thought he had wealth enough at his command to buy all the cookies in the shop."

"So he hadn't only been pertending to buy," said "Budder." "Poor little boy, he had been toosing—toosing what he would buy. I'm so glad you gave him anoder penny, Auntie."

"He's so gad him got anoder penny," echoed Baby; though, to tell the truth, I am not sure that he had been listening to the story. He had been making up for lost time by crunching away at his biscuit. And when the boys said "Good night," Auntie gave them each another biscuit, and mother smiled and said it was because it was Auntie's first night. But "Budder" told Baby afterwards, by some funny reasoning of his own, that they had got another biscuit each, "'cos of [60] that poor little boy who wasn't greedy."

And Baby, of course, was quite satisfied, as "Budder" said so.

I think I shall always remember that little cripple boy when I see cocoa-nut cakes, and it will make me like them, if possible, better

than ever.

THE SIX POOR LITTLE PRINCESSES

[61]

"And all the Christ Child's other gifts . . .
. . . but still—but still—
The doll seem'd all my waking thoughts to fill. . . ."
The Doll that ne'er was Mine.

There were six of them, beginning with Helen and ending with Baby, and as Helen was only twelve and Baby already five, it is easy to understand that they were all pretty near of a size. But they weren't really princesses. That was all Jinny's planning. Indeed most things which were nice or amusing or at all "out-of-the-way" were Jinny's planning.

Jinny's long name was Ginevra. She came third. Helen and Agatha were in front of her, and below her came Elspeth and Belinda and Baby. Baby had a proper name, I suppose, but I never heard it, and so I can't tell you what it was. And as no one ever did hear it, I don't see that it much matters. Nor would it have mattered much if Belinda had had no proper name either, for she was never called anything but Butter-ball. The story was that it was because she was so fat; and as, like many fat people, she was very good-natured, she did not mind.

[62]

They were all together in the nursery, together but alone, as was rather often the case; for they had no kind, comfortable old nurse to spoil and scold them by turns, poor children, only a girl that Miss Burton, the lady whom they lived with, kept "to do the nursery work," which does not sound like being a nice nurse at all, though I suppose Miss Burton did not understand the difference. There were a good many things she did not understand. She liked the children to be neatly dressed, and to have good plain food in plenty; she was very particular that they should do their lessons and go for a walk every day when it was fine enough, but that was about all she thought of.

She did not think they needed any fun except what they could make for themselves, and even then it must not be too noisy; she could not understand that they could possibly be "dull," caged up in their nursery. "Dull," when there were six of them to play together! She would have laughed at the idea.

They had few story-books and fewer toys. So they had to invent stories for themselves, and as for the toys, to make believe very much indeed. But how they would have succeeded in either had it not been for Jinny I should be afraid to say. [63]

"It's a shame—a regular shame," said Ginevra. She was sitting on the table in the middle of the room with Elspeth beside her. The two little ones were cross-legged on the floor, very disconsolately nursing the battered remains of two very hideous old dolls, who in their best days could never have been anything but coarse and common, and Helen and Agatha sat together on a chair with a book in their hands, which, however, they were not reading. "It's a shame," Ginevra repeated; "even the little princes in the tower had toys to play with."

"Had they?" said Helen. "Is that in the history, Jinny?"

"It's in some history; anyway, I'm sure I've heard it," Jinny replied.

"But this isn't a tower," said Agatha.

"No, it's a dungeon," replied Ginevra grimly. "And if any of you besides me had the spirit of a true princess, you wouldn't stand it."

"We don't want to stand it any more than you do," Helen said quietly. "But what are we to do? You don't want to run away, do you? Where could we run to? It isn't as if papa was anywhere in England. Besides, we're not starved or beaten, and we're in no danger of having our heads cut off." [64]

"I'd rather we were—there'd be some fun in that," said Princess Jinny.

"Fun!" repeated Agatha.

"Well, it wouldn't be as stupid as being shut up here in this dreary old nursery—I mean dungeon," said Ginevra. "And now that our cruel gaoler has refused to let us have the small solace of—of a—" she could not find any more imposing word—"*doll* to play with, I think the time has come to take matters into our own hands, princesses."

"I've no objection," said Helen and Agatha, speaking together. "But what do you mean to do?"

"You shouldn't call Miss Burton a gaoler—she isn't as bad as *that;* besides, she's not a man," said Elspeth, who had not before spoken. "We might call her the governor—no, governess; but that sounds so funny, 'governess of the tower,' or custo—then some word like that, of the castle."

"But this isn't a tower—we've fixed that—nor a castle. It's just a dungeon—that'll do very well, and it's great fun at night when we put out the candles and grope about in the dark. And gaoler will do very well for Miss Burton—some are quite kind, much kinder than she." [65]

"It's all along of our never having had any mamma," said a slow, soft little voice from the floor.

"Princess Butter-ball, what a vulgar way of speaking you have! —'all along of'—I'm ashamed of you," said Jinny severely. "Besides, we did have a mamma once—all except——" and she glanced at Baby, but without finishing her sentence. For had she done so poor Princess Baby would have burst into loud sobs; it was a very sore point with her that she had never had a mamma at all, whereas all the others, even Butter-ball, were perfectly sure they could remember their mother.

"If Aunt Ginevra would come home," sighed Elspeth. "We've always been promised she would." "And she's written us kind letters," added Agatha.

"What's letters?" said Jinny contemptuously.

"Well, you needn't complain," said Helen. "She sent you a silver

mug—real silver—and that's more than any of our godmothers did for the rest of us."

"Yes, she did," said Jinny, "and it's fortunate for us all, princesses, that through all our troubles I have always kept that one—memento of happier days about my person——" [66]

"What stories, Jinny!" Agatha exclaimed. "At least it's stories if you're being real just now. You mix up princess-ing and real, so that I get quite muddled. But, you know, you *don't* carry the mug about with you."

For all answer, Princess Ginevra, after some fumbling in her pocket, drew out a short, thick parcel wrapped in tissue paper, which she unfolded, and held up to view a silver mug.

"There now," she said.

Agatha looked rather crestfallen.

"It must be very uncomfortable to have that lumpy thing in your pocket, and some day Miss Burton will be asking where it's gone," she said. "I suppose it makes you fancy yourself more a princess, but I'm getting rather tired of fancies. Now if we only had a beautiful doll, and could all work at dressing it, that *would* be worth something."

"And we might go on being princesses all the same, or even more," put in Elspeth.

"Patience," said Jinny, "patience and courage. Leave it to me. I think I see my way. I have my eye on a trusty adherent, and if I am not much mistaken, you shall have a doll before Christmas."

All five pricked up their ears at this—they had all at the bottom of their hearts the greatest faith in Ginevra, though the elder ones now and then felt it necessary to snub her a little. [67]

"Are you in earnest, Jinny?" said Helen; "and if you are, I wish you'd tell us what you mean. Who is the trusty adherent?"

"I know," said Agatha. "It's the red-haired boy next door. Jinny dropped her umbrella the other day and he picked it up for her, and she stopped to thank him—that day we had colds and couldn't go out, Helen."

"No," said Elspeth; "it was Jinny that picked up some of his books that dropped—he was carrying such a pile of awfully messy ragged ones. He must go to a messy school."

"He was not going to school," said Ginevra. "He was taking these old books to—but no, I must not betray him."

"Rubbish," said Agatha; "he can't be more than nine. What could there be to betray? *He's* not a shut-up prince, Jinny. Do talk sense for once."

Ginevra changed her tone.

"I don't want to tell you," she said in a matter-of-fact voice, "for fear of disappointing you all. Just wait a very few days and then I'll tell you. But first, *supposing* we could get a doll, what should it be like—fair or dark?" [68]

"Dark, black hair and brown eyes," replied all the five voices. For the six princesses had fair curls and blue eyes, so, naturally, they preferred a contrast.

"Hum," said Tinny. "Brown hair, perhaps, but not black. The black-haired dolls in the shop-windows look common."

"Never mind. *Any* haired would do so long as we got her," said Agatha. "But don't talk about it. It does make me want her *so* dreadfully."

Late that afternoon, just about the time that the little boy next door would be coming home from school, a small figure with a shawl drawn over its head might have been seen at Miss Burton's front gate. She had waited patiently for some minutes. At last she was rewarded by the sight, or the sound rather, for it was almost too dark

to see any one, of Master Red-Head coming up the road. When he got close to his own door she called out. It was rather difficult to do so, for she had no idea what his name was.

"Master—Mr.—" she began, and then changing suddenly, "boy, please, I don't know your name." [69]

He stopped and came up to her, exclaiming of course, "I say, who's there? What's up?"

"It's me—Prin—I mean one of the little girls next door, the one who picked up your old books the other day. I want to ask you something, please."

Red-Head was all attention, and the two went on talking for some minutes.

"You're sure he will?" said Jinny at last.

"Quite positive. I'll get all out of him I can. It's real silver, you say."

"Real, pure silver," she replied.

"And—and it's your very own? I mean you may do what you like with it?" Red-Head went on, for he was a boy with a conscience.

"Of course it's my own. Do you think I'd steal?" exclaimed Jinny indignantly, so indignantly that she omitted to answer his second question, not even asking it of herself.

"No, no, of course not. But you know—*I* wouldn't get leave to sell my watch though it's my own. Only I suppose it's all because you've no father and mother to look after you. It's very hard on you to have no toys. I suppose girls can't live without dolls. But I say, tell me again about the doll. I'll have to do it all at once, for we're going away for the holidays the day after to-morrow." [70]

"You're to get all the money you can, and the very prettiest doll you can have for the money. With brown hair, remember—not light, we're tired of light, we've all got it ourselves—and not black, black's

common."

"And not red, I suppose. You may as well say it. I don't mind."

"Well, no," said Ginevra hesitatingly. She would not for worlds have hurt his feelings—no princess would so treat a trusty adherent—yet she could not pretend to a weakness for red hair. "I *think* we'd like brown best."

"All right. Then to-morrow afternoon, just about this time. It's a half-holiday—we're breaking up, but it's best to wait till dark for fear you should get a scolding. I'll be here just about this time, with—you know what."

"Thank you, oh thank you so much," and Ginevra held out her hand, half expecting him to kiss it, instead of which, however, he gave it a schoolboy shake.

"I can excuse it, however; he could not be expected to understand," she said to herself as she flew up to the nursery.

THE SIX POOR LITTLE PRINCESSES

"Ginevra found herself running upstairs, though not so fast as the evening before, for fear of dropping the precious parcel she held in her arms." P. 71

She could scarcely sleep that night, and the next morning it was all she could do to keep her secret. But there was plenty of determination under Princess Jinny's fair curls, and by dint of much squeezing of her lips together and saying to herself what a pity it [71]

would be to spoil the beautiful "surprise," she managed to get through the morning without doing more than dropping some mysterious hints. But how long the day seemed, short as it really was! Would it never get dark? For it was clear and frosty, and the afternoon, to Jinny, appeared, out of contradiction, to be twice as long as usual of closing in.

"All comes, however, to him (or her) who waits," and the blissful moment at last arrived when Ginevra found herself running upstairs, though not so fast as the evening before, for fear of dropping the precious parcel she held in her arms.

"The dear, sweet boy," she said to herself. "I'd have liked to kiss him. Perhaps we all might when he comes home again."

For Red-Head's last words had been a charge not to forget to let him know after the holidays if Miss Dolly was approved of.

Ginevra burst into the nursery.

"Princesses," she exclaimed, "shut your eyes, while I unwrap her. I'll shut mine too. I haven't seen her myself." [72]

"Is it—can it be—the doll?" they all cried, and their hearts nearly stopped beating with excitement.

"Now," Jinny exclaimed.

They all pressed forward. All six pairs of eyes were fixed on Jinny's lap, but not a sound was heard. A blank look of disappointment fell over every face. Red-Head, poor Red-Head had done his best, but oh, what a mistake! He had bought a *dressed* doll, and as ten and sixpence, which was all he had got for the mug, will not go very far in such articles, it can be imagined that dolly herself, notwithstanding the gorgeousness of her attire, fell short, lamentably short, of the poor princesses' expectations.

"She's only china, and her hair's a put-on wig," said Agatha, with tears in her eyes.

"Her clothes don't even take off and on, and they're not a bit like a little girl's clothes," said Elspeth.

Ginevra said not a word; her face told of nothing less than despair.

"And poor darling Jinny has sold her mug to buy it with—all to please us. I found it out, but it was too late to stop it," said Helen. "Jinny darling, we must like her, we *will*—any way she'll be better than [73] nothing. We'll make her new clothes, and then perhaps she won't look so vulgar," whereupon, Helen setting the example, all the five princesses fell upon Jinny's neck and hugged and kissed her and each other amidst their tears.

"And we mustn't tell Red-Head," said Jinny; "he'd be *so* disappointed. He did his best. I never thought of saying she wasn't to be dressed. He's going away to-morrow, and of course they wouldn't change the doll after he comes back. Besides, she *is* better than nothing, surely?"

Christmas Eve—the six princesses sat on the window-sill looking out on the fast-falling snow. Dolly—partially denuded of her gorgeous attire, but looking rather woe-begone, if less self-satisfied and vulgar, for new clothes "to take on and off," and of irreproachable good taste, are not to be fashioned by little fingers in a day—was reposing in Butter-ball's fat arms. They "took turns" of her, as was the fairest arrangement under the circumstances of six little girls and only one doll; and, true to the sound philosophy of her being "better than nothing," a certain half-contemptuous affection for her had taken the place of the first dislike. [74]

Suddenly—rat-tat-tat at the front knocker.

"The postman," said Helen. "*Possibly* there may be a Christmas card for us."

It was for "us," but it was not a card. No; a letter, addressed outside to Helen as the eldest, but inside beginning "My six dear little nieces."

"From Aunt Ginevra," Helen exclaimed; "and oh, she is coming home at last. And oh, oh, just fancy, we are all to go to live with her. And—and——"

"Read it aloud," said Jinny quickly. But Helen was all trembling with excitement. Jinny seized it and read.

Delightful news truly for the six imprisoned princesses!

"She *must* be nice," said Jinny; "she writes so sweetly. And what can the presents be that she says she is sending us for Christmas?"

Agatha looked over her shoulder.

"I have chosen what I think would have pleased me most when I was a little girl. The box is sent off by express from Paris, where your uncle and I are resting for a few days, so that you may have it by Christmas. And before the new year begins, my darlings, I hope to be at last with you." [75]

Rat-tat-tat again. The railway van this time. Such a big box comes up to the nursery. Dear, dear, what a business to get it opened. How the six pairs of eyes shine, how the six pairs of hands tremble with eagerness as each undoes her own specially marked parcel. And oh, the cries of delight at last! What could be lovelier, what more perfect, than the six exquisite dolls, each more beautiful than her sisters!

"Real wax, real hair, real everysing," cries Princess Baby.

"One suit of clothes ready, taking off and on ones, and lots of stuff to make more," adds Butter-ball.

"Oh, how sweet Auntie must be, how happy we are going to be!" cry all.

But Jinny's face is sad.

"My poor, ugly dolly," she murmurs. "And oh, what shall I say if Auntie asks for my jug?"

"We'll tell her—all of us together. It was all for our sakes you did it, and so she can't be angry," say the other five.

"And, Jinny, I do think the old doll would make a beautiful maid for the others; she really couldn't look vulgar in a neat print frock and white apron."

Ginevra brightens up at this. [76]

"All the same," she said, "I wish now we had waited a little and believed that Auntie would come as soon as she could. I see that it would have been better. And oh, I do so hope she won't be vexed."

She was not vexed; only very, *very* sorry. More deeply sorry than the princesses themselves could understand.

"I had no idea of it all," said poor Auntie. "Yet I could not have come to you sooner, my darlings. Still—if I had known—— But it is all over now, and you are going to be as happy as ever your Auntie can make you."

"And it's *almost* the same as having a mamma, isn't it?" said Baby, satisfied that in this possession she had an undoubted share.

The mug was reclaimed. And the dealer, who had paid far too little for it, was well frightened by no less a person than Uncle himself.

Poor Red-Head never knew how he had failed. But Auntie, who got to know his father and mother, was able, without hurting his feelings, to make him understand that little boys do well to keep out of such transactions even when inspired by the kindest of motives.

"Thank you so much for telling me about it. I am pleased, for it is just what I wanted to hear of."

"And I am so glad for Herr Wildermann's sake. It rarely happens in this world that one hears of a want and a supply at the same time;" and the speaker, laughing as she said the last words, shook hands once again with her hostess and left her.

Lady Iltyd went to the window,—a low one, leading on to the garden, and looked out. Then she opened it and called out clearly, though not very loudly—

"Basil, Basi—i—il, are you there, my boy?"

"Yes, mother; I'm coming." And from among the bushes, at a very short distance, there emerged a rather comical little figure. A boy of eight or nine, with a bright rosy face and short dark hair. Over his sailor suit he had a brown holland blouse, which once, doubtless, had been clean, but was certainly so no longer. It stuck out rather bunchily [78] behind, owing to the large collar and handkerchief worn beneath, and as the child was of a sturdy make to begin with, and was extra flushed with his exertions, it was no wonder that his mother stopped in what she was going to say to laugh heartily at her little boy.

"You look like a gnome, Basil," she said. "What have you been doing to make yourself so hot and dirty?"

"Transplanting, mother. It's nearly done. I've taken a lot of the little wood plants that I have in my garden and put them down here among the big shrubs, where it's cool and damp. It was too dry and sunny for them in my garden, Andrew says. They're used to the nice, shady, damp sort of places in the wood, you see, mother."

"But it isn't the time for transplanting, Basil. It is too late."

"It won't matter, Andrew says, mother. I've put them in such a

beautiful wet corner. But I'm awfully hot, and I'm rather dirty."

"Rather," said his mother. "And, Basil, your lessons for to-morrow? It's four o'clock, and you know what your father said about having them done before you come down to dessert." [79]

Basil shook himself impatiently.

"Oh bother!" he said; "whenever I'm a little happy somebody begins about something horrid. I've such a lot of lessons to-day. And it's a half-holiday. I think it is the greatest shame to call it a half-holiday, and then give more lessons to do than any other day."

