

CHAPTER ONE

PLAYING PILGRIMS

"Christmas won't be Christmas without any presents," grumbled Jo, lying on the rug.

"It's so dreadful to be poor!" sighed Meg, looking down at her old dress.

"I don't think it's fair for some girls to have plenty of pretty things, and other girls nothing at all," added little Amy, with an injured sniff.

"We've got Father and Mother, and each other," said Beth contentedly from her corner.

The four young faces on which the firelight shone brightened at the cheerful words, but darkened again as Jo said sadly, "We haven't got Father, and shall not have him for a long time." She didn't say "perhaps never," but each silently added it, thinking of Father far away, where the fighting was.

Nobody spoke for a minute; then Meg said in an altered tone, "You know the reason Mother proposed not having any presents this Christmas was because it is going to be a hard winter for everyone; and she thinks we ought not to spend money for pleasure, when our men are suffering so in the army. We can't do much, but we can make our little sacrifices, and ought to do it gladly. But I am afraid I don't," and Meg shook her head, as she thought regretfully of all the pretty things she wanted.

"But I don't think the little we should spend would do any good. We've each got a dollar, and the army wouldn't be much helped by our giving that. I agree not to expect anything from Mother or you, but I do want to buy *Undine and Sintran* for myself. I've wanted it so long," said Jo, who was a bookworm.

"I planned to spend mine in new music," said Beth, with a little sigh, which no one heard but the hearth brush and kettle-holder.

"I shall get a nice box of Faber's drawing pencils; I really need them," said Amy decidedly.

"Mother didn't say anything about our money, and she won't wish us to give up everything. Let's each buy what we want, and have a little fun; I'm sure we work hard enough to earn it," cried Jo, examining the heels of her shoes in a gentlemanly manner.

"I know I do—teaching those tiresome children nearly all day, when I'm longing to enjoy myself at home," began Meg, in the complaining tone again.

"You don't have half such a hard time as I do," said Jo. "How would you like to be shut up for hours with a nervous, fussy old lady, who keeps you trotting, is never satisfied, and worries you till you're ready to fly out the window or cry?"

"It's naughty to fret, but I do think washing dishes and keeping things tidy is the worst work in the world. It makes me cross, and my hands get so stiff, I can't practice well at all." And Beth looked at her rough hands with a sigh that any one could hear that time.

"I don't believe any of you suffer as I do," cried Amy, "for you don't have to go to school with impertinent girls, who plague you if you don't know your lessons, and laugh at your dresses, and label your father if he isn't rich, and insult you when your nose isn't nice."

"If you mean libel, I'd say so, and not talk about labels, as if Papa was a pickle bottle," advised Jo, laughing.

"I know what I mean, and you needn't be statirical about it. It's proper to use good words, and improve your vocabilary," returned Amy, with dignity.

"Don't peck at one another, children. Don't you wish we had the money Papa lost when we were little, Jo? Dear me! How happy and good we'd be, if we had no worries!" said Meg, who could remember better times.

"You said the other day you thought we were a deal happier than the King children, for they were fighting and fretting all the time, in spite of their money."

"So I did, Beth. Well, I think we are. For though we do have to work, we make fun of ourselves, and are a pretty jolly set, as Jo would say."

"Jo does use such slang words!" observed Amy, with a reproving look at the long figure stretched on the rug.

Jo immediately sat up, put her hands in her pockets, and began to whistle.

"Don't, Jo. It's so boyish!"

"That's why I do it."

"I detest rude, unladylike girls!"

"I hate affected, niminy-piminy chits!"

"Birds in their little nests agree," sang Beth, the peacemaker, with such a funny face that both sharp voices softened to a laugh, and the "pecking" ended for that time.

"Really, girls, you are both to be blamed," said Meg, beginning to lecture in her elder-sisterly fashion. "You are old enough to leave off boyish tricks, and to behave better, Josephine. It didn't matter so much when you were a little girl, but now you are so tall, and turn up your hair, you should remember that you are a young lady."