At the bottom of her heart Lady Ilyd was a little of Basil's opinion; but she felt it would do no good, and might do a great deal of harm to say so. Basil went as a day-scholar to a very good private school at Tarnworth, the little country town two miles off. He rode there on his pony in the morning, and rode home again at four o'clock. He liked his schoolfellows, and did not *dis*like his teachers, but he could not bear lessons! There was this much excuse for him, that he was not a clever boy in the sense of learning quickly. On the contrary, he learned slowly, and had to read a thing over several times before he understood it. Sometimes he would do so patiently enough; but sometimes—and these "times," I fear, came more frequently than the good ones—he was so *im*patient, so easily discouraged, that it was not a pleasant task to superintend his lessons' learning. Yet he was not without a queer kind of perseverance of his own—he could not [80] bear to go to bed leaving any of his lessons unfinished, and he would go on working at them with a sort of dull, hopeless resolution that was rather piteous, till one reflected that, after all, he might just as well look cheerful about it. But to look cheerful in the face of difficulties was not Basil's "way." With the first difficulty vanished all his brightness and good temper, and all he could do was to work on like a poor little over-driven slave, with no pleasure or satisfaction in his task. And many an evening bedtime was long past before his lessons were ready, for though Basil well knew how long he took to learn them, and how the later he put them off the harder they grew, there

was no getting him to set to work at once on coming home. He would make one excuse after another—"it was not worth while beginning till after tea," or his little sister Blanche had begged him to play with her just for five minutes, and they "hadn't noticed how late it was," or—or—it would be impossible to tell all the reasons why Basil never could manage to begin his lessons so as to get them done at a reasonable hour. So that at last his father had made the rule of which his mother reminded him—that he was not to come down to dessert unless his lessons were done. [81]

Now, not coming down to dessert meant more to Basil than it sounds, and nothing was a greater punishment to him. It was not that he was too fond of nice things, for he was not at all a greedy boy, though he liked an orange, or a juicy pear, or a macaroon biscuit as much as anybody, and he liked, too, to be neatly dressed, and sit beside his father in the pretty dining-room, by the nicely arranged table with the flowers and the fruit and the sparkling wine and shining glass. For though Basil was not in some ways a clever child, he had great taste for pretty and beautiful things. But it was none of the things I have mentioned that made him so *very* fond of "coming down to dessert." It was another thing. It was his mother's playing on the piano.

Every evening when Lady Ilityd left the dining-room, followed by Basil and Blanche, she used to go straight to the grand piano which stood in one corner of the library, where they generally sat, and there she would play to the children for a quarter of an hour or so, just whatever they asked for. She needed no "music paper," as Blanche called it; the music seemed to come out of her fingers of itself. And this was Basil's happiest moment of the day. Blanche liked it too, but not as much as Basil. She would sometimes get tired of sitting still, and begin to fidget about, so that now and then her mother would tell her to run off to bed without waiting for nurse to come for her. But not so Basil. There he would sit,—or lie perhaps, generally on the white fluffy rug before the fire,—with the soft dim light stealing in through the coloured glass of the high windows, or in winter evenings with no light but that of the fire fitfully dancing on the rows and rows and *rows* of [82]

books that lined the walls from floor to ceiling, only varied here and there by the portrait of some powdered-haired great-grandfather or grandmother smiling, or sometimes, perhaps, frowning down on their funny little descendant in his sailor-suit, with his short-cropped, dark head. A quaint little figure against the gleaming white fur, dreaming—what?—he could not have told you, for he had not much cleverness in telling what he thought. But his music-dreams were very charming nevertheless, and in after life, whenever anything beautiful or exquisite came in his way, Basil's thoughts always flew back to the old library and his mother's playing.

For long he had imagined that nothing of music kind could be more delightful. But a short time before this little story begins a new knowledge had come to him. At a concert at Tarnworth—for once or twice a year there were good concerts at the little town—he had heard a celebrated violinist play, and it seemed to Basil as if a new world had opened to him. [83]

"Mother," he said, when the concert was over, looking up at his mother with red cheeks and sparkling eyes, "it's better than the piano—that little fiddle, I mean. It's like—like——"

"Like what, my boy?"

"I can't say it," said Basil, "but it's like as if the music didn't belong to *here* at all. Like as if it came out of the air someway, without notes or anything. I think if I was an awfully clever man I could say things out of a fiddle, far better than write them in books."

His mother smiled at him.

"But you mustn't call it a fiddle, Basil. A violin is the right name."

"Violin," repeated Basil thoughtfully. And a few minutes later, when they were in the carriage on their way home, "Mother," he said, "do you think I might learn to play the violin?"

"I should like it very much," said his mother. "But I fear there is no teacher at Tarnworth. I will inquire, however. Only, Basil, there is one [84]

thing. The violin is difficult, and you don't like difficulties."

Basil opened his eyes.

"Difficult," he said, and as he spoke he put up his left arm as he had seen the violinist do, sawing the air backwards and forwards with an imaginary bow in his right—"difficult! I *can't* fancy it would be difficult. But any way, I'd awfully like to learn it."

This had been two or three months ago. Lady Ilyd had not forgotten Basil's wish; and, indeed, if she had been inclined to do so, I don't think Basil would have let her. For at least two or three times a week he asked her if she had found a violin teacher yet, and whether it wouldn't be a good plan to write to London for a violin. For, at the bottom of his heart, Basil had an idea which he did not quite like to express, in the face of what his mother had said as to the difficulty of violin playing, namely, that teaching at all would be unnecessary!

"If I only had a violin in my arms," he used to say to himself as he fiddled away with his invisible bow, "I am *sure* I could make it sing out whatever I wanted." [85]

And I am afraid that this idea of violin playing which had taken such a hold of him, did not help him to do his lessons any the quicker. He would fall into a brown study in the middle of them, imagining himself with the longed-for treasure in his possession, and almost *hearing* the lovely sounds, to wake up with a start to a half-finished Latin exercise or French verb on the open copy-book before him, so that it was really no wonder that the complaint, evening after evening repeated, "Basil hasn't finished his lessons," at last wore out his father's patience.

We have been a long time of returning to the garden and listening to the conversation between Basil and his mother.

"Yes, I think it's a shame," repeated Basil, *àpropos* of Wednesday afternoon lessons.

"But it can't be altered," said his mother, "and instead of wasting

time in grumbling, I think it would be much better to set to work. And Basil, listen. If you really exert yourself to the utmost, you may still get your lessons done in time this evening. And if they *are* done in time, and you can come down to dessert, I shall have something to tell you in the library after dinner." [86]

"Something to tell me," repeated Basil, looking rather puzzled. "How do you mean, mother? Something nice, do you mean?"

He did not take up ideas very quickly, and now and then looked puzzled about things that would have been easily understood by most children.

"Nice, of course it is nice, you stupid old fellow," said his mother, laughing. "Are you in a brown study, Basil? That bodes ill for your lessons. Come, rouse yourself and give *all* your attention to them, and let me see a bright face at dessert. *Of course* it is something 'nice' I have to tell you, or I wouldn't make a bribe of it, would I? It's very wrong to bribe you, isn't it?"

"I don't know," said Basil. "I don't think it can be if you do it. Kiss me, mother. I'll try to do my lessons quickly," and lifting up his rosy face for his mother's kiss, he ran off. "But oh, how I do hate them!" he said to himself as he ran.

After all, "they" were not so very difficult to-day, or perhaps Basil really did try hard for once. However that may have been, the result was a happy one. At dessert two bright little people made their appearance in the dining-room, and before his father had time to ask him the question he had hitherto so dreaded, the boy burst out with the good news— [87]

"All done, father, every one, more than half an hour ago."

"Yes," said Blanche complacently, "he's been *werry* good. He's put his fingers in his ears, and kept bumming to himself *such* a lot, and he hasn't played the vi'lin one time."

"Played the violin!" repeated her father. "What does she mean?

You didn't tell me Basil had already be——" he went on, turning to the children's mother; but she hastily interrupted him.

"Blanche means playing an imaginary violin," she said, smiling. "Ever since Basil heard Signor L—— at Tarnworth, his head has been running on violins so, that he stops in the middle of his lessons to refresh himself with a little inaudible music."

As she spoke she got up and moved towards the door.

"Bring your biscuits and fruit into the library, children," she said. "You can eat them there. I'm not going to play to you this evening. We're going to talk instead."

Up jumped Basil.

"I don't want any fruit," he said, "I really don't. Blanche, you stay with father and eat all you want. I want to be a little while alone with mother in the library. Mayn't I, mother?" he added coaxingly. "Blanche doesn't mind." [88]

"You are really very complimentary to *me*," said his father, laughing. "Why should Blanche mind?"

"I doesn't," said Blanche, very contentedly watching her father peeling a pear for her. So Basil and his mother went off together for their talk.

"About the 'something nice,' mother?" began Basil.

"Well, my boy, I'm quite ready to tell you. Mrs. Marchcote was here to-day. You know who I mean—the lady who lives in that pretty house at the end of Tarnworth High Street. You pass it every morning going to school."

"I know," said Basil, nodding his head. "But I don't care about Mrs. Marchcote, mother. Is she going to have a children's party—is that it? I don't think I care about parties, mother." And his face looked rather disappointed.

"Basil, Basil, how impatient you are! I never said anything about a children's party. Mrs. Marchcote told me something quite different from that. Listen, Basil. A young German—Herr Wildermann is his [89] name—has come to Tarnworth in hopes of making his living by teaching the violin. He can give pianoforte lessons also, but he plays the violin better. He plays it, she says, *very* beautifully. He has got no pupils yet, Basil. But—who do you think is going to be his first one?"

Basil gazed at his mother. For a moment he felt a little puzzled.

"Mother," he said at last, "do you mean—oh, mother, *are* you going to let me have lessons? Shall I have a dear little violin of my own? Oh, mother, mother!"

And he jumped up from the rug where he had been lying at his mother's feet, and looked as if he were ready to turn head over heels for joy!

"Yes, my boy," said his mother; "you are going to have your first lesson the day after to-morrow, and Herr Wildermann is to choose you a violin. But listen, Basil, and think well of what I say. It is *not* easy to learn to play the violin. Even if a child has a great deal of taste—talent even—for music, it requires great patience and perseverance to learn to play the violin at all well. No instrument requires more patience before you can arrive at anything really good. I would not say all this to another child—I would let Blanche, for instance, find out the [90] difficulties for herself, and meet them as they come, cheerfully and brightly as she always does. But you are so exaggerated about difficulties, Basil, that I want to save yourself and me vexation and trouble before you begin the violin. You are too confident at first, and you cannot believe that there will be difficulties, and then you go to the other extreme and lose heart. Now, I warn you that the violin is *very* difficult. And it is not a thing you *must* learn—not like your lessons at school. It will be a great, an immense pleasure to you once you master it, but unless you resolve to be patient and persevering and *hopeful* in learning it, you had better not begin it."

Lady Iltyd spoke very earnestly. She was anxious to make an

impression on Basil, for she saw more clearly than any one the faults of his character, and longed to help him to overcome them. For a moment or two Basil remained silent, for he was, as she had hoped he would be, struck by what she had said, and was thinking over it. Then he jumped up, and throwing his arms round his mother's neck, kissed her very lovingly.

"Mother dear," he said, "I do want to learn it, and I will try. Even if it is very difficult, I'll try. You'll see if I won't, for I do love music, and I love *you*, mother. And I would like to please you." [91]

Lady Ilityd kissed him in return.

"My own dear boy," she said, "you will please me very much if you overcome that bad habit of losing heart over difficulties."

"He may learn more things than music in learning the violin," she thought to herself.

But as Basil went upstairs to bed, fiddling at his invisible violin all the way, and whistling the tune he liked to fancy he was playing, *he* said to himself: "I do mean to try, but I *can't* believe it is so difficult as mother says."

Part II

That same afternoon an elderly woman was sitting alone by the window of a shabby little parlour over a grocer's shop in the High Street of Tarnworth. She had a gentle, careworn face—a face that looked as if its owner had known much sorrow, but had not lost heart and patience. She was knitting—knitting a stocking, but so deftly and swiftly that it was evident she did not need to pay any attention to what her fingers were doing. Her eyes,—soft, old, blue eyes, with the [92] rather sad look those clear blue eyes often get in old age,—gazed now and then out of the window—for from where she sat a corner of the ivy-covered church tower was to be seen making a pleasant

object against the sky—and now and then turned anxiously towards the door.

"He is late, my poor Ulric," she said to herself. "And yet I almost dread to see him come in, with the same look on his face—always the same sad disappointment! Ah, what a mistake it has been, I fear, this coming to England—but yet we did it for the best, and it seemed so likely to succeed here where there are two or three such good schools and no music teacher. We did it for the best, however, and there is no use regretting it. The good God sees fit to try us—but still we must trust Him. Ah, if it were only I, but my poor boy!"

And the old eyes filled with slow-coming tears.

They were hastily brushed away, however, for at that moment the door opened and a young man, breathless with excitement, hurried into the room.

"Mother!" he exclaimed, but before he could say more she interrupted him.

"What is it, my boy? What is it, Ulric?" she exclaimed. "No bad news, surely?" [93]

"Bad news, mother dear? I scarcely see what more bad news *could* come to us. As long as we have each other, what is there for us to lose? But I did not mean to speak gloomily this morning, for I have brought you *good* news. Fancy, mother, only fancy—I have got a pupil at last."

"My Ulric—that *is* good news!" said poor Frau Wildermann.

"And who knows what it may lead to," said the young man. "I have always heard that the *first* pupil is the difficulty—once started, one gets on rapidly. Especially if the pupil is one likely to do one credit, and I fancy this will be the case with this boy. Mrs. Marchcote—it is through her kindness I have been recommended—says he has unusual taste for music. He has been longing to learn the violin."

"Who is he?" asked the mother.

"The son of Sir John Iltyd—one of the principal families here. I could not have a better introduction. I am to go the day after to-morrow—three lessons a week, and well paid."

He went on to explain all about the terms to his mother, who listened with a thankful heart, as she saw Ulric's bright eyes and eager, hopeful expression.

"He has not looked like that for many a long day," she thought to herself, "and the help has not come too soon. Ulric would have been even more unhappy had he known how very little we have left." [94]

And she felt glad that she had struggled on without telling her son quite the worst of things. What would she not have borne for him—how had she not struggled for him all these years? He was the only one left her, the youngest and last of her children, for the other three had died while still almost infants, and Ulric had come to them when she and her husband were no longer young, and had lost hopes of ever having a child to cheer their old age. So never was a son more cherished. And he deserved it. He had been the best of sons, and had tried in his boyish way to replace his father, though he was only twelve years old when that father died. Since then life had been hard on them both, doubly hard, for each suffered for the other even more than personally, and yet in another sense not so hard as if either had been alone. They had had misfortune after misfortune—the little patrimony which had enabled Frau Wildermann to yield to Ulric's darling wish of being a musician by profession, had been lost by a bad investment just as his musical education was completed, and it seemed too late in the day for him to try anything else. And so for a year or two they had struggled on, faring not so badly in the summer when living is cheaper, and Ulric often got engagements for the season in the band at some watering-place, but suffering sadly in the long, cold German winters—suffering as those do who will not complain, who keep up a respectable appearance to the last. And then came the idea of emigrating to England, suggested to them by a [95]

friend who had happened to hear of what seemed like an opening at Tarnworth, where they had now been for nearly two months without finding any pupils for Ulric, or employment of any kind in his profession for the young musician.

So it is easy to understand the delight with which he accepted Lady Iltyd's proposal, made to him by Mrs. Marchcote.

It would be difficult to say which of the two, master or pupil, looked forward the more eagerly to the first music-lesson. Basil dreamed of it night and day. Herr Wildermann on his side built castles in the air about the number of pupils he was to have, and the fame he was to gain through his success with Lady Iltyd's boy. Poor fellow, it was not from vanity that his mind dwelt on and so little doubted this same wonderful success! [96]

And in due course came the day after to-morrow, neither hastened nor retarded by the eagerness with which it was looked forward to.

"What a beautiful home! The child cannot but be refined and tender in nature who has been brought up in such a home," thought Herr Wildermann, ready at all times to think the best, and more than usually inclined to-day to see things through rose-coloured spectacles.

He was walking up the long avenue of elms, leading to the Hall. The weather was lovely, already hot, however, and he would have liked to take off his hat and let the breeze—what there was of it, that is to say—play on his forehead. But he had not a free hand, for he was loaded with no less than three violins, his own and two others, what are called half and three-quarters sized, as, till he saw his little pupil, he could not tell which would suit him. He did look rather a comical object, I daresay, to the tall footman at the door, but not so to the eager child who had spent the last hour at least in peeping out to see if his master was not yet coming.

"Mother," he exclaimed, rushing back into the room, "he's come. And he's brought loads of violins." [97]

"*Loads*," repeated Lady Iltyd, smiling down at her boy, whose rosy cheeks and bright eyes were still rosier and brighter than usual; "well, among them it is to be hoped there will be one to suit you."

Then she turned to Ulric, who was standing in the doorway, half dazzled by the brightness of the pretty room into which he was ushered after the darker hall, and still more confused by his intense anxiety to please the graceful lady who was greeting him so kindly, and to win the liking of the child he was to teach. But Basil's mother's pleasant manner soon set him at his ease, and in a minute or two he was opening the violin cases and discussing which would be the right size for the boy. Basil gazed and listened in silence. At the first glance Herr Wildermann had felt a little disappointed. His new pupil was not certainly a poetical looking child! His short sturdy figure and round rosy face spoke of the perfection of hearty boyish life, but nothing more. But his breathless eagerness, the intense interest in his eyes—most of all the look in his face as he listened to a little caprice which Ulric played on his own violin as a sort of introduction to the lesson, soon made the musician change his opinion. [98]

"He has it—he has the musician's soul. One can see it!" he half said, half whispered to Lady Iltyd, though he had the good sense to understand what might have seemed a little cold in her answer.

"I think Basil truly loves music," she said, "but you will join with me, I am sure, Herr Wildermann, in telling him that to be a musician at all, to play *well* above all, takes much patience and perseverance. Nothing in this world can be done without trouble, can it?"

"Ah no," said Herr Wildermann, "that is true."

But Basil, whose fingers were fidgeting to touch at last the violin and dainty bow, said nothing.

"I will leave you," said his mother. "I think you will find it better to be alone with Basil, Herr Wildermann."

And she left the room.

She listened with some anxiety to the sounds which now and then made their way to the room where she sat writing. Sweet clear sounds occasionally from the master's violin, but mingled, it must be confessed, with others the reverse of musical. Squeakings and gruntings, and a dreadful sort of scraping whine, not to be described in words. [99]

"My poor Basil," thought his mother, though it was a little difficult not to smile at a *most* unearthly shriek that just then reached her ears. "I hope he is not losing his temper already."

But she waited quietly till the sounds ceased. Then came the soft sweet notes of a melody which she knew well, played by Herr Wildermann alone; and a few minutes after she saw among the trees the tall thin figure of the young German, laden with but two violins this time as he made his way down the avenue.

She waited a minute or two to see if Basil would come to her. Then, as he did not, she returned to the morning room where he had had his lesson. He was still there, standing by the window, but she was pleased to hear as she went in that he was humming to himself the air that Ulric had played last.

"Well, Basil?" she said, "and how did you get on?"

The boy turned round—there was a mixture of expressions on his face. A rather dewy look about his eyes made his mother wonder for a moment if he had been crying. But when he spoke it was so cheerfully that she thought she must have been mistaken. [100]

"He plays *so* beautifully, mother," he said.

"Yes," she replied. "I knew he did. I heard him one day at Mrs. Marchcote's, and I listened this morning."

"You listened, mother?" he said. "Did you hear how awfully it squeaked with me?"

"Of course," said Lady Iltyd, in a matter-of-fact way; "it is always so

at first."

Basil seemed relieved.

"Yes," he said, "*he* said so too. But I don't mind. He says I shall very soon be able to make it sound prettily—to get nice *sounds*, you know, even before I can play tunes, if——" and Basil hesitated.

"If what?"

"If I practise a lot. But I think I shall. It's rather fun after all, and I do so like to have that ducky little violin in my arms. It does feel so jolly," and he turned with sparkling eyes again to the dainty little case containing his new treasure.

His mother was pleased. The first brunt of disappointment which she was sure Basil had felt, whether he owned to it or not, had passed off better than she had expected.

BASIL'S VIOLIN
"—In the pantry, when he took it into his head to pay a visit to the footmen."
P. 101

And for some days his energy continued. At all hours, when the boy was at home, unearthly squeaks and shrieks were to be heard in various parts of the house, for it was not at all Basil's way to confine his practisings to his own quarters. Anywhere that came handy—on [101]

the staircase, in the pantry, when he took it into his head to pay a visit to the footmen, the boy and his violin were to be seen at all sorts of odd hours, and alas, still more surely to be *heard!* For a while his mother thought it best not to interfere, she did not wish to check his ardour, and the second and third lessons went off, as far as she could judge, very well. But gradually the violin grew less talkative—a day, then a couple of days, then even longer, passed without its voice being heard, and one day, towards the close of the fifth or sixth lesson, Lady Ilyd, going into the room, saw a look she knew too well on her little son's face. He flung down the violin and turned to Herr Wildermann—

"I *can't* play any more—nasty thing—I believe it's got a bad fairy inside it," he said, half in fun, half in petulance.

"Why, Basil——" began his mother, but her glance happening at the moment to fall on the young German, she stopped short, startled at the look of intense distress that overspread his features. "He thinks I shall blame *him*, poor fellow," she thought, and, with her quick kindliness, she tried, indirectly, to reassure him. [102]

"Don't look so grave about this silly little boy, Herr Wildermann," she said brightly. "Suppose you drive away the bad fairy by playing to us, and let lazy Basil rest a little."

Basil's face, which had clouded over at the beginning of this speech, brightened up again. He flung himself down on the rug with the air of one intending to enjoy himself. And for the next ten minutes or so not a sound was heard but the exquisite tones of the master's violin, thrilling with intensity, then warbling like a bird in the joyous spring-time, bringing the tears to the boy's eyes with its tender pathos, and then flushing his cheeks with excitement, till at last they died away in the distance as it were, as if returning to the enchanted land from whence they came.

Basil gave a deep sigh.

"Ah," he said, in a low voice, "to play like *that*——"

Herr Wildermann's face lighted up.

"He *has* it—he loves it so much, madame," he said half apologetically to Lady Illtyd. [103]

"Yes," she said, but her tone was rather grave. "But it is not enough to love it. He must learn not to be so easily discouraged. You know, my boy, what I said to you at the beginning," she went on, turning to Basil, "it is not a *necessity* to learn the violin. I would rather you gave it up than make it a worry and vexation to yourself and others."

Basil stopped her with a kiss.

"It's only when the bad fairy comes," he said. "Don't be vexed with me, mother. I'm in a beautiful good temper now."

A day or two after this, Basil's mother left home for a fortnight. She said a few words to him before she went, about his violin lessons, but not much, for she had heard him practising again with more attention, and she had begun to hope his impatience and discouragement had been merely a passing fit. So she only repeated to him what she had said already. Basil listened in silence, with an expression on his face she did not quite understand. But she thought it better to say no more, especially when the boy flung his arms round her neck, and repeated more than once—

"I do want to please you, little mother; I do, I do," he cried; and her last sight of him, as the carriage drove away, was standing with his violin in his arms at the hall-door, pretending to fiddle away at a great rate. [104]

"He is only a baby, after all," said Lady Illtyd to herself. "I must not be too anxious about his faults. This fortnight will test his perseverance about the violin. If he is not going to be steady about it, he must give it up."

Alas! the fortnight tested Basil and found him wanting. There were some excuses perhaps. It was very hot, and the half-yearly

examinations were coming on. In his parents' absence it had been arranged that he was to stay later at school so as to get his lessons done before coming home—a very necessary precaution; for without his mother at hand to keep him up to his work, it is to be doubted if the lessons would often have been finished before midnight! Basil would not have gone to bed and left them undone—that was not his way; but he would have wasted three hours over what with energy and cheerfulness might have been well done in one. At school, under the eye of a master, this was less likely to occur—the boy was to some extent *forced* to give his attention and keep up his spirit, though the [105] master, whose business it was to superintend the lessons preparing, found his labours increased in no trifling way during the fortnight of Basil's staying later.

And when he got home after all this hard work, the boy felt inclined for a romp with Blanche, or a stroll in the garden, far more than for practising the violin! Half-holidays, too, in hot weather, presented many temptations. The hay was down in the park on the side nearest the house, the strawberries were at their prime; there seemed always something else to do than struggling with the capricious little instrument, whose "contrariness," as he called it, really made Basil sometimes fancy it was bewitched.

"You've got it inside you; why won't you let it come out for me as well as for him?" he would say, addressing his violin, half in fun, half in petulance, after some vain but not very sustained effort to draw out of it tones in any way approaching those which in Herr Wildermann's hands seemed to come of themselves. "No, I've no patience with you. It's too bad," and down he would fling violin and bow, declaring to himself he would never touch them again. But when the day for the music lesson came round, and Herr Wildermann drew out some few [106] lovely notes before Basil was ready to begin, all the boy's impatience disappeared, and he listened as if entranced till his master recalled his attention. And thus, seeing the child's undoubted love for music, Ulric could not yet feel altogether discouraged, though again there were times when he doubted if his efforts would ever succeed in making a musician of the boy.

"But as long as he likes it so much," he would say to himself, "and provided he does not *wish* to give it up, it would be wrong of me to suggest it. In any case it is for his mother to judge."

Before the fortnight was over, however, Herr Wildermann's patience was sorely tried. There came a day on which, with a sudden outburst of temper, Basil refused to try any more, and only by dint of promising to play to him for a quarter of an hour after the lesson was over, could his master get him to make any effort. Nor was it worth much when made.

And poor Ulric walked home that day to the little lodging over the grocer's shop with a heavy heart. [107]

Part III

In the first pleasant excitement of her return home and finding the children well, and to all appearance happy, Lady Iltyd did not think of what had, nevertheless, been often in her mind during her absence—namely, Basil's violin!

But the day after, when he came back from school and was beginning to tell her all he had been busied about while she was away, the question soon came to her lips, "And what about your violin, my boy?"

Basil hesitated—then his rosy face grew rosier than before, and he stood first upon one leg and then upon the other, a habit of his when not quite easy in his mind.

"Well?" said Lady Iltyd.

Then out it came.

"Mother," he began, "I didn't like to tell you yesterday just when you first came back, but I was going to tell you. I know you'll be vexed, but

I must tell you the truth. I haven't got on a bit—I tried to practise at first, but I *can't* get to play, and I hate it—I mean I hate not being able to play—and please, mother, I want to leave it off." [108]

A rather sad look came over Lady Ilityd's face, but she only said quietly—

"Very well, Basil. You have quite made up your mind, I suppose?"

"Yes," he replied. "You know you always said, mother, I needn't go on with it if I didn't—if it was too difficult," for he could not truthfully say "if I didn't care for it."

"Yes. I told you it was no *necessity*. Very well, then, I will tell Herr Wildermann to-morrow."

"But, mother," Basil hesitated, "I didn't want you to be vexed about it."

"I am not *vexed*," his mother replied. "My disappointment is another matter. But I will keep to what I said. It is better for you to give it up than to make a trouble of it to yourself and others. Now run away, for I am busy."

Basil went out of the room slowly, and not feeling altogether happy in his mind. "It isn't fair of mother," he said to himself; "she told me I needn't go on with it if I didn't like, and she never said she'd be vexed if I gave it up, and she is vexed." But he would not remember how much and often his mother had warned him before he began, how she had told him of the patience and perseverance required, and [109] how he had refused to believe her! And, boy-like, he soon forgot all about it in a game with Blanche and the dogs in the garden, or remembered it only with a feeling of relief that he need not cut short his play to go in to practise his unlucky violin. But a remark of his little sister's rather destroyed his equanimity.

"I'm going in now, Basil," she said with the little "proper" air she sometimes put on; "I've not finished my scales yet, and I won't have time after tea. And you should go in for your violin, Basil. Come

along."

"No," said Basil, rolling himself again lazily on the smooth lawn; "I'm not going to bother with it any more. I've given it up."

Blanche's eyes opened wide.

"Oh, Basil!" she exclaimed. "How sorry mother will be!"

"Rubbish," said Basil, roughly. "Mother always said I might leave it off if I liked. I don't want you to preach to me, Blanche." Upon which Blanche walked away, her little person erect with offended dignity.

Basil did not feel happy, but he called the dogs to him and went off whistling. [110]

The next day was a half-holiday. Basil came home at mid-day, and the violin lesson was in the afternoon.

"Am I to have a lesson to-day, mother?" said the boy at luncheon.

"Herr Wildermann is coming," replied his mother, "it would be very rude to let him come for nothing. I will see him first, and then you can go to him for the hour. If he likes to play to you instead of your having a lesson, I do not care. It does not signify *now*."

The idea would have been very much to Basil's taste, but the tone in which his mother said that "now," made him again feel vexed. He tried to fancy he had cause for being so, for he would not own to the real truth—that he was vexed with himself, and that "himself" deserved it.

"It isn't fair," he repeated half sullenly.

Two hours later he was summoned to the library. Herr Wildermann had come fully a quarter of an hour before—he had heard his ring, and he knew his mother was in the drawing-room waiting for him. When he entered the library he thought at first there was no one there —the violin cases lay open on the table, the music-stand was placed ready as usual; but that was all. No pleasant voice met him with a [111]

friendly greeting in broken English and words of kindly encouragement.

"Can Herr Wildermann have gone already?" thought the boy. "He might have waited to say good-bye. What did Sims call me for if he had gone?"

And he was turning to leave the room with a mixture of feelings—irritation and some disappointment, mingled nevertheless with a certain sense of relief, for he had dreaded this last lesson—when a slight, a very slight sound seeming to come from somewhere near the windows, caught his ear. He had come into the room more softly than his wont, and his footfall had made no sound on the thick carpet. The person who was hidden by the curtains had not heard him, had no idea any one was in the room, for through a sort of half-choked sob the child heard two or three confused words which, though uttered in German, were easy enough to understand—

"My mother, ah, my poor mother! How can I tell her? Oh, my mother!"

And startled and shocked, Basil stopped short in the question that was on his lips. "Who's there? Is it you, Blanche?" he had been on the point of saying, when the words caught his ears. [112]

"It must be Herr Wildermann—can he be *crying?*" said Basil to himself, his cheeks growing red as the idea struck him. "What should I do?"

He had no time to consider the question, for as he stood in perplexity his little dog Yelpie, who had followed him into the room, suddenly becoming aware of the state of things, dashed forward with a short sharp bark.

"Yelpie—Yelpie," cried Basil; "be quiet, Yelpie. It's only Herr Wildermann. Don't you know him, Yelpie? What a stupid you are!"

He went on talking fast to give the young German time to recover himself, for, on hearing Basil's voice, Ulric had come forward from the

shelter of the curtains. He was not red, but pale,—very pale, with a look of such intense misery in his eyes, that Basil's momentary feeling of contempt entirely faded into one of real anxiety and sympathy.

"Are you ill, Herr Wildermann? You look so strange. Is your mother ill? Is anything dreadful the matter?" he asked hurriedly, pressing forward nearer to the young man. [113]

Ulric tried to smile, but it was a poor attempt, and he felt that it was so. Suddenly a sort of weak, faint feeling came over him—he had walked over to the Park in the full heat of the day, and the meals that were eaten over the grocer's shop were very frugal!—he had not been prepared for the news that had met him. "Could I—might I have a glass of water, Master Basil?" he said, drawing to him a chair and dropping into it.

"I'll ring for—no, stay, I'll fetch it myself," said Basil, with quick understanding. "I shouldn't like the servants to know he had been *crying*—poor man," he thought to himself as he left the room. And in two minutes he was back with a glass of wine and water.

"I made Sims put some sherry in it," he said half apologetically. "You've knocked yourself up somehow, Herr Wildermann, haven't you?"

And Ulric drank obediently, and managed this time to smile more successfully. "How kind and thoughtful the boy was—how could he be the cause of such sorrow, if indeed he understood it!" thought the young man to himself.

"I—yes—perhaps it was the hot sun," he said confusedly, as he put down the glass. "Thank you, very much. I am all right now. Had we not better begin? Not that I am hurried," he went on. "I can stay a full hour from now. I have no engagements—nothing to hurry me home," he added sadly, for in his heart he was thinking how he dreaded the return home, and what he would have to tell his poor old mother. [114]

"But what's the matter?" persisted Basil, who, now that the ice was

broken, felt inclined to get to the bottom of things. "What are you so troubled about—what were you——?" He hesitated and stopped short, and again his rosy cheeks grew redder than usual.

Herr Wildermann looked up. He was still very pale, but he did not seem self-conscious or ashamed.

"You saw my distress?" he said quietly. "Ah, well, I could not help it —the thought of my poor mother——" He turned away and bit his lips. "I thought you knew the cause of it," he went on; "your lady mother, did you not know—did she not tell you that she meant to-day to give me notice that the lessons are to cease—that this is to be the last?"

Basil opened his mouth as if he meant to say something, and stood there, forgetting to shut it again, and staring up in Ulric's face, though no words came. Ulric, after waiting a moment or two, turned away and began arranging the violins. Then at last the boy ejaculated —

[115]

"Herr Wildermann, you—you don't mean to say——" and stopped short again.

"To say what?" asked the young German, but without much tone of interest in his voice. He had quite mastered himself by now—a sort of dull, hopeless resignation was coming over him—it did not seem to matter what Basil said about it; it was all settled, and the momentary gleam of good-fortune which had so raised his hopes had faded into the dark again. "We must go back to Germany," he was saying to himself. "Somehow or other I must scrape together money enough to take my mother back to her own country. There at least she need not starve. I can earn our daily bread, even if I have to give up music for ever."

But again Basil's voice interrupted his thoughts.

"Herr Wildermann," said the boy, speaking now with eagerness, and throwing aside his hesitation, "is it possible that it is about my

lessons that you're unhappy? Does it *matter* to you if I give them up? I never thought of it."

"Master Basil," said the young man sadly, "it does not signify now. It is all settled. But I do not blame you. It is not your fault—at least, it is not exactly your fault. You are so young, and the violin is very difficult. I am sorry to lose you as a pupil, for I think you could have learnt well, if you had had more hopefulness and perseverance." [116]

And again he turned away as if there were no more to be said.

But Basil was not to be so easily satisfied.

"Herr Wildermann," he exclaimed, going nearer to his master and pulling him gently by the sleeve, "that can't be all. I daresay you're vexed at my giving it up when you've tried so hard to teach me, but that wouldn't make you so *dreadfully* sorry. Herr Wildermann, do tell me all about it? Is it because—because of the money?" he whispered at last. "Are you so—does it matter so much?"

Ulric turned his pale face to the boy. Its expression was still sad—very sad, but quiet and resigned.

"Yes, my child," he said composedly. "Why should I hide it? There is no shame in it—yes, it is because of the money. We are *very* poor. And also I had hoped much from giving you lessons. I thought if I succeeded as I expected it would have brought me other pupils." [117]

Basil gazed up in the young man's face for a moment or two without speaking. He did not take in ideas very quickly, and perhaps he had never before in his life thought so seriously as at this moment.

"I see," he said at last. "I did not understand before. If I had known—but even now it is not too late, Herr Wildermann. I need not give up my lessons. I will ask mother to let me go on with them, and you will see she will agree in a moment."

A gleam of pleasure lighted up Ulric's pale face, but it faded almost as quickly as it had come.

"Thank you for your kind thought, my little friend," he said; "but what you propose would not be right. It would not be right for your mother to pay me money for teaching you when she had decided that she did not want me to teach you any more. It would be a mere charity to me—it would be more honest for me to ask for charity at once," he went on, the colour mounting to his face. "No, Basil, it could not be; but thank you as much. Now let us go on with our lesson."