"I'm not! And if turning up my hair makes me one, I'll wear it in two tails till I'm twenty," cried Jo, pulling off her net, and shaking down a chestnut mane. "I hate to think I've got to grow up, and be Miss March, and wear long gowns, and look as prim as a China Aster! It's bad enough to be a girl, anyway, when I like boy's games and work and manners! I can't get over my disappointment in not being a boy. And it's worse than ever now, for I'm dying to go and fight with Papa. And I can only stay home and knit, like a poky old woman!"

And Jo shook the blue army sock till the needles rattled like castanets, and her ball bounded across the room.

"Poor Jo! It's too bad, but it can't be helped. So you must try to be contented with making your name boyish, and playing brother to us girls," said Beth, stroking the rough head with a hand that all the dish washing and dusting in the world could not make ungentle in its touch.

"As for you, Amy," continued Meg, "you are altogether too particular and prim. Your airs are funny now, but you'll grow up an affected little goose, if you don't take care. I like your nice manners and refined ways of speaking, when you don't try to be elegant. But your absurd words are as bad as Jo's slang."

"If Jo is a tomboy and Amy a goose, what am I, please?" asked Beth, ready to share the lecture.

"You're a dear, and nothing else," answered Meg warmly, and no one contradicted her, for the 'Mouse' was the pet of the family.

As young readers like to know 'how people look', we will take this moment to give them a little sketch of the four sisters, who sat knitting away in the twilight, while the December snow fell quietly without, and the fire crackled cheerfully within. It was a comfortable room, though the carpet was faded and the furniture very plain, for a good picture or two hung on the walls, books filled the recesses, chrysanthemums and

Christmas roses bloomed in the windows, and a pleasant atmosphere of home peace pervaded it.

Margaret, the eldest of the four, was sixteen, and very pretty, being plump and fair, with large eyes, plenty of soft brown hair, a sweet mouth, and white hands, of which she was rather vain. Fifteen-year-old Jo was very tall, thin, and brown, and reminded one of a colt, for she never seemed to know what to do with her long limbs, which were very much in her way. She had a decided mouth, a comical nose, and sharp, gray eyes, which appeared to see everything, and were by turns fierce, funny, or thoughtful. Her long, thick hair was her one beauty, but it was usually bundled into a net, to be out of her way. Round shoulders had Jo, big hands and feet, a flyaway look to her clothes, and the uncomfortable appearance of a girl who was rapidly shooting up into a woman and didn't like it. Elizabeth, or Beth, as everyone called her, was a rosy, smooth-haired, bright-eyed girl of thirteen, with a shy manner, a timid voice, and a peaceful expression which was seldom disturbed. Her father called her 'Little Miss Tranquility', and the name suited her excellently, for she seemed to live in a happy world of her own, only venturing out to meet the few whom she trusted and loved. Amy, though the youngest, was a most important person, in her own opinion at least. A regular snow maiden, with blue eyes, and yellow hair curling on her shoulders, pale and slender, and always carrying herself like a young lady mindful of her manners. What the characters of the four sisters were we will leave to be found out.

The clock struck six and, having swept up the hearth, Beth put a pair of slippers down to warm. Somehow the sight of the old shoes had a good effect upon the girls, for Mother was coming, and everyone brightened to welcome her. Meg stopped lecturing, and lighted the lamp, Amy got out of the easy chair without being asked, and Jo forgot how tired she was as she sat up to hold the slippers nearer to the blaze.

"They are quite worn out. Marmee must have a new pair."

"I thought I'd get her some with my dollar," said Beth.

"No, I shall!" cried Amy.

"I'm the oldest," began Meg, but Jo cut in with a decided, "I'm the man of the family now Papa is away, and I shall provide the slippers, for he told me to take special care of Mother while he was gone."

"I'll tell you what we'll do," said Beth, "let's each get her something for Christmas, and not get anything for ourselves."

"That's like you, dear! What will we get?" exclaimed Jo.

Everyone thought soberly for a minute, then Meg announced, as if the idea was suggested by the sight of her own pretty hands, "I shall give her a nice pair of gloves."

"Army shoes, best to be had," cried Jo.