Basil understood, but was not satisfied. The lesson passed quietly. Never had the boy so thoroughly given his attention, or tried so hard to overcome the difficulties which had so disheartened him. [118]

"It is too bad," he said to himself; "but it is all my own fault. I believe I could have got on if I had really tried. And now it is too late. He wouldn't give me lessons now, for he would think it was only for him."

Suddenly an idea struck him.

"Herr Wildermann," he said, "won't you do *this?* Suppose I ask for just six lessons more, and I *will* try. You'll see if I don't. Well, after these six, if I'm not getting on any better, it'll be given up. But if I am, and if I really *want* to go on, you won't think it's not right, will you?"

Ulric hesitated.

"No," he said; "I have no scruples in going on teaching you, for I feel certain you could learn well if you were more hopeful. But you must explain it all to your mother, and—and——" He stopped short, and then went on resolutely. "I will not be ashamed. It is for my mother—anything for her. It was only the feeling, my boy—but perhaps you are too young to understand—the feeling that it was almost like asking charity."

"I do understand," exclaimed Basil, "and I don't think I need tell [119] mother *yet*, Herr Wildermann. I don't want to promise again, and perhaps not keep my promise. I'll just ask for the six lessons, and tell mother I can't tell her why just yet. And then think how surprised she'll

be if I really do get on;" and the boy's eyes sparkled with delight. But to Ulric's there came tears of thankfulness.

If Lady Iltyd suspected in part what had worked the change in Basil's ideas and prompted his request, she was too wise to say so. His petition for six lessons more was granted willingly, but not lightly.

"Do you really mean to profit by them, Basil?" she asked. "If so, I am only too willing that you should go on and give yourself a fair trial."

"That is it, mother," said the boy eagerly, "I want to see, to try if I can't do better. At least that is *partly* it," he went on, for he had already told her that he could not explain the whole just yet.

So poor Ulric Wildermann went home with a lighter heart than he had expected. He hoped much from these six lessons, for it was evident that Basil meant to put his heart into them.

"I need not tell my mother of my fears," thought Ulric to himself, "for they may, after all, prove to be only fears, and what would be the use of making her miserable in such a case?" And he was so bright and [120] cheerful that evening in the little sitting-room over the grocer's shop, that even his mother's eyes failed to discover that he had had more than usual anxiety that day.

One week, two weeks, three weeks passed. It was the day of the last of the six lessons.

"Mother," said Basil that morning when he was starting for school. "I have my violin lesson this afternoon when I come home, you know. Herr Wildermann told me to ask you if you would come in to-day while I am playing. Not at the beginning, please, but about half-way through. He wants you to see if I am getting on better," and then, with a very happy kiss, he was off.

Lady Iltyd had left Basil quite to himself about his violin these last weeks. She had not *heard* much of his practising, but she had noticed that he got his school lessons done quickly and without needing to be reminded, and then regularly disappeared in his own

quarters, and she had her private hopes and expectations.

Nor were they disappointed. What cannot be done with patience and cheerfulness? Those three weeks had seen more progress made than the three months before, and Basil's eyes danced with [121] pleasure when he left off playing and stood waiting to hear what his mother would say.

She said nothing, but she drew him to her and kissed him tenderly, and Basil, peeping up half shyly—for somehow, as he told Blanche afterwards, "mother's *pleased* kisses" always made him feel a little shy—saw a glimmer of tears in her eyes.

"You *are* pleased, mother?" he whispered, and another kiss was the answer. Then the young stranger came forward.

"Herr Wildermann, I must thank you for all the trouble you have taken. I am more than pleased," said Lady Illtyd warmly. "How have you succeeded so well? You have taught him more than his music—you have taught him to persevere, and to keep up heart in spite of difficulties."

"He has taught himself, madame," said Ulric eagerly, his face flushing. "It was his kind heart that gave him what he needed. Ah, Master Basil," he went on, turning to his little pupil, "I must now tell the whole, and then it will be to say if you are still to continue your lessons."

"The whole" was soon told, and it is easy to understand that it did not lessen Lady Illtyd's pleasure. She had been glad to find her boy [122] capable of real effort and determination—she was still more glad to find that the new motive which had prompted these was unselfish sympathy and kindness.

"I thank you *again*, Herr Wildermann," she said, when the young man had told her all, "you have, as I said, taught Basil more lessons than you knew. And your mother is happy to have so good a son."

Better days began for the young music-master. Thanks to Basil's

mother and to Basil himself, for the boy became a pupil who would have done credit to any master, Herr Wildermann gradually made his way in the neighbourhood he had chosen for his new home, and his old mother's later days were passed in peace and comfort. He always counted Tarnworth his home, though as time went on he came to be well known as one of the first violinists of the day, in London and others of the great capitals of Europe.

But sometimes when his success and popularity were at the highest, he would turn to the friend who had been his first pupil, and say half regretfully—

"*You* might excel me if you chose, Basil. I could sometimes find it in my heart to wish that you too had been born a poor boy with his way to make in the world." [123]

And Basil Iltyd would laugh as he told Uric that his affection made him over-estimate his pupil's talent.

"Though, such as it is," he added, "I have to thank you for having drawn it out, and added untold pleasure to my life."

For though Basil had too many other duties to attend to for it to be possible for him to devote very much time to music, he never neglected it, and never forgot the gratitude he owed his mother for encouraging his boyish taste.

"Above all," Lady Iltyd used often to say, "as in mastering the violin, you gained your first battle over impatience and want of perseverance."

"My first but not my last," he would answer brightly. For Basil came to be known for steady, cheerful determination, which, after all, is worth many more brilliant gifts in the journey through life, which to even the most fortunate is uphill and rugged and perplexing at times.

THE MISSING BON-BONS

[124]

A TRUE STORY

Chapter I

"Let it either be grave or glad
If only it may be true."

Dear me, such a lot of children! At first you could hardly have believed that they were all brothers and sisters—such a number there seemed, and several so nearly of a size. There were—let me see—two, three, four, actually five girls of varying heights, the two elder, twins apparently, for in all respects they resembled each other so closely; three or four boys, too, from Jack of fourteen to little hop-o'-my-thumb Chris of six. There they were all together in the large empty playroom at Landell's Manor, dancing, jumping, shouting, as only a roomful of perfectly healthy children, under the influence of some unusual and delightful excitement, can dance, and jump, and shout. [125]

"Miss Campbell's coming to-day—joy, joy!" exclaimed one or two of the little girls.

"Miss Campbell is coming, hurrah, hurrah!" sang Jack to the tune irresistibly suggested by the words, and others joining in the chorus, till the next boy created a diversion by starting the rival air of—

"Home for the holidays here we be,
Out of the clutches of L.L.D."

"'Tisn't home for the holidays," objected the smallest girl but one. "Miss Campbell's never going to school no more. Her's coming home for all-a-ways."

But in defiance of her remonstrance, the stirring strains continued, till suddenly through the clamour a tiny shrill voice made itself heard.

"Let Towzer sing, let Towzer sing," it pleaded. "Towzer wants to sing all be-lone."

There was a rush in the three-year-old baby's direction.

"Sing, of course she shall, the darling!" cried Maggie, the "Jack-in-the-middle" of the five little sisters, and the first to reach the small aspirant to vocal honours. "She shall stand on the table," she continued, struggling breathlessly with "Towzer," as she tried to lift her in her arms, "and——" [126]

"Out of the way, Maggie. Out of the way, Flop!" shouted Jack, charging down ruthlessly on to the little girls, sending Maggie to the right-about and Flop to the left. "You are not to try to lift Towzer, Maggie; mother has said so, ever so many times. You'll be dropping her and smashing her to pieces some day, the way you smashed Lady Rosalinda—you're far too little. There now, Towzer, my pet," as he safely established her on the sturdy wooden table; "sing, and we'll all clap."

Maggie retreated resentfully, muttering as she did so, "I'm not little—I'm seven; and Towzer isn't made of wax."

"Silence," shouted Jack, and the baby began her song.

"Miss Tammel are coming out of L. D.," she began. Shouts of laughter.

"Go on, darling; that's beautiful. Clap, clap, can't you! She thinks we're laughing at her," said Jack, the latter part of his speech an "aside" to the audience.

But it was too late; Towzer's feelings were deeply wounded.

"Towzer won't sing no more, naughty Jack, and naughty Patty, and Edith, and naughty all boys and girls to laugh at Towzer," she cried, [127] her very blue eyes filling with tears. She was such a pretty little girl, "fair, fair, with" not "golden," I should rather say, "silvern hair," so very pale were the soft silky locks that clustered round her little head. How

she ever came to be called "Towzer," her real name being Angela, would have puzzled any one unused to the extraordinary things invented by children's brains, and the queer grotesque charm which the "rule of contrary," especially as applied to nicknames, seems to possess for them.

Towzer's tears flowed piteously; everybody at once was trying to console her, and poor Towzer was all but suffocated among them, when there came a sudden interruption—a maid servant appeared at the door.

"Master Jack and Master Max," she said as soon as she could make herself heard, "your mamma wished me to say as she hoped you were remembering about finishing your lessons early, for Miss Campbell's train is due at Stapleham at five, and your papa's ordered the carriage at four, and will be annoyed if you're not ready. And Miss Patty, I was to say," she was continuing, when suddenly she caught sight of "the baby" still on the table, in a sad state of crush and discomposure, as, Jack and Max having already rushed off, all the remaining children were fighting for her possession. "Now that is too bad, I do declare! What are you all pulling and dragging at the dear child for? Making her cry, too. Miss Maggie, you've been teasing her, I'm certain—you're always in mischief. I'm sure I don't know whatever nurse will say—Miss Hangela's frock just clean on! I'm sure I hope Miss Campbell will keep you in better order, I do; for since your mamma's been ill, it's just dreadful the way you go on." [128]

"I didn't make her cry," "And I'm sure I didn't," cried Patty and Edith at once.

"Then it's Miss Maggie, as usual; you come too, Miss Florence," said Dawson, as she walked off with the rescued Towzer in her arms and Flop at her heels, taking no notice of Maggie's indignant exclamation—"You're a nasty, horrid, cross thing, Dawson! and I only hope Miss Campbell will set you down when she comes."

Great things were evidently expected of "Miss Campbell," and by no one in the house was her return looked for more eagerly than by

her invalid mother, who had of late found the care of her many boys and girls, weigh heavily on her. For this reason Eleanor, the eldest [129] daughter of the family, a girl of seventeen, had been recalled from a school in Paris sooner than would otherwise have been the case, and it was her expected arrival this very evening that had caused all the playroom commotion. It was a year, fully a year, since she had been at home, and it was no wonder that all her brothers and sisters rejoiced at her return, for she was kind and unselfish, bright and merry, and the old Manor House without her had lost half its sunshine.

Five o'clock—all the children are already at the windows, some at the door, though "she cannot be here till six or half-past," says mamma; and nurse valiantly refuses to put on Towzer's second clean frock for another hour at least.

Six o'clock at last—five minutes, ten minutes, a quarter past—oh, how slowly the time goes! At last wheels, unmistakable wheels up the drive! Jack's head poked ever so far out of the carriage window on one side, and Max's on the other. A general shriek, "They've come! they've come!" and in another minute Eleanor is in her mother's arms, to be released from them only to be hugged and re-hugged and hugged again; while from every direction comes the cry, "Miss [130] Campbell has come, dear Miss Campbell." "Miss Tammel are tum, dear Miss Tammel."

At last they are all in bed—Jack, Max, Harry, Chris, Patty, Edith, Maggie, Flop, and Towzer; and Miss Campbell is free to sit quietly beside her mother's sofa, with her soft thin hands in hers.

"Oh, dear Eleanor, how nice it is to have you home again!"

"Oh, dear mamma, how nice it is to be at home again!"

Then they talked together of many things—of Eleanor's school-life and friends, of all that had happened at home while she was away, of

all the girl hoped to do to help her mother.

"I shall be so thankful if you do not find the children too much for you," said Mrs. Campbell. "You see, Miss Fanshawe is excellent as a daily governess, but she could not possibly stay here altogether, on account of her invalid father; if only it is not putting too much on you, my darling," she added anxiously.

Eleanor stooped over and kissed her mother.

"Don't fear, dear; I may make mistakes, but I shall learn. They are [131] dear children; how funny it is how my old name for myself has clung to me! I could fancy myself a baby again when I heard that tiny Towzer calling me 'Miss Tammel.'"

"You will never get them to call you anything else," said her mother. "It must sound rather odd to strangers."

"And at school I was always Eleanor! But how glad I am to be 'Miss Tammel' again. I have brought some small presents for the children," she went on; "books for Patty and Edith, and dolls for the three little ones and a few bon-bons—not many, but coming from Paris I thought they would expect some. There are two little boxes exactly alike for Flop and Towzer, and a rather larger one for Maggie. So there will be no excuse for squabbling."

"No; that will be very nice. Poor Maggie," said Mrs. Campbell; "I fear you will find her the most troublesome. She is an 'odd' one; perhaps that has to do with it, but somehow she seems always getting into scrapes, and I fancy the others are a little sharp on her. She has a queer temper, but she is a very clever child."

"She is honest and truthful, however, is she not?" said Eleanor. "I can stand anything if a child is that; but deceitfulness——" Her fair [132] young brow contracted, and a slightly hard expression came over her face.

"I hope so," said her mother; "I have no reason to think otherwise. But she has an extraordinary vivid imagination, and she is curiously

impressionable—the sort of child that might be worked upon to imagine what was not true."

"Still truth is truth. There can be no excuse for a falsehood," said Eleanor.

"Mother is too indulgent and gentle in some ways," she thought. "I must look after Maggie, and be firm with her."

"But gentleness encourages truth, where severity might crush it," said her mother softly, as if she had heard Eleanor's unspoken words.

Miss Campbell made no reply, but she pressed her mother's hand.

"And the day after to-morrow, mother dear, you will be leaving us!" she said regretfully.

"Yes, but only for a month; and now that you are here, your father and I can leave with such lightened hearts. I feel sure that the change to St. Abbots will do me good now," replied Mrs. Campbell cheerfully. [133]

Chapter II

To-morrow—the first part of it at least—found the excitement scarcely less great than on the day of Miss Campbell's arrival. For there were the presents to distribute! A delightful business to all concerned, as Eleanor had invariably succeeded in choosing "just what I wanted more than anything," and the hugs she had again to submit to were really alarming, both as to quantity and quality. And among all the children none hugged her more than Maggie.

"It's like Santa Claus morning—goodies too," she exclaimed, dancing about in delight.

"Don't talk nonsense, you silly child," said Patty, who was of a

prosaic and literal turn of mind. "You wouldn't believe, Miss Campbell," she went on, turning to her elder sister, "would you, that Maggie last Christmas went and told Flop that Santa Claus was a real old man, and that he really came down the chimney, and poor Flop wakened in the night, quite frightened—screaming—and so mamma said Maggie was never to speak about Santa Claus again, and you *are* doing so, Maggie," she wound up with, virtuously. [134]

"But it's so pretty about Santa Claus, and so funny, isn't it, Miss Campbell?" said Maggie, peering up into Eleanor's face with her bright, restless, gray-green eyes.

"Nothing can be funny or pretty that mamma tells you not to talk about, Maggie," said Miss Campbell.

"Oh no; I know that, and I didn't mean to speak of it again. But except for that—if Flop hadn't got frightened, it would be nice, wouldn't it? I have such a lot of fairies all my own, and I wanted Flop to have some, and she wouldn't."

"She was very wise; and I think, Maggie, you might find some better things to amuse yourself with than such fancies," said Eleanor rather severely.

Maggie's face fell.

"I'm always naughty," she whispered to herself. "Even Miss Campbell thinks me so already, and I'm sure fairies teach me to be good."

In her vague childish way she had been looking forward to full sympathy from her eldest sister, and her hard tone disconcerted her.

"Now run off, dears, quickly," said Eleanor; "you've got your goodies safe."

Off they trotted, Towzer's little fat hands clasping tight her treasures. [135]

"Dollies and doodies; Towzer and Flop dot just the same," she

said with delight to nurse when they reached their own domain.

"And don't you think, dearie, you'd better let nurse keep the goodies for you? See here, dears," said nurse to the two little girls, "we'll put both boxes up on the high chest of drawers, where they'll be quite safe, and you shall have some every day. Shall we finish Miss Flop's first and then Miss Baby's? It'll keep them fresher, not to have one box opened till the other's done. Miss Maggie, I suppose you'll keep your own?"

"Yes," said Maggie; and so it was arranged.

"I'll keep mine till my birthday, and then I'll have a fairy feast, and invite Flop and Towzer," was Maggie's secret determination, which, however, she communicated to no one. And though she spent a great part of her playtime unobserved in arranging and rearranging the pretty bon-bons, not one found its way to her mouth. Her birthday was to be in a fortnight.

The next day Mr. and Mrs. Campbell left home, and Eleanor's reign began; auspiciously enough to all appearance.

"You'll be gentle with them all, dear, especially Maggie; they have not been under regular discipline for some time, you know?" said Mrs. Campbell as she kissed Eleanor. [136]

"Of course, mamma dear; can't you trust me?" was the reply, with the slightest touch of reproach; and to herself the girl whispered, "Real kindness and gentleness are not incompatible with firmness, however."

On the fourth day the calm was interrupted. Eleanor had just returned from a drive to Stapleham, to fetch the afternoon letters, when she was seized upon by Patty and Edith in hot indignation.

"Miss Campbell! Miss Campbell!" they cried. "What do you think that naughty, greedy, mean Maggie has done? She's stolen poor Towzer's goodies—all of them—at least, half—the box was half full, nurse says, and though nurse all but saw her, she will say she didn't

take them, and there was no one else in the night nursery this afternoon. Maggie was left in alone for half an hour, because she had a little cold, and when nurse and the little ones came in Towzer's box was gone."

Eleanor leant on the hall table for a moment. A sick faint feeling went through her. Maggie, her own sister, to be capable of such a thing! To her rigorous inexperience it seemed terrible. The idea that [137] taking what was not one's own and then denying it was hardly, at seven years old, to be described by the terms such actions on the part of an older person would deserve, would have seemed to her weak tampering with evil.

"Oh, Patty," she exclaimed, "are you sure?"

"Come up and see for yourself. Nurse will tell you," said the twins, too eagerly indignant to notice or pity their sister's distress; and Eleanor followed their advice.

The charge seemed sadly well founded. Nurse described the position of the boxes.

"Up on the high chest of drawers, where none of the littler ones than Miss Maggie could climb," she said. Flop's was empty, Towzer's still half full, when they went out that afternoon, and nurse returning unexpectedly, had caught sight of Maggie running out of the night nursery—"where she had no business to be. I had told her to stay in the other room by the fire, and there's nothing of hers in there; for you know, miss, she sleeps in Miss Patty's room."

"And what reason did she give for being there?"

"She got very red, miss, and at first wouldn't say anything; but I [138] saw she had been clambering up—a chair was dragged out of its place—and so then she said it was to stretch out of the window to gather some of the ivy leaves to ornament her goodies. And I was that silly, I believed her," said nurse, with considerable self-disgust.

"You didn't look at the bon-bons then?"

"Never thought of them, miss, till we came in, and the little ones asked for some, and I reached up and found only the one box, and that empty."

"And you've looked all about? You're sure it hasn't fallen down?"

"Oh dear, no! Of course I looked everywhere. Besides, I saw Miss Maggie after something in there," said nurse conclusively, "and my parasol that always lies on the drawers was on the floor when I came in."

"Maggie," said Eleanor, "do you hear that? You must have climbed up to the drawers."

"Yes," said Maggie; "I did."

Eleanor breathed more freely.

"What for?"

Maggie hesitated.

"I wanted the parasol to hook the leaves," she said; "I saw it when I stood on the chair."

"Patty," said Eleanor, "go and see if there are any leaves on Maggie's goodies."

THE MISSING BON-BONS

Patty returned. No, there were none. [139]

"Well, Maggie?" said Eleanor.

"I know there aren't. I didn't get them. Nurse scolded me, and I didn't like to go back to get them."

"Was she near the window when you saw her, nurse?"

"No, miss; she was nearer to the drawers, and so was the chair."

"Yes," said Maggie, "I was getting the parasol."

Eleanor said no more, but, rather to nurse's annoyance, went herself to the night nursery and thoroughly examined it. There was no trace of the lost bon-bons.

"And supposing she has eaten the bon-bons, where is the box?" she said.

"She may have thrown it in the fire; very likely she didn't mean to keep the box. She may have slipped it into her pocket in a fright," said nurse. But no trace of it was now to be seen in Maggie's pocket.

"Maggie," said Eleanor, "I cannot send you to your room on account of your cold. But no one is to speak to you till you confess all. I shall ask you again at bedtime, and I trust you will then speak the truth. Now Patty, and Edith, and Flop, remember Maggie's not to be spoken to." [140]

"Nasty greedy thing; and not one of her own goodies eaten," muttered Patty. "I'm sure no one will want to speak to her."

"Hush, Patty. Don't cry, Towzer darling," said Eleanor, for poor Towzer was sobbing bitterly, though her grief was inconsistent in its objects.

"No doodies, and poor Maggie!" was her lament.

To divert her "Miss Tammell" carried her off to the drawing-room. And thus Maggie was sent to Coventry.

By bedtime her features were hardly to be recognised, so blurred and swollen with crying was the poor little face. But still there was no

confession. "I didn't touch Towzer's goodies," she persisted over and over again. Eleanor's heart ached, but still duty must be done.

"How can she persist so?" she said, turning to nurse.

"Yes indeed, Miss Maggie, how can you?" said nurse. "It would almost make one believe her if there was a chance of it, but I've had every bit of furniture out of the room, or turned about just to make sure. Miss Maggie's a queer child, once she takes a thing into her head; but she's not exactly obstinate either." [141]

So Maggie, "unshriven and unforgiven," was put to bed in her misery, with no kind kiss or loving "good-night." "If she would but own to it, dreadful though it is," sighed Eleanor. But two days—two days, and, worse still, two nights—went by, and still the child held out. Eleanor herself began to feel quite ill, and Maggie grew like a little ghost. Her character seemed to have changed strangely—she flew into no passions, and called no one any names; apparently she felt no resentment, only misery. But how terribly crushing was the Pariah-like life she led in the nursery, probably none of those about her had the least idea of. On the third morning there came a change.

"Miss Campbell! Miss Campbell!" said Patty and Edith, slipping with bare feet and night-gowned little figures into their sister's room—quite against orders, but it was a great occasion—"wake up, wake up, Maggie's confessed!"

And so it proved. There sat Maggie upright in her cot, with flushed face and excited eyes.

"I took them, Miss Campbell. I did take Towzer's goodies, and eatened them up."

Eleanor sat down on the side of the little bed.

"Oh, Maggie!" she said reproachfully. "How could you! But, still more, how could you deny it so often?" [142]

Maggie looked at her bewilderedly, then meeting the stern

reproach in her sister's eyes, hid her face in the bed-clothes while she murmured something about not having remembered before.

"Hush!" said Eleanor, "don't make things worse by false excuses."

"Make her tell all about it," whispered Patty.

"No," said Eleanor; "it would only tempt her to invent palliations. It is miserable enough—I don't want to hear any more."

What "palliations" were, to Patty was by no means clear.

"At least," she persisted, "you might ask her what she did with the box."

Maggie caught the words.

"I didn't touch the box," she said, "only the goodies."

"Oh, what a story!" exclaimed the twins.

"Be quiet, children; I will not have any more said. Don't you see what it will lead her into," said Eleanor.

But some of her old spirit seemed to have returned to Maggie. Her eyes sparkled with eagerness as she repeated, "I didn't touch the box; no, I never did. Only the goodies." [143]

"Maggie, you are to say no more, but listen to me," said Eleanor. Then sending Patty and Edith away, she spoke to the culprit as earnestly as she knew how of the sin of which she had been guilty, ending by making her repeat after her a few simple words of prayer for pardon. All this Maggie received submissively, only whispering, as if to herself, "But I do think God might have made me remember before!" which remark Eleanor judged it best to ignore. Then she kissed Maggie, and the child clung to her affectionately. But still Eleanor could not feel satisfied; there was a dreamy vagueness about the little girl, a want, it seemed to Eleanor, of realising her fault to the full, which puzzled and perplexed her. Still Maggie was restored to favour, and in a day or two seemed much the same as

usual, even flying into a passion when, contrary to Eleanor's order, the subject was alluded to in the nursery and curiosity expressed as to what had become of the box. "I don't mind you saying I took the goodies," she said. "I did; but I never touched the box."

A week, ten days, went by. It was the evening before Maggie's birthday. All the children were in bed, Jack and Max at their lessons [144] in their own room, when a tap came at the door of the library, where Miss Campbell was sitting alone, and in answer to her "come in," nurse entered. She looked pale and discomposed. Eleanor could almost have fancied she had been crying.

"What is the matter?" she exclaimed.

"This, Miss Campbell, this is the matter," said nurse, laying a little box on the table; "and, oh! when I think what that poor child suffered, I feel as if I could never forgive myself."

"Flop's box!" said Eleanor, bewildered; "it can't be—surely it is Towzer's—and," as she opened it, "half full of bon-bons!"

"Yes, miss; just as it was left."

"And Maggie never touched them?"

"Never touched them, miss," said nurse solemnly. Then she explained. A dressmaker from the neighbouring town had been in the nursery the day the bon-bons were missed, fitting nurse in the very room where they were. And on this person's return home, she had found the little box among the folds of the material. "I remember tossing a lot of things up on to the drawers to be out of the way, because Miss Baby would climb on to my bed, where they were, and [145] I thought she would crush them," said nurse; "and Miss Weaver never thought it of any consequence, or she would have brought it before. It's a long walk from Stapleham, and she knew she would be coming in a few days with my new dress, so thought it wouldn't matter."

Nurse was so genuinely distressed that Eleanor could not find it in her heart to say anything to add to her trouble. Besides, how could

she, of all others, do so?

"I," she reflected, "with mamma's warning in my ears. Ah yes, I see now what she meant by Maggie's impressionableness, and imaginativeness, and the tender treatment she needs."

The next day Eleanor herself told Maggie of the discovery, and showed her the box. For a moment an expression of extreme perplexity clouded the child's face. Then like a sudden ray of sunshine, light broke over it.

"I know, Miss Campbell!" she exclaimed, "I know how it was. I thinkened and thinkened so much about it that at last I dreamed it. But only about the goodies, not the box. So I didn't tell a story, did I, Miss Campbell? Dreams aren't stories." [146]

"No, darling. And will you forgive me for doubting you?" said Eleanor.

"But how could you help it, Miss Campbell, dear Miss Campbell?" cried Maggie, without a touch of resentment.

So Maggie was cleared, and the new sympathy with her, born of this grievous mistake, never failed her on the part of her eldest sister; and Maggie's temper and odd ways gradually softened down into no worse things than unusual energy and very decided talent. She became undoubtedly the "clever woman of the family," but as her heart expanded with her head, Eleanor had good reason to feel happy pride in her young sister. And when the mother came home, after a month's absence, to find all prospering under Miss Campbell's care, and Eleanor felt free to tell her all that happened—which by letter, for fear of troubling her, she had refrained from doing—she felt that her one misgiving as to her eldest daughter's influence over the younger ones was removed. The lesson of the missing bon-bons would never be forgotten. Poor Maggie's three days of suffering had not been in vain.

LOST ROLLO

Chapter I

Ever since Persis and I were quite little there was one thing we longed for more than anything else. I think most children have some great wish, or fancy, perhaps grown-up people would call it, like that. But with many it changes, especially of course if they get the thing—*then* they set to work longing and planning for something else. But Persis and I didn't change—not even when we got it, or thought we had got it, for good. We wished for it for so long that it really seemed to grow with us; the older and bigger we grew, the stronger and bigger our wish seemed to grow. We were only seven and five—that sounds rather awkward, but I don't see how else to put it, for Persis is a girl, so I must put her age first!—she was seven and I was five (that sounds better), when we first began wishing for it. It was a story that first put it into our heads, and after that, nearly every story we read or[148] heard seemed to have to do with it somehow, and to put it still more into them. And we were—I mean to say Persis was eleven, and I was nine when what we thought was going to be the fulfilment of our wish came. That was really a long time. Four years—four summers and winters and autumns and springs—to keep on thinking about a thing and wishing for it!

I have not yet said what it was we wished for so much. It was to have a dog of our very own. Not a stupid little dog, though even that would perhaps have been better than nothing, but a great beautiful *big* dog. We did change about a little, as to the exact kind we wished for most, but that was partly because at first we didn't understand very well about all the sorts of big dogs there are, and whatever kind we happened to read about or see a picture of, we fancied would be the nicest. But in the end we came back pretty near to what we had begun with. We settled that we would like a collie best of all, because they are so faithful and intelligent, and as the dog in the story which had made us think of it first was a sheep-dog. That was almost the

same thing, for though all sheep-dogs are not collies, all collies *are* sheep-dogs. [149]

It was two years ago that it all happened. I am eleven now, and Persis of course is thirteen, as she is two years older. That year we didn't know where we were to go to for the holidays. Papa is a lawyer; I can't exactly tell you what kind of a lawyer, but I think he is rather a grand one, for he is always very busy, and I know he can't do half what people want him to do, though there are many lawyers in London who have very little indeed to do, mamma says. I always think it is such a pity papa can't give them some of *his* work, isn't it? But with being so busy, of course he gets very few holidays, and sometimes he can't tell till just the day or so before whether he will be able to go away or not. And mamma doesn't like to go without him, so two or three times we children have had to be sent away alone with our governess and Eliza the schoolroom maid, and we don't like that at all.

It was getting very near the holidays, already the middle of July, and though we had several times asked mamma where we were going, she had never been able to tell us, and at last she got tired of our asking, and said in her rather vexed voice—she has a vexed voice, and a *very* vexed voice as well, but when it isn't as bad as either of these we call it her "*rather* vexed" voice. [150]

"Persis and Archie, I wish you would not ask the same thing so often. When I have anything to tell you I promise you I will do so at once."

Then *we* promised we would not tease her about it any more, though we could not help talking about it a good deal to ourselves.

"I'm afraid we're going to be sent with Miss Ellis and Eliza like last year," I said.

"It'll be too bad—two years running," Persis replied. "But it wouldn't be nearly so bad if we had a dog, would it, Archie? Miss Ellis couldn't be so frightened then of going on nice long walks. But

it's no use thinking about it. Mamma will never let us have one, I'm afraid."

For though mamma is very kind to animals—she wouldn't hurt any creature for the world, and she doesn't even like killing a wasp—she does not care much about pets, particularly not in town. She always says they are not happy except in the country. At least she used to say so. I think she has rather changed her opinion now.

"No," I said, sighing; "I'm afraid it's best to try to leave off thinking about it. We have thought about it such a long time, Persis." [151]

But I don't think our fixing not to think any more about it really did make us leave off doing so. The only sensible way of putting a thing out of your head is by putting something else there instead, and this happened to us just then, though it didn't make us really forget about our dog for *good*, of course.

One morning, about a week after the day she had told us we weren't to tease any more, mamma called us into the drawing-room.

"Persis and Archie," she said, "I promised I would tell you as soon as I knew myself about going to the country. And you have been good children in not teasing again about it. So I am pleased to have good news for you. We are going next week to a lovely place where you have never been before. It is on the borders of Wildmoor—that beautiful great moor where I used sometimes to go when I was little. There are lovely walks, and it is *quite* country, so I hope you will be very happy there."

"And we are *all* going—you and papa too?" we said.

"Yes, *all*," mamma answered, smiling. "Would you rather have gone without us?" [152]

Of course she only said that to tease us—she knew quite well we wouldn't. And of course we both jumped up and hugged her and told her she was a very naughty little mamma to speak like that.

"We like Miss Ellis very well, you know, mamma," said Persis, "but still we *couldn't* like going with her as well as with you and papa."

"Indeed," said mamma, "and supposing, just *supposing* Miss Ellis couldn't come too, would it spoil your pleasure very much?"

We looked rather grave at this, for we hardly knew what to answer. It seemed unkind to say we should *not* much mind, for Miss Ellis is really very kind, especially when we are left alone with her. But yet it wouldn't have been true to say it *would* spoil our pleasure, and if you children are *real* children who read this, or even if you are big people who haven't forgotten about being children, you will know how nice it is sometimes to get quite away from lessons and lesson-books, and as it were to forget all about them—to be something like lambs, or squirrels, or rabbits, in one's feelings, just thinking about nothing except how lovely the sunshine is, and the grass, and the trees, and being alive altogether. And I don't think it does us any harm, for [153] afterwards, I think it makes us like lessons better again, when we come back to them, partly because it's a change, and partly too because after so much play, the least we can do is to try to work well. But still it seemed unkind to Miss Ellis to say we wouldn't mind.

At last Persis, who generally thinks of the right thing to say, looked up brightly.

"If Miss Ellis herself didn't mind, and was perhaps going to see her own friends and be very happy, *then* we wouldn't mind, mamma."

Mamma smiled.

"That's right, Persis, and that's just how it is. Miss Ellis is going to have a holiday, so you and Archie may enjoy your own holiday with clear consciences."

We were awfully glad after that. Everything seemed right.

"If *only*," I said, "we had our dog, Bruno, Persis."

For we had given our fancy dog a name, and spoke him as if he

really lived.

"Hush, Archie," said Persis, "you promised to leave off thinking about him. It seems greedy to want everything. Just *fancy* what we have compared with poor children. Lots of them don't even have one single day in the country, Archie," which made me feel rather ashamed of wishing for anything more. It was good of Persis to put it that way. [154]

Chapter II

We were to go to Wildmoor the very next week, but still it seemed a long time off. If it hadn't been for the packing, I don't know how we'd have got over the time, for Miss Ellis's holiday began almost immediately, and we hadn't anything to do. Only Eliza was to go with us, as there were to be servants left in the house we were going to, but of course we were very glad she was coming, as we liked her to go out walks with us; she let us do whatever we took into our heads.

It was a nice day, though rather too hot to be pleasant for travelling, when we at last started for Wildmoor. It wasn't a very long journey, however, only about three hours in the railway, and the nicest part came at the end. That was a drive of nearly six miles. Persis and I don't count driving as travelling at all, and this drive was perfectly lovely. Papa had ordered a sort of covered waggonette to meet us at the station, and as it was a very fine evening he let us two go outside beside the coachman, and he went inside with mamma and Eliza, though I'm sure he'd much rather have been on the box. For some way the road was very pretty, but just something like other country roads. But after going about two miles or so we got on to the moor, and then it just was lovely. We had never seen moorland before, and the air was so fresh and breezy, Persis said it made her think of the sea. Indeed, I think a great big moor, a *very* big one, is rather like a rough sea; the ground is all ups and downs like big waves, and when you look far on you could almost fancy the green ridges were [155]

beginning to heave and roll about.

"Won't we have lovely walks here, Archie?" said Persis, and "I should just think we would," I answered.

And after a bit it grew even prettier; the sun began to set, and all the colours came out in the sky, and even the ground below seemed all burning and glowing too. I never have seen any sunsets so beautiful as those on the moor, and of course we remember this one the best as it was the first we saw. [156]

Just as it was fading off into gray we turned sharply to the left, leaving the moor, and after five minutes' driving down a lane, we drew up at the door of the little house that was to be our home for the next few weeks. It was a dear little house, just exactly what we had wished for. It had a good many creepers over the walls, roses and honeysuckle and clematis, and the garden was beautifully neat. And inside there was a tiny dining-room and a rather bigger drawing-room, and upstairs three or four very neat bedrooms, besides those for the servants. Persis and I had two little white rooms side by side. There were white curtains to the beds and to the windows, and the furniture was light-coloured wood, so they really looked white all over.

That first evening we thought most of the dining-room, or rather of the tea that was spread out for us there. For we were so very hungry, and the things to eat were so very good, and quite a change from London. There were such very nice home-made bread, and tea-cakes, and honey—honey is never so good as in moor country, you know, it has quite a different taste.