"Some handkerchiefs, all hemmed," said Beth.

"I'll get a little bottle of cologne. She likes it, and it won't cost much, so I'll have some left to buy my pencils," added Amy.

"How will we give the things?" asked Meg.

"Put them on the table, and bring her in and see her open the bundles. Don't you remember how we used to do on our birthdays?" answered Jo.

"I used to be so frightened when it was my turn to sit in the chair with the crown on, and see you all come marching round to give the presents, with a kiss. I liked the things and the kisses, but it was dreadful to have you sit looking at me while I opened the bundles," said Beth, who was toasting her face and the bread for tea at the same time.

"Let Marmee think we are getting things for ourselves, and then surprise her. We must go shopping tomorrow afternoon, Meg. There is so much to do about the play for Christmas night," said Jo, marching up and down, with her hands behind her back, and her nose in the air.

"I don't mean to act any more after this time. I'm getting too old for such things," observed Meg, who was as much a child as ever about 'dressing-up' frolics.

"You won't stop, I know, as long as you can trail round in a white gown with your hair down, and wear gold-paper jewelry. You are the best actress we've got, and there'll be an end of everything if you quit the boards," said Jo. "We ought to rehearse tonight. Come here, Amy, and do the fainting scene, for you are as stiff as a poker in that."

"I can't help it. I never saw anyone faint, and I don't choose to make myself all black and blue, tumbling flat as you do. If I can go down easily, I'll drop. If I can't, I shall fall into a chair and be graceful. I don't care if Hugo does come at me with a pistol," returned Amy, who was not gifted with dramatic power, but was chosen because she was small enough to be borne out shrieking by the villain of the piece.

"Do it this way. Clasp your hands so, and stagger across the room, crying frantically, 'Roderigo! Save me! Save me!'" and away went Jo, with a melodramatic scream which was truly thrilling.

Amy followed, but she poked her hands out stiffly before her, and jerked herself along as if she went by machinery, and her "Ow!" was more suggestive of pins being run into her than of fear and anguish. Jo gave a despairing groan, and Meg laughed outright, while Beth let her bread burn as she watched the fun with interest. "It's no use! Do the best you can when the time comes, and if the audience laughs, don't blame me. Come on, Meg."

Then things went smoothly, for Don Pedro defied the world in a speech of two pages without a single break. Hagar, the witch, chanted an awful incantation over her kettleful of simmering toads, with weird effect. Roderigo rent his chains asunder manfully, and Hugo died in agonies of remorse and arsenic, with a wild, "Ha! Ha!"

"It's the best we've had yet," said Meg, as the dead villain sat up and rubbed his elbows.

"I don't see how you can write and act such splendid things, Jo. You're a regular Shakespeare!" exclaimed Beth, who firmly believed that her sisters were gifted with wonderful genius in all things.

"Not quite," replied Jo modestly. "I do think *The Witches Curse, an Operatic Tragedy* is rather a nice thing, but I'd like to try *Macbeth*, if we only had a trapdoor for Banquo. I always wanted to do the killing part. 'Is that a dagger that I see before me?'" muttered Jo, rolling her eyes and clutching at the air, as she had seen a famous tragedian do.

"No, it's the toasting fork, with Mother's shoe on it instead of the bread. Beth's stage-struck!" cried Meg, and the rehearsal ended in a general burst of laughter.

"Glad to find you so merry, my girls," said a cheery voice at the door, and actors and audience turned to welcome a tall, motherly lady with a 'can I help you' look about her which was truly delightful. She was not elegantly dressed, but a noble-looking woman, and the girls thought the gray cloak and unfashionable bonnet covered the most splendid mother in the world.

"Well, dearies, how have you got on today? There was so much to do, getting the boxes ready to go tomorrow, that I didn't come home to dinner. Has anyone called, Beth? How is your cold, Meg? Jo, you look tired to death. Come and kiss me, baby."