And when we had eaten, if not quite as much as we *could*, any way quite as much as was good for us, we went a little turn round the [157] garden while Eliza was getting our trunks open, and then we said good-night to papa and mamma and went to bed as happy, or almost as happy, as we could be. There was just one thought in both our minds that prevented our being *quite* happy, but we had fixed not to speak about it.

The next day and the days that followed were delightful. The weather kept fine and the walks were endless. Papa enjoyed it as much as we did. He took us out himself, and when it was not to be a very, very long walk, mamma came too. Once or twice we carried our dinner with us and didn't come home till evening, and several times we had tea on the moor near our house.

After about a week papa told us one evening that he had to go to London the next day to stay one night. He had ordered a carriage to come to take him to the station early, and he said if it was fine Persis and I and Eliza might drive with him and walk back across the moor, if we didn't think we'd be tired. Of course we didn't, and though we were sorry for him to go, we liked the idea of the drive. And as the morning did turn out fine, it all happened as he had planned. We saw him off, and then we started for our walk back. We had never been at [158] this side of the moor since the day we arrived, and papa told us we might vary the walk by going down a lane that skirted it for some way.

"There is a farmhouse there," he said, "where I daresay they would give you some milk if you are thirsty."

We thought it a very good idea, and after going about half a mile down the lane we came upon the farmhouse just as he had said. A little girl was feeding some chickens just in front, and when we asked her if we could have a cup of milk, she said she would run in and see. While we were waiting we heard a voice, a laughing merry voice it sounded, calling out in a sort of orchard close by—

"Down, Rollo, down—oh, you naughty old dog," it said.

Just then the little girl came out to ask Eliza if she'd mind coming in to fetch the milk, as she couldn't carry both the jug and the cups. Eliza went in, and I suppose she stayed chatting to the farmer's wife, who, she told us afterwards, was busy churning, for she was certainly five minutes gone. While she was away, the gate into the orchard opened and a girl—not a little girl, but a grown-up young lady—came [159] running out, followed by a beautiful big dog. He was really a splendid fellow, and as she ran, he ran, half jumping against her—I think she

had something in her hand he wanted to get—and again we heard the laughing voice call out—

"Down, Rollo—you naughty old fellow. You'll knock me over if you don't take care, you great, clumsy darling."

They rushed across the road—the girl and the dog—and down a little lane just opposite. They were gone like a flash, but we did, at least *I* did see them, the dog especially, quite clearly. Afterwards I tried to fancy I hadn't, but that was not true. I did see the dog perfectly.

I turned to Persis.

"Did you ever see such a beauty?" I said. But just then Eliza came out with the milk, and we didn't say any more about the dog. We both kept thinking about it all the way home, I know, but somehow we didn't care to talk about it before Eliza. The wish for a dog of our own had become such a very deep-down thought in our hearts that we could not talk about it easily or lightly—not even to each other always.

[160]

Papa came back from London the next day, but mamma was disappointed to hear that he was obliged to return there again the end of the week, this time to stay two nights. We did not drive with him again to the station because it was a wet day, otherwise we should have wished it doubly, in the chance of having another sight of the beautiful dog.

It was the very day after papa had gone this second time that a strange thing happened. Persis and I were out in the garden rather late in the evening before going to bed, and we had just gone a tiny bit out into the lane to see if the sky looked red over the moor where the sun set, when we heard a sort of rushing, pattering sound, and looking round, what should be coming banging along towards us, as fast as he could, but a great big dog. He stopped when he got up to us and began wagging his tail and rubbing his head against us in the *sweetest* way, and then we saw that his tongue was hanging out, and that his coat was rough and dusty, and he breathed fast and pantingly—he was evidently very tired, and, above all, thirsty. I was off for a

mug of water for him before we said a word, and oh how glad he was of it! He really said "Thank you" with his tail and his sweet nose as plainly as if he had spoken. And he didn't seem to think of leaving us —he was alone, there was no one in sight, and he seemed as if he was sure he had found friends in us. [161]

"LOST ROLLO
He stopped when he got up to us and began wagging his tail and rubbing his head against us in the sweetest way"
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"He is very like—he is just like—-" Persis began at last. But I interrupted her.

"There are lots of dogs like him," I said. "He is lost—we must take

him in for the night. Oh, Persis, just fancy—if he is really *quite* lost, we may have to keep him for good. Mamma might perhaps let us. Oh, Persis!"

We took him in with us and called to mamma to come out to the door to look at him. She saw what a beauty he was at once, and stroked his head and called him "poor doggie," for, as I said, she is always kind to animals, though she doesn't care for pets.

"We must take him in for the night any way," she said. "Perhaps in the morning we may find out where he comes from."

There was an empty kennel in the yard, and we found some nice clean hay in the hampers that we had brought with groceries from London. And the cook gave us some scraps and one or two big bones. So "Bruno," as of course we called him, was made very comfortable.

And you can fancy—no, I really—I don't think you *can*—the state of excitement in which Persis and I went to bed. [162]

Chapter III

We got up very early indeed the next morning, and of course we both rushed straight to the yard. We had had a dreadful feeling that perhaps somebody would have come to claim the dog, and that we should find him gone. But no—there he was, the beauty, and as soon as ever he saw us, out he came wagging his dear tail and looking as pleased as pleased.

"Do you see how he knows us already, Archie?" said Persis. "Isn't he *too* sweet? Couldn't you really think the fairies had sent him to be our very own?"

We could scarcely eat any breakfast, and the moment it was over we dragged mamma out to look at him. She was as nearly much

taken with him as we were, we could see, only she said one thing which I wished she hadn't.

"How unhappy his owners must be at having lost him!" it was.

And then she began talking about what could be done to find them. Persis and I didn't say anything. We wouldn't speak even to each other about what we both knew deep down in our hearts—we wouldn't even think of it. [163]

Papa was not to be back till the next day. Nothing could be done till he came, any way, so all that day Persis and I had the full happiness of Bruno. He was so good and obedient and seemed so perfectly at home with us, that we even ventured to take him out a walk, though not of course a very long one. He gambolled over the moor with us, seemingly as happy as could be, and the very moment we called him back he came. It was wonderful how he seemed to know his name, especially when we called it out rather long, making the last "o" sound a good deal—"Bru*no*—*o*," like that, you know. Oh, he was so delightful! All our fancies about having a dog seemed nothing compared to the reality.

The next day papa came back. He was almost as pleased with Bruno as we were.

"Yes," he said, after looking him well over, "he is a beauty and no mistake. A collie of the very best kind. But some one or other must be in trouble about him." [164]

"That's just what I have been saying," mamma put in. "If this weren't such an out-of-the-way place, no doubt we should have seen advertisements about him."

"I'll look in the local papers," said papa.

And that evening when we were at tea, he came in with a little thin-looking newspaper in his hand, which he seemed to be searching all through for something. Persis and I shivered, but we didn't dare to say much.

"Have you been at Local, papa?" I asked. "Is it far from here?"

"Been at where?" papa said. "What in the world is the child talking about?"

Papa has *rather* a sharp way sometimes, but he doesn't mean it, so we don't mind.

"At Local," I said again, "the place where you said there was a newspaper. Is it anywhere near the station?" (I *hoped* of course it was not, for the nearer the station the more likely that the dog should be advertised for in the newspaper. You know of course what I mean by "near the station.")

To my surprise papa burst out laughing.

"You little goose," he said, holding out the paper. "There, look for yourself;" and I saw that the name of the paper was *The Wildmoor Gazette*. I was quite puzzled, and I suppose my face showed it. [165]

"Local," said papa, "only means connected with the place—with any place. I just meant that I would get the newspaper of this place to see if any such dog as Bruno was advertised for. But I don't see anything of the kind. I think I must put in an advertisement of having found him."

"Oh, papa, you surely won't!" Persis burst out.

Papa turned upon her with a sort of sharpness we did mind this time, for we saw he was quite in earnest.

"My dear child," he said, "what are you thinking of? It would not be honest not to try to restore the dog to those he belongs to. I have already told all the neighbours about him."

Persis said no more, but she grew very red indeed. I think I did too, but I'm not quite sure, and I couldn't ask Persis afterwards, for we had fixed in our minds we wouldn't speak of that thing. I turned my face away, however, for fear of papa seeing it. He would have

thought there was something very queer the matter if he had seen we were both so red.

That afternoon he went out without saying where he was going, but we both felt quite sure he had gone about putting that horrid advertisement in the paper. And even without that, we knew that if he went telling about Bruno to everybody he'd be *sure* to be claimed. The country's not like town, you see. Everybody knows everybody else's affairs in the country. [166]

We took Bruno out, feeling that we only loved him the more for not knowing how soon he might be taken from us. We both hugged him and cried over him that afternoon, and the dear fellow seemed to understand. He looked up in our faces with such *very* "doggy" eyes.

And after that, there never, for some days, came a knock at the door, or the sound of a strange voice in the kitchen, without our trembling. And we never came in from a walk with Bruno without getting cold all over at the thought that perhaps some one might be waiting for him.

But nothing of the sort did happen. And time went on, till it grew to be nearly three weeks that our dear dog had been with us.

One evening papa came to us in the yard when we were saying good-night to Bruno.

"I suppose you're getting to think him quite your own," he said. "It certainly does not seem as if he were going to be owned. But what will mamma say to taking him home with us—eh, little people?" [167]

"I don't think she'll mind," said Persis. "She loves him too—awfully. And Archie and I are full of plans about how to manage him in London."

"Ah, indeed," said papa. "Well, one of the first things to be done, it seems to me," he went on, "is to get him a collar," and he drew a yard measure out of his pocket and measured Bruno's neck. "I am going up to town to-morrow for two nights," he then told us. "You two

can come to meet me at the station when I come back, with Eliza, of course, and this fellow, and you shall see what I can get in the way of a collar. I'll tell mamma the train, and you can all drive home with me."

We thanked papa—it was very kind of him, and we said we'd like to go to meet him very much. But things seldom turn out as one expects. The day papa was to come mamma had to go to the little town near the station herself—something about a washerwoman it was—so she ordered a carriage, and we drove over with her. We were all at the station together to meet papa, and when he came he had brought the loveliest collar for Bruno—with his name on, and ours, and our address in London! [168]

"*We* won't risk losing him," papa said.

Then he asked us if we wouldn't rather walk home, and we said we should, as we had driven there, and mamma didn't mind going back alone. So we set off, us two and papa. And we were so happy and so sure now of Bruno being ours, that we didn't notice that papa took the way down the lane that we had been once before.

We never noticed it, till we were close to the gate of the farm—the very farm where we had got milk—the very gate where—-

And, just as we got up to it, it opened, and a girl, a lady, *the very one*, came out, not running and jumping, but walking quite quietly. But when she caught sight of us, of Bruno, and when he caught sight of her! Oh! He rushed at her, and she threw her arms round him.

"Oh, my Rollo, my own dear naughty Rollo," she called out, and I believe she was crying. "Have you come back to me at last? Where *have* you been?"

And Bruno—*our* Bruno—went on wagging his tail and rubbing his nose on her, and pawing at her, just as he had done to us, only *more!*

Persis and I stood stock-still, feeling as if we *couldn't* bear it. [169]

Chapter IV

Papa was the first to speak. The young lady went on hugging at Bruno, and taking no notice of any of us. Papa looked very grave. I think he thought it rather rude of her, even if she was so pleased to find her dog again, for she might have seen how well he had been taken care of, and what a beautiful new collar he had. Papa waited a minute or two, and then he said, rather grandly, you know—

"Excuse me, madam, for interrupting you. I should be glad of some explanation about the dog. Is he your dog?"

"*My* dog," said the girl, half sitting up and shaking her hair back. It had got messy with all her hugging at Bruno. "I should rather think so. I have nothing to explain. What do you mean?"

"I beg your pardon," said papa. "I have had the dog nearly a month, and during that time I have advertised him regularly. I have sent all about the neighbourhood to ask if any one had lost a dog, and altogether I have had a good deal of trouble and expense."

The girl got rather red. [170]

"I see," she said, "I didn't think of that. I was only so glad to find my dear dog. I'm very much obliged to you, I'm sure. I can tell you why your advertisements were never answered. We've been away for nearly a month, and the people here whom we lodge with have been very stupid about it. They missed Rollo as soon as we left, and took for granted we'd taken him with us after all. And we never knew till we came back two days ago that he was lost. He was lonely, you see, when he found I had gone, and I suppose he set out to look for me."

"Yes," said papa. "Then I suppose there is nothing more to be said. My children must bear the disappointment; they had naturally come to look upon him as their own."

Persis and I had turned away, so she couldn't see we were crying.

We didn't want her to see; we didn't like her.

"I—I can't offer to pay you anything of what he's cost you, I suppose?" she said, getting redder still.

"Certainly not. Good-morning," and papa lifted his hat. And we all went off.

"My poor Persis and Archie," said papa very kindly. And when he said that, we felt as if we couldn't keep it in any longer. We both burst [171] out crying—loud.

Just then we heard steps behind us. It was the girl running with the lovely new collar in her hand.

"This at least is yours," she said, holding it out to papa. He smiled a little.

"You will please us by keeping it," he said. "It fits him; you can easily have the engraving altered."

"Thank you," she said; "thank you very much. I am very sorry indeed for the children," she went on, for she couldn't have helped seeing how we were crying; and a nice look came into her eyes, which made us like her better. She was very pretty. I forget if I said so. "Shall I—shall I bring Rollo some day to see you?"

But we shook our heads.

"No, thank you," Persis managed to get out.

"Ah," she said, "I'm sorry; but I understand."

And then we liked her *quite*.

We trotted on beside papa, none of us speaking. At last Persis touched me.

"Archie," she said, "I think it's for a punishment. May I tell?"

I just nodded my head. [172]

Then Persis went close up to papa and put her hand through his arm.

"Papa," she said, "we've something to tell you. We're not crying *only* for Bruno, we're unhappy because—because we've not been good."

"We've not been *honest*," I said. That word "honest" had been sticking in my throat ever since the day papa had said it when he was speaking about it being right to advertise the dog. And now, when *I* said it, I felt as if I was going to choke. It felt so awful, you don't know.

Papa looked very grave, but he held out his other hand to me, and I was glad of that.

"Tell me all about it," he said; and then we told him everything—all about how in our real hearts we had known, or *almost* known, where Bruno came from, but how we had tried to pretend to ourselves—separately, I mean; Persis to herself and me to myself—that we didn't know, so that we wouldn't even say it to each other, and how it did seem now as if this had come for a punishment.

Papa was very kind, so kind that we went on to tell him how great the temptation had been, how *dreadfully* we had longed for a dog, and how it had seemed that our only chance of ever having one would be one coming of itself, like Bruno had done. [173]

"Why did you not tell mamma or me how very, very much you wished for one?" asked papa. "It would have been better than bottling it up so between yourselves. You have made yourselves think you wished for one even more than you really did."

But we couldn't quite agree with that.

"We did speak of it sometimes," we said, "but we knew mamma didn't want to have a dog—not in London. And——" but there we stopped. We really didn't quite know why we hadn't said more about it. I think children often keep their fancies to themselves without quite

knowing why. But we didn't think it had been a fancy only, after all. "We *couldn't* have loved him more," we said. "The real of it turned out quite as nice as the fancy."

Then papa spoke to us very seriously. I daresay you can tell of yourselves—all of you who have nice fathers and mothers—the sort of way he spoke. About being quite, *quite* true and honest even in thinkings, and about how dangerous it is to try to deceive *ourselves*, for that the self we try to deceive is the best part of us, the voice of God in our hearts, and it can never *really* be deceived, only, if we don't listen to it, after a while we can't hear it any more. [174]

"Yes," said Persis, "I did know I was shamming to my good self all the time."

Then she cried a little more—and I did too. And papa kissed us, and we went on home, rather sadly of course, but still feeling, in a good way, glad too. And papa told it all to mamma, so that she kissed us *very* nicely when she said good-night, and called us her poor darlings.

You may think that is the end. But it isn't. The end is lovely.

About a week after that day, one afternoon we heard that a lady and gentleman with a big dog had come to call on papa and mamma. We were afraid it was Bruno, and the people belonging to him, and as we didn't want to see him again, we were just going to run out and hide in the garden for fear we should be sent for, when papa himself came calling for us.

"Persis. Archie." And we dared not run away.

"Papa," we said, "we don't want to come if it is Bruno."

"It is Bruno," he said; "but, all the same, you must come. You must trust me." [175]

We had to go into the drawing-room. There was the girl talking quite nicely to mamma, and a gentleman with her, who we saw was

her brother, and—there was Bruno! We tried not to look at him, while we shook hands. How silly we were!

"Children," said papa, "this young lady has come to say something which will please you very much. She finds, quite unexpectedly, that she cannot keep her dog, as she and Mr. Riverton"—papa made a little bow to the brother—"are going abroad. Miss Riverton wants a good home for her dog. Do you think we could promise him one?"

We could scarcely speak. It seemed too good to be true.

"Would he be ours for always?" I asked, and the young lady said, "Yes, of course. I wouldn't want to give you the pain of parting with him *twice*, you poor children."

"And mamma says we may?" we asked. And mamma nodded. Then Persis had a nice thought.

"Aren't you very sorry?" she asked the girl. But *she* only smiled. "No, I can't say I am," she said, "because I know he'll be very happy with you. And though I love him very much, I love my brother better, and I'm *very* glad to go with him instead of being left behind, even with Rollo." [176]

We *quite* liked her then. Her face was so nice. And she kissed us when she went away. Persis liked it, and I didn't mind.

Our Bruno has been with us ever since, and we love him more and more. He is quite happy, even in London, for he has a nice home in the stables, and we take him a walk every day, and he comes very often into the house. And in the country, where we now go for much longer every year, he is always with us.

The girl writes to us sometimes, and we answer, and tell her about Bruno. She is coming to see him next year, when they come back to England. She calls him "Rollo," but we like "Bruno" best, and *he* doesn't mind, the dear old fellow.

THE BLUE DWARFS:

[177]

AN ADVENTURE IN THÜRINGEN

"And then on the top of the Caldon Low
There was no one left but me."

Mary Howitt.

"I liked the blue dwarfs the best—far, far the best of anything," said Olive.

"'The blue dwarfs!'" repeated Rex. "What *do* you mean? Why can't you say what you mean plainly? Girls have such a stupid way of talking!"

"What can be plainer than *the blue dwarfs?*" said Olive rather snappishly, though, it must be allowed, with some reason. "We were talking about the things we liked best at the china place. *You* said the stags' heads and the inkstands, and *I* say the blue dwarfs."

"But I didn't see any dwarfs," persisted Rex.

"Well, I can't help it if you didn't. You had just as much chance of seeing them as I had. They were in a corner by themselves—little figures about two inches high, all with blue coats on. There were [178] about twelve of them, all different, but all little dwarfs or gnomes. One was sitting on a barrel, one was turning head-over-heels, one was cuddling his knees—all funny ways like that. Oh, they were lovely!"

"I wish I had seen them better," said Rex regretfully. "I do remember seeing a tray full of little blue-looking dolls, but I didn't notice what they were."

Olive did not at once answer. Her eyes were fixed on something she saw passing before the window. It was a very, very little man. He was not exactly hump-backed, but his figure was somewhat deformed, and he was so small that but for the sight of his rather

wizened old face one could hardly have believed he was a full-grown man. His eyes were bright and beady-looking, like those of a good-natured little weasel, if there be such a thing, and his face lighted up with a smile as he caught sight of the two, to him, strange-looking children at the open window of the little village inn.

"Guten Tag," he said, nodding to them; and "Guten Tag," replied the children, as they had learnt to do by this time to everybody they met. For in these remote villages it would be thought the greatest breach of courtesy to pass any one without this friendly greeting. [179]

Rex drew a long breath when the dwarf had passed.

"Olive——" he began, but Olive interrupted him.

"Rex," she said eagerly, "that's *exactly* like them—like the blue dwarfs, I mean. Only, of course, their faces were prettier—nice little china faces, rather crumply looking, but quite nice; and then their coats were such a pretty nice blue. I think," she went on consideringly —"I think, if I had that little man and washed his face *very* well, and got him a bright blue coat, he would look just like one of the blue dwarfs grown big."

Rex looked at Olive with a queer expression.

"Olive," he said in rather an awe-struck tone; "Olive, do you think perhaps they're *real?* Do you think perhaps somewhere in this country—in those queer dark woods, perhaps—that there are real blue dwarfs, and that somebody must have seen them and made the little china ones like them? Perhaps," and his voice dropped and grew still more solemn; "*perhaps*, Olive, that little man's one of them, and they may have to take off their blue coats when they're walking about. Do you know, I think it's a little, just a very little frightening? Don't you, Olive?" [180]

"No, of course I don't," said Olive, and, to do her justice, her rather sharp answer was meant as much to reassure her little brother as to express any feeling of impatience. Rex was quite a little fellow, only

eight, and Olive, who was nearly twelve, remembered, that when she was as little as that, she used sometimes to feel frightened about things which she now couldn't see anything the least frightening in. And she remembered how once or twice some of her big cousins had laughed at her, and amused themselves by telling her all sorts of nonsense, which still seemed terrible to her when she was alone in her room in the dark at night. "Of course there's nothing frightening in it," she said. "It would be rather a funny idea, I think. Of course it can't be, you know, Rex. There are no dwarfs, and gnomes, and fairies now."

"But that little man was a dwarf," said Rex.

"Yes, but a dwarf needn't be a fairy sort of person," explained Olive. "He's just a common little man, only he's never grown as big as other people. Perhaps he had a bad fall when he was a baby—that might stop his growing." [181]

"Would it?" said Rex. "I didn't know that. I hope I hadn't a bad fall when I was a baby. Everybody says I'm very small for my age." And Rex looked with concern at his short but sturdy legs.

Olive laughed outright.

"Oh, Rex, what a funny boy you are! No, certainly, you are not a dwarf. You're as straight and strong as you can be."

"Well, but," said Rex, returning to the first subject, "I do think it's very queer about that little dwarf man coming up the street just as you were telling me about the blue dwarfs. And he *did* look at us in a funny way, Olive, whatever you say, just as if he had heard what we were talking about."

"All the people look at us in a funny way here," said Olive. "We must look very queer to them. Your sailor suit, Rex, and my 'Bolero' hat must look to them quite as queer as the women's purple skirts, with bright green aprons, look to us."

"Or the bullock-carts," said Rex. "Do you remember how queer we

thought them at first? *Now* we've got quite used to seeing queer things, haven't we, Olive? Oh! now do look there—at the top of the street—there, Olive, did you *ever* see such a load as that woman is carrying in the basket on her back? Why, it's as big as a house!" [182]

He seemed to have forgotten about the dwarfs, and Olive was rather glad of it. These two children were travelling with their uncle and aunt in a rather out-of-the-way part of Germany. Out-of-the-way, that is to say, to most of the regular summer tourists from other countries, who prefer going where they are more sure of finding the comforts and luxuries they are accustomed to at home. But it was by no means out-of-the-way in the sense of being dull or deserted. It is a very busy part of the world indeed. You would be amazed if I were to tell you some of the beautiful things that are made in these bare homely little German cottages. For all about in the neighbourhood there are great manufactories and warehouses for china and glass, and many other things; and some parts of the work are done by the people at home in their own houses. The morning of the day of which I am telling you had been spent by the children and their friends in visiting a very large china manufactory, and their heads were full of the pretty and wonderful things they had seen.

And now they were waiting in the best parlour of the village inn while their uncle arranged about a carriage to take them all on to the small town where they were to stay a few days. Their aunt was tired, and was resting a little on the sofa, and they had planted themselves on the broad window-sill, and were looking out with amusement at all that passed. [183]

"What have you two been chattering about all this time?" said their aunt, suddenly looking up. "I think I must have been asleep a little, but I have heard your voices going on like two birds twittering."

"Have we disturbed you, Auntie?" asked Olive, with concern.

"Oh no, not a bit; but come here and tell me what you have been talking about."

Instantly Rex's mind went back to the dwarfs.

"Auntie," he said seriously, "perhaps you can tell me better than Olive can. Are there really countries of dwarfs, and are they a kind of fairies, Auntie?"

Auntie looked rather puzzled.

"Dwarfs, Rex?" she said; "countries of dwarfs? How do you mean?"

Olive hastened to explain. Auntie was very much amused.

"Certainly," she said, "we have already seen so many strange things in our travels that it is better not to be too sure what we may not see. But any way, Rex, you may be quite easy in your mind, that if ever you come across any of the dwarfs, you will find them very good-natured and amiable, only you must be very respectful—always say 'Sir,' or 'My lord,' or something like that to them, and bow a great deal. And you must never seem to think anything they do the least odd, not even if they propose to you to walk on your head, or to eat roast fir-cones for dinner, for instance." [184]

Auntie was quite young—not so very much older than Olive—and very merry. Olive's rather "grown-up" tones and manners used sometimes to tempt her to make fun of the little girl, which, to tell the truth, Olive did not always take quite in good part. And it must for Olive be allowed, that Auntie did sometimes allow her spirits and love of fun to run away with her a little too far, just like pretty unruly ponies, excited by the fresh air and sunshine, who toss their heads and gallop off. It is great fun at first and very nice to see, but one is sometimes afraid they may do some mischief on the way—without meaning it, of course; and, besides, it is not always so easy to pull them up as it was to start them. [185]

Just as Auntie finished speaking the door opened and their uncle came in. He was Auntie's elder brother—a good deal older—and very kind and sensible. At once all thoughts of the dwarfs or what Auntie had been saying danced out of Rex's curly head. Like a true

boy he flew off to his uncle, besieging him with questions as to what sort of a carriage they were to go on in—*was* it an ox-cart; oh, mightn't they *for once* go in an ox-cart? and might he—oh, might he sit beside the driver in front?

His uncle laughed and replied to his questions, but Olive stayed beside the sofa, staring gravely at her aunt.

"Auntie," she said, "you're not *in earnest*, are you, about there being really a country of dwarfs?"

Olive was twelve. Perhaps you will think her very silly to have imagined for a moment that her aunt's joke could be anything but a joke, especially as she had been so sensible about not letting Rex get anything into his head which could frighten him. But I am not sure that she was so very silly after all. She had read in her geography about the Lapps and Finns, the tiny little men of the north, whom one might very well describe as dwarfs; there might be dwarfs in these [186] strange Thüringian forests, which were little spoken of in geography books; Auntie knew more of such things than she did, for she had travelled in this country before. Then with her own eyes Olive had seen a dwarf, and though she had said to Rex that he was just an odd dwarf by himself as it were, not one of a race, how could she tell but what he might be one of a number of such queer little people? And even the blue dwarfs themselves—the little figures in the china manufactory—rather went to prove it than not.

"They may have taken the idea of dwarfs from the real ones, as Rex said," thought Olive. "Any way I shall look well about me if we go through any of these forests again. They must live in the forests, for Auntie said they eat roast fir-cones for dinner."

All these thoughts were crowding through her mind as she stared up into Auntie's face and asked solemnly—

"Auntie, were you in earnest?"

Auntie's blue eyes sparkled.

"In earnest, Olive?" she said. "Of course! Why shouldn't I be in earnest? But come, quick, we must get our things together. Your uncle must have got a carriage." [187]

"Yes," said he, "I have. *Not* an ox-cart, Rex. I'm sorry for your sake, but for no one else's; for I don't think there would be much left of us by the end of the journey if we were to be jogged along the forest roads in an ox-cart. No! I have got quite a respectable vehicle; but we must stop an hour or two on the way, to rest the horses and give them a feed, otherwise we could not get through to-night."

"Where shall we stop?" said Auntie, as with the bundles of shawls and bags they followed the children's uncle to the door.

"There is a little place in the forest, where they can look after the horses," said he; "and I daresay we can get some coffee there for ourselves, if we want it. It is a pretty little nook. I remember it long ago, and I shall be glad to see it again."

Olive had pricked up her ears. "A little place in the forest!" she said to herself; "that may be near where the dwarfs live: it is most likely not far from here, because of the one we saw." She would have liked to ask her uncle about it, but something in the look of her aunt's eyes kept her from doing so.

"Perhaps she *was* joking," thought Olive to herself. "But perhaps she doesn't know; *she* didn't see the real dwarf. It would be rather nice if I did find them, *then* Auntie couldn't laugh at me any more." [188]

They were soon comfortably settled in the carriage, and set off. The first part of the drive was not particularly interesting; and it was so hot, though already afternoon, that they were all—Olive especially, you may be sure—delighted to exchange the open country for the pleasant shade of a grand pine forest, through which their road now lay.

"Is it a very large forest, Uncle?" said Olive.

"Yes, very large," he replied rather sleepily, to tell the truth; for both

he and Auntie had been nodding a little, and Rex had once or twice been fairly asleep. But Olive's imagination was far too hard at work to let her sleep.

"The largest in Europe?" she went on, without giving much thought to poor Uncle's sleepiness.

"Oh yes, by far," he replied, for he had not heard clearly what she said, and fancied it was "the largest hereabouts."

"Dear me!" thought Olive, looking round her with awe and satisfaction. "If there are dwarfs anywhere, then it must be here."

And she was just beginning another. "And please, Uncle, is——?" [189] when her aunt looked up and said lazily—

"Oh, my dear child, do be quiet! Can't you go to sleep yourself a little? We shall have more than enough of the forest before we are out of it." Which offended Olive so much that she relapsed into silence.

Auntie was a truer prophet than she knew; for when they got to the little hamlet in the wood, where they were to rest, something proved to be wrong with one of the horse's shoes; *so* wrong, indeed, that after a prolonged examination, at which all the inhabitants turned out to assist, it was decided that the horse must be re-shod before he could go any farther; and this made it impossible for the party who had come in the carriage to go any farther either. For the nearest smithy was two miles off; the horse must be led there and back by the driver, which would take at least two, if not three, hours. It was now past six, and they had come barely half way. The driver shook his head, and said he would not like to go on to the town till morning. The horse had pricked his foot; it might cause inflammation to drive him farther without a rest, and the carriage was far too heavy for the other horse alone, which had suddenly struck the children's uncle as a brilliant idea. [190]

"There would be no difficulty about the harnessing, any way," he said to Auntie, laughing; "for all the vehicles hereabouts drawn by one horse have the animal at one side of a pole, instead of between

shafts."

But Auntie thought it better to give in.

"It really doesn't much matter," she said; "we can stay here well enough. There are two bedrooms, and no doubt they can give us something to eat; beer and sausages, and brown bread any way."

And so it was settled, greatly to Olive's satisfaction; it would give her capital opportunities for a dwarf hunt! though as to this she kept her own counsel.

The landlady of the little post-house where they had stopped was accustomed to occasional visits of this kind from benighted or distressed travellers. She thought nothing of turning her two daughters out of their bedroom, which, it must be owned, was very clean, for Auntie and Olive, and a second room on the ground-floor was prepared for Rex and his uncle. She had coffee ready in five minutes, and promised them a comfortable supper before bedtime. Altogether, everything seemed very satisfactory, and when they felt a little refreshed, Auntie proposed a walk—"a good long walk," she said, "would do us good. And the landlady says we get out of the forest up there behind the house, where the ground rises, and that there is a lovely view. It will be rather a climb, but it isn't more than three-quarters of an hour from here, and we have not walked all day." [191]

Uncle thought it a good idea, and Rex was ready to start at once; but Olive looked less pleased.

"Don't you want to come, Olive?" said Auntie. "Are you tired? You didn't take a nap like the rest of us."

"I am a little tired," said Olive, which was true in one sense, though not in another, for she was quite fit for a walk. It struck her that her excuse was not quite an honest one, so she added, "If you don't mind, I would rather stay about here. I don't mind being alone, and I have my book. And I do so like the forest."

"Very well," said her uncle; "only don't lose yourself. She is

perfectly safe," he added, turning to her aunt; "there are neither wolves, nor bears, nor robbers nowadays, in these peaceful forests."

So the three set off, leaving Olive to her own devices. She waited [192] till they were out of sight, then she made her preparations.

"I'd better take my purse," she said to herself, "in case I meet the dwarfs. Auntie told me to be very polite, and perhaps they would like some of these tiny pieces; they just look as if they were meant for them." So she chose out a few one-pfennig copper coins, which are much smaller than our farthings, and one or two silver pieces, worth about twopence-halfpenny each, still smaller. Then she put in her pocket half a slice of the brown bread they had had with their coffee, and arming herself, more for appearance's-sake than anything else, with her parasol and the book she had with her in her travelling bag, she set off on her solitary ramble.

It was still hot—though the forest trees made a pleasant shade. Olive walked some way, farther and farther, as far as she could make out, into the heart of the forest, but in her inexperience she took no sort of care to notice the way she went, or to make for herself any kind of landmarks. She just wandered on and on, tempted first by some mysterious little path, and then by another, her mind full of the idea of the discoveries she was perhaps about to make. Now and then a squirrel darted across from one tree to another, disappearing [193] among the branches almost before Olive could be sure she had seen it, or some wild wood birds, less familiar to the little foreigner, would startle her with a shrill, strange note. There were here and there lovely flowers growing among the moss, and more than once she heard the sound of not far off trickling water. It was all strangely beautiful, and she would greatly have enjoyed and admired it had not her mind been so full of the queer fascinating idea of the blue dwarfs.

At last—she had wandered about for some time—Olive began to feel tired.

"I may as well sit down a little," she thought; "I have lots of time to get back. This seems the very heart of the forest. They are just as

likely to be seen here as anywhere else."

So Olive ensconced herself in a comfortable corner, her back against the root of a tree, which seemed hollowed out on purpose to serve as an arm-chair. She thought at first she would read a little, but the light was already slightly waning, and the tree shadows made it still fainter. Besides, Olive had plenty to think of—she did not require any amusement. Queer little noises now and then made themselves heard—once or twice it really sounded as if small feet were pattering along, or as if shrill little voices were laughing in the distance; and with each sound, Olive's heart beat faster with excitement—not with fear. [194]

"If I sit very still," she thought, "who knows what I may see? Of course, it would be much nicer and prettier if the dwarfs were quite tiny—not like the little man we saw in the street at that place—I forget the name—for he was not pretty at all—but like the blue dwarfs at the manufactory. But that, I suppose, is impossible, for they would be really like fairies. But they might be something between: not so big as the little man, and yet bigger than the blue dwarfs."

And then Olive grew a little confused in trying to settle in her mind how big, or how small rather, it was possible or impossible for a nation of dwarfs to be. She thought it over till she hardly seemed sure what she was trying to decide. She kept saying to herself, "Any way, they could not but be a good deal bigger than my thumb! What does that mean? Perhaps it means more in German measures than in English, perhaps——"

"THE BLUE DWARFS
They were sliding down the branch-es of the tree in all directions." p.195

But what was that that suddenly hit her on the nose? Olive looked [195]
up, a very little inclined to be offended; it is not a pleasant thing to be hit on the nose; could it be Rex come behind her suddenly, and playing her a trick? Just as she was thinking this, a second smart tap

on the nose startled her still more, and this time there was no mistake about it; it came from above, and it was a fir-cone! Had it come of itself? Somehow the words, "Roast fir-cones for dinner," kept running in her head, and she took up the fir-cone in her fingers to examine it, but quickly dropped it again, for it was as hot as a coal.

"It has a very roasty smell," thought Olive; "where can it have come from?"

And hardly had she asked herself the question, when a sudden noise all round her made her again look up. They were sliding down the branches of the tree in all directions. At first, to her dazzled eyes, they seemed a whole army, but as they touched the ground one by one, and she was able to distinguish them better, she saw that after all there were not so *very* many. One, two, three, she began quickly counting to herself, not aloud, of course—that would not have been polite—one, two, three, up to twelve, then thirteen, fourteen, and so on up to—yes, there were just twenty-four of them. [196]

"Two of each," said Olive to herself; "a double set of the blue dwarfs."

For they were the blue dwarfs, and no mistake! Two of each, as Olive had seen at once. And immediately they settled themselves in twos—two squatted on the ground embracing their knees, two strode across a barrel which they had somehow or other brought with them, two began turning head-over-heels, two knelt down with their heads and queer little grinning faces looking over their shoulders, twos and twos of them in every funny position you could imagine, all arranged on the mossy ground in front of where Olive sat, and all dressed in the same bright blue coats as the toy dwarfs at the china manufactory.

Olive sat still and looked at them. Somehow she did not feel surprised.

"How big are they?" she said to herself. "Bigger than my thumb? Oh yes, a good deal. I should think they are about as tall as my arm would be if it was standing on the ground. I should think they would

come up above my knee. I should like to stand up and measure, but perhaps it is better for me not to speak to them till they speak to me." [197]

She had not long to wait. In another moment two little blue figures separated themselves from the crowd, and made their way up to her. But when they were close to her feet they gave a sudden jump in the air, and came down, not on their feet, but on their heads! And then again some of her aunt's words came back to her, "If they should ask you to stand on your head, for instance."

"Dear me," thought Olive, "how did Auntie know so much about them? But I do hope they won't ask me to stand on *my* head."

Her fears were somewhat relieved when the dwarfs gave another spring and came down this time in a respectable manner on their feet. Then, with a good many bows and flourishes, they began a speech.

"We are afraid," said the first.

"That the fir-cones," said the second.

"Were rather underdone," finished up the first.

Olive really did not know what to say. She was dreadfully afraid that it would seem so very rude of her not even to have *tasted* the cones. But naturally she had not had the slightest idea that they had been intended for her to eat.

"I am very sorry," she said, "Mr.——, sir! my lord! I beg your pardon. I don't quite know what I should call you." [198]

"With all respect," said the first.

"And considering the circumstances," went on the second.

Then, just as Olive supposed they were going to tell her their names, they stopped short and looked at her.

"I beg your pardon," she began again, after waiting a minute or

two to see if they had nothing else to say; "I don't quite understand."

"Nor do we," they replied promptly, speaking for the first time both together.

"Do you mean you don't know what *my* name is?" said she. "It's Olive, *Olive!*" for the dwarfs stood staring as if they had not heard her. "Olive!" she repeated for the third time.

"Green?" asked the first.

"No!" said Olive. "Of course not! *Green* is a very common name—at least——"

"But you called us 'blue,'" said the second; and it really was a relief to hear him finish a sentence comfortably by himself, only Olive felt very puzzled by what he said.

"How do you know?" she said. "How could you tell I called you the blue dwarfs?" and then another thought suddenly struck her. How very odd it was that the dwarf spoke such good English! "I thought you were German," she said. [199]

"How very amusing!" said the dwarfs, this time again speaking together.

Olive could not see that it was very amusing, but she was afraid of saying so, for fear it should be rude.

"And about the fir-cones," went on the first dwarf. "It is distressing to think they were so underdone. But we have come, all of us," waving his hand in the direction of the others, "to invite you to supper in our village. There you will find them done to perfection."

Olive felt more and more uncomfortable.

"You are very kind," she said. "I should like to come very much if it isn't too far; but I am afraid I couldn't eat any supper. Indeed, I'm not hungry." And then a bright thought struck her. "See here," she went on, drawing the half slice of bread out of her pocket, "I had to put this

in my pocket, for I couldn't finish it at our afternoon coffee."

The two dwarfs came close and examined the piece of bread with the greatest attention. They pinched and smelt it, and one of them put [200] out his queer little pointed tongue and licked it.

"Not good!" he said, looking up at Olive and rolling about his eyes in a very queer way.

"I don't know," said Olive; "I don't think it can be bad. It is the regular bread of the country. I should have thought you would be accustomed to it, as you live here."

The two dwarfs took no notice of what she said, but suddenly turned round, and standing with their backs to Olive called out shrilly, "Guten Tag." Immediately all the other dwarfs replied in the same tone and the same words, and to Olive's great surprise they all began to move towards her, but without altering their attitudes—those on the barrel rolled towards her without getting off it; the two who were hugging their knees continued to hug them, while they came on by means of jerking themselves; the turning head-over-heels ones span along like wheels, and so on till the whole assemblage were at her feet. Then she saw unfolded before her, hanging on the branches of the tree, a large mantle, just the shape of her aunt's travelling dust-cloak, which she always spread over Olive in a carriage, only, instead of being drab or fawn-coloured, it was, like the dwarfs' jackets, bright [201] blue. And without any one telling her, Olive seemed to know of herself that she was to put it on.

She got up and reached the cloak easily; it seemed to put itself on, and Olive felt very happy and triumphant as she said to herself, "Now I'm really going to have some adventures."

The dwarfs marched—no! one cannot call it marching, for they had about a dozen different ways of proceeding—they moved on, and Olive in the middle, her blue cloak floating majestically on her shoulders. No one spoke a word. It grew darker and darker among the trees, but Olive did not feel frightened. On they went, till at last she

saw twinkling before them a very small but bright blue light. It looked scarcely larger than the lamp of a glow-worm, but it shone out very distinct in the darkness. Immediately they saw it the dwarfs set up a shout, and as it died away, to Olive's surprise, they began to sing. And what do you think they sang? Olive at first could hardly believe her ears as they listened to the thoroughly English song of "Home, sweet Home." And the queerest thing was that they sang it very prettily, and that it sounded exactly like her aunt's voice! And though they were walking close beside her, their voices when they left off [202] singing did not so much seem to stop as to move off, to die away into the distance, which struck Olive as very odd.

They had now arrived at the trunk of a large tree, half way up which hung the little lamp—at least Olive supposed it must be a lamp—from which came the bright blue light.

"Here we are," said one of the dwarfs, she did not see which, "at the entrance to our village." And thereupon all the dwarfs began climbing up the tree, swarming about it like a hive of bees, till they got some way up, when one after another they suddenly disappeared. Olive could see all they did by the blue light. She was beginning to wonder if she would be left standing there alone, when a shout made her look up, and she saw two dwarfs standing on a branch holding a rope ladder, which they had just thrown down, and making signs to her to mount up by it. It was quite easy; up went Olive, step by step, and when she reached the place where the two dwarfs were standing, she saw how it was that they had all disappeared. The tree trunk was hollow, and there were steps cut in it like a stair, down which the dwarfs signed to her that she was to go. She did not need to be twice told, so eager was she to see what was to come. The [203] stair was rather difficult for her to get down without falling, for the steps were too small, being intended for the dwarfs, but Olive managed pretty well, only slipping now and then. The stair seemed very long, and as she went farther it grew darker, till at last it was quite dark; by which time, fortunately, however, she felt herself again on level ground, and after waiting half a minute a door seemed to open, and she found herself standing outside the tree stair, with the

prettiest sight before her eyes that she had ever seen or even imagined.

It was the dwarf village! Rows and rows of tiny houses—none of them more than about twice as high as Olive herself, for that was quite big enough for a dwarf cottage, each with a sweet little garden in front, like what one sees in English villages, though the houses themselves were like Swiss châlets. It was not dark down here, there was a soft light about as bright as we have it at summer twilight; and besides this, each little house had a twinkling blue light hanging above the front door, like a sign-post. And at the door of each cottage stood one of the dwarfs, with a little dwarf wife beside him; only, instead of blue, each little woman was dressed in brown, so that they were rather less showy than their husbands. They all began bowing as Olive appeared, and all the little women curtseying, and Olive seemed to understand, without being told, that she was to walk up the village street to see all there was to be seen. So on she marched, her blue cloak floating about her, so that sometimes it reached the roofs of the houses on each side at the same time. [204]

Olive felt herself rather clumsy. Her feet, which in general she was accustomed to consider rather neat, and by no means too large for her age, seemed such great awkward things. If she had put one of them in at the window of a dwarf house, it would have knocked everything out of its place.

"Dear me!" thought Olive, "I had no idea *I* could seem clumsy! I feel like a great ploughman. I wish I were not so big."

"Yes," said a voice beside her, "it has its disadvantages;" and Olive, looking down to see who spoke—she had to look down for everything—caught sight of one of the two dwarfs with whom she had first spoken. She felt a little ruffled. She did not like this trick of the dwarf hearing what she thought before she said it.

"Everything has its disadvantages," she replied. "Don't you find yourself very inconveniently small when you are up in *our* world?" [205]

"Exactly so," said the dwarf; but he did not seem the least put out.

"They are certainly very good-tempered," said Olive to herself. Then suddenly a thought struck her.

"Your village is very neat and pretty," she said; "though, perhaps—I don't mean to be rude, not on any account——"

"No," interrupted the dwarf; "Auntie told you on no account to be rude."

"Auntie!" repeated Olive, in astonishment; "she is not *your* auntie!"

"On no account," said the dwarf, in the same calm tone, but without seeming to take in that Olive meant to reprove him.

"It's no use trying to make them understand," said Olive to herself.

"Not the least," said the dwarf; at which Olive felt so provoked that she could have stamped her feet with irritation. But as *thinking* crossly seemed in this country to be quite as bad as *speaking* crossly, she had to try to swallow down her vexation as well as she could.

"I was going to say," she went on quietly, "that to my taste the village would be prettier if there was a little variety. Not all the houses just the same, you know. And all of *you* are so like each other, and all your little brown wives too. Are there no *children* dwarfs?" [206]

"Doubtless. Any quantity," was the answer.

"Then where are they all?" said Olive. "Are they all asleep?" She put the last question rather sarcastically, but the sarcasm seemed to be lost on the little man.

"Yes, all asleep," he replied; "all asleep, and dreaming. Children are very fond of dreaming," he went on, looking up at Olive with such a queer expression, and such a queer tone in his voice too, that Olive got a queer feeling herself, as if he meant more than his words actually said. Could he mean to hint that *she* was dreaming? But a

remark from the dwarf distracted her thoughts.

"Supper is ready," he said. "They are all waiting." And turning round, Olive saw before her a cottage a good deal larger than the others; in fact, it was almost high enough for her, with considerable stooping, to get in at the door. And through the windows she saw a long table neatly covered with a bright blue tablecloth, and spread with numbers of tiny plates, and beside each plate a knife and fork [207] and a little blue glass cup. Two great dishes stood on the table, one at each end. Steam was rising from each, and a delicious smell came out through the open windows.

"I did not know I was so hungry," thought Olive; "but I do *hope* it isn't fir-cones."

"Yes," said the dwarf; "they'll be better done this time."

Then he gave a sort of sharp, sudden cry or whistle, and immediately all the dwarfs of the village appeared as if by magic, and began hurrying into the house, but as soon as they were in the middle of the passage they fell back at each side, leaving a clear space in the middle.

"For you," said the first dwarf, bowing politely.

"Do you always have supper here altogether like that?" said Olive. "How funny!"

"Not at all," said the dwarf; "it's a table d'hôte. Be so good as to take your place."

Olive bent her head cautiously in preparation for passing through the door, when again the same sharp cry startled her, and lifting her head suddenly she bumped it against the lintel. The pain of the blow was rather severe. [208]

"What did you do that for?" she exclaimed angrily. "Why did you scream out like that? I——" But she said no more. The cry was repeated, and this time it did its work effectually, for Olive awoke.

Awoke—was it waking?—to find herself all in the dark, stiff and cold, and her head aching with the bump she had given it against the old tree-trunk, while farther off now she heard the same shrill hoot or cry of some early astir night-bird, which had sounded before in her dreams.

"Oh dear! oh dear!" she sobbed, "what shall I do? Where am I? How can I ever find my way in the dark? I believe it was all a trick of those nasty blue dwarfs. I don't believe I *was* dreaming. They must be spiteful goblins. I wish I had not gone with them to see their village." And so for some minutes, half asleep and half awake, Olive stayed crouching by the tree, which seemed her only protector. But by degrees, as her senses—her common sense particularly—came back to her, she began to realise that it was worse than useless to sit there crying. Dark as it was, she must try to find her way back to the little inn, where, doubtless, Auntie and the others were in the greatest distress about her, the thought of which nearly made her burst out crying again; and poor Olive stumbled up to her feet as best she [209] could, fortunately not forgetting to feel for her book and parasol which were lying beside her, and slowly and tremblingly made her way on a few steps, hoping that perhaps if she could manage to get out of the shadow of the trees it might not be quite so dark farther on. She was not altogether disappointed. It certainly grew a very little less black, but that it was a very dark night there was no denying. And, indeed, though it had not been dark, she would have had the greatest difficulty in finding her way out of the wood, into which she had so thoughtlessly penetrated. Terrifying thoughts, too, began to crowd into her mind, though, as I think I have shown you, she was not at all a timid child. But a forest on a dark night, and so far away from everywhere—it was enough to shake her nerves. She hoped and trusted there was no fear of wolves in summer-time; but bears!—ah! as to bears there was no telling. Even the hooting cries of the birds which she now and then again heard in the distance frightened her, and she felt that a bat flapping against her would send her nearly out of her mind. And after a while she began to lose heart—it was not quite so dark, but she had not the very least idea where she was [210]

going. She kept bumping and knocking herself against the trunks; she was evidently not in a path, but wandering farther and farther among the forest trees. That was about all she could feel sure of, and after two or three more vain efforts Olive fairly gave up, and, sinking down on the ground, again burst into tears.

"If I but had a mariner's compass," she thought, her fancy wandering off to all the stories of lost people she had ever heard of. Then she further reflected that a compass would do her very little good if it was too dark to see it, and still more as she had not the slightest idea whether her road lay north, south, east, or west. "If the stars were out!" was her next idea; but then, I am ashamed to say, Olive's ideas of astronomy were limited. She could have perhaps recognised the Plough and the Pole star, but she could not remember which way they pointed. Besides, she did not feel quite sure that in Thüringen one would see the same stars as in England or Paris; and, after all, as there were none visible, it was no good puzzling about it, only if they *had* been there it would not have seemed so lonely. Suddenly—what was that in the distance? A light, a tiny light, bobbing in and out of sight among the trees? Could it be a star come out of its way to take pity on her? Much more likely a Will-o'-the-wisp; for she did not stop to reflect that a dry pine forest in summer-time is not one of Will-o'-the-wisp's favourite playgrounds. It was a light, as to that there was no doubt, and it was coming nearer. Whether she was more frightened or glad Olive scarcely knew. Still, almost anything was better than to sit there to be eaten up by bears, or to die of starvation; and she eagerly watched the light now steadily approaching her, till it came near enough for her to see that it was a lantern carried by some person not high above the ground. A boy perhaps; could it be—oh, joyful thought!—could it be Rex? But no; even if they were all looking for her it was not likely that they would let Rex be running about alone to get lost too. Still, it must *be* a boy, and without waiting to think more Olive called out— [211]

"Oh, please come and help me! I'm lost in the wood!" she cried, thinking nothing of German or anything but her sore distress.

The lantern moved about undecidedly for a moment or two, then the light flashed towards her and came still nearer.

"*Ach Gott!*" exclaimed an unfamiliar voice, and Olive, peering [212] forward, thought for half a second she was again dreaming. He was not, certainly, dressed in blue, and he was a good deal taller than up to her knee; but still he was—there was no doubt about it—he was a dwarf! And another gaze at his queer little figure and bright sparkling eyes told Olive that it was the very same little man who had smiled at Rex and her when he saw them leaning out of the inn window that very afternoon.

She didn't feel frightened; he looked so good-natured and so sorry for her. And somehow Olive's faith in the possible existence of a nation of dwarfs had received a shock; she was much more inclined to take things prosaically. But it was very difficult to explain matters. I think the dwarf at the first moment was more inclined to take *her* for something supernatural than she was now to imagine him a brownie or a gnome. For she was a pretty little girl, with a mass of golden fair hair and English blue eyes; and with her hat half fallen off, and her cheeks flushed, she might have sat for a picture of a fairy who had strayed from her home.

Her German seemed all to go out of her head. But she managed to remember the name of the village where they had been that [213] afternoon, and a sudden recollection seemed to come over the dwarf. He poured out a flood of words and exclamations, amidst which all that Olive could understand was the name of the village and the words "*verirrt*," "*armes Kind*," which she knew meant "lost" and "poor child." Then he went on to tell that he too was on his way from the same village to somewhere; that he came by the woods, because it was shorter, and lifting high his lantern, gave Olive to understand that he could now show her the way.

So off she set under his guidance, and, only fancy! a walk of not more than ten minutes brought them to the little inn! Olive's wanderings and straying had, after all, drawn her very near her

friends if she had known it. Poor Auntie and Rex were running about in front of the house in great distress. Uncle and the landlord and the coachman had set off with lanterns, and the landlady was trying to persuade Auntie that there was not *really* anything to be afraid of; neither bears, nor wolves, nor evilly-disposed people about: the little young lady had, doubtless, fallen asleep in the wood with the heat and fatigue of the day; which, as you know, was a very good guess, though the landlady little imagined what queer places and people [214] Olive had been visiting in her sleep.

The dwarf was a well-known person thereabouts, and a very harmless, kindly little man. A present of a couple of marks sent him off to his cottage near by very happy indeed, and when Uncle returned a few minutes later to see if the wanderer had been heard of, you can imagine how thankful he was to find her. It was not so *very* late after all, not above half-past ten o'clock, but a thunderstorm which came on not long after explained the unusual darkness of the cloud-covered sky.

"*What* a good thing you were safe before the storm came on!" said Auntie, with a shudder at the thought of the dangers her darling had escaped. "I will take care never again to carry my jokes too far," she resolved, when Olive had confided to her the real motive of her wanderings in the wood. And Olive, for her part, decided that she would be content with fairies and dwarfs in books and fancy, without trying to find them in reality.

"Though all the same," she said to herself, "I should have liked to taste the roast fir-cones. They did smell so good!" "And, Auntie," she said aloud, "were you singing in the wood on your way home with [215] Uncle and Rex?"

"Yes," said Auntie, "they begged me to sing 'Home, sweet Home.' Why do you ask me?"

Olive explained. "So it was *your* voice I heard when I thought it was the dwarfs," she said, smiling.

And Auntie gave her still another kiss.

THE END

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