While making these maternal inquiries Mrs. March got her wet things off, her warm slippers on, and sitting down in the easy chair, drew Amy to her lap, preparing to enjoy the happiest hour of her busy day. The girls flew about, trying to make things comfortable, each in her own way. Meg arranged the tea table, Jo brought wood and set chairs, dropping, over-turning, and clattering everything she touched. Beth trotted to and fro between parlor kitchen, quiet and busy, while Amy gave directions to everyone, as she sat with her hands folded.

As they gathered about the table, Mrs. March said, with a particularly happy face, "I've got a treat for you after supper."

A quick, bright smile went round like a streak of sunshine. Beth clapped her hands, regardless of the biscuit she held, and Jo tossed up her napkin, crying, "A letter! A letter! Three cheers for Father!"

"Yes, a nice long letter. He is well, and thinks he shall get through the cold season better than we feared. He sends all sorts of loving wishes for Christmas, and an especial message to you girls," said Mrs. March, patting her pocket as if she had got a treasure there.

"Hurry and get done! Don't stop to quirk your little finger and simper over your plate, Amy," cried Jo, choking on her tea and dropping her bread, butter side down, on the carpet in her haste to get at the treat.

Beth ate no more, but crept away to sit in her shadowy corner and brood over the delight to come, till the others were ready.

"I think it was so splendid in Father to go as chaplain when he was too old to be drafted, and not strong enough for a soldier," said Meg warmly.

"Don't I wish I could go as a drummer, a vivan—what's its name? Or a nurse, so I could be near him and help him," exclaimed Jo, with a groan.

"It must be very disagreeable to sleep in a tent, and eat all sorts of bad-tasting things, and drink out of a tin mug," sighed Amy.

"When will he come home, Marmee?" asked Beth, with a little quiver in her voice.

"Not for many months, dear, unless he is sick. He will stay and do his work faithfully as long as he can, and we won't ask for him back a minute sooner than he can be spared. Now come and hear the letter."

They all drew to the fire, Mother in the big chair with Beth at her feet, Meg and Amy perched on either arm of the chair, and Jo leaning on the back, where no one would see any sign of emotion if the letter should happen to be touching. Very few letters were written in those hard times that were not touching, especially those which fathers sent home. In this one little was said of the hardships endured, the dangers faced, or the homesickness conquered. It was a cheerful, hopeful letter, full of lively descriptions of camp life, marches, and military news, and only at the end did the writer's heart over-flow with fatherly love and longing for the little girls at home.

"Give them all of my dear love and a kiss. Tell them I think of them by day, pray for them by night, and find my best comfort in their affection at all times. A year seems very long to wait before I see them, but remind them that while we wait we may all work, so that these hard days need not be wasted. I know they will remember all I said to them, that they will be loving children to you, will do their duty faithfully, fight their bosom enemies bravely, and conquer themselves so beautifully that when I come back to them I may be fonder and prouder than ever of my little women."

Everybody sniffed when they came to that part. Jo wasn't ashamed of the great tear that dropped off the end of her nose, and Amy never minded the rumpling of her curls as she hid her face on her mother's shoulder and sobbed out, "I am a selfish girl! But I'll truly try to be better, so he mayn't be disappointed in me by-and-by."

"We all will," cried Meg. "I think too much of my looks and hate to work, but won't any more, if I can help it."

"I'll try and be what he loves to call me, 'a little woman' and not be rough and wild, but do my duty here instead of wanting to be somewhere else," said Jo, thinking that keeping her temper at home was a much harder task than facing a rebel or two down South.

Beth said nothing, but wiped away her tears with the blue army sock and began to knit with all her might, losing no time in doing the duty that lay nearest her, while she resolved in her quiet little soul to be all that Father hoped to find her when the year brought round the happy coming home.

Mrs. March broke the silence that followed Jo's words, by saying in her cheery voice, "Do you remember how you used to play Pilgrims Progress when you were little things? Nothing delighted you more than to have me tie my piece bags on your backs for burdens, give you hats and sticks and rolls of paper, and let you travel through the house from the cellar, which was the City of Destruction, up, up, to the housetop, where you had all the lovely things you could collect to make a Celestial City."

"What fun it was, especially going by the lions, fighting Apollyon, and passing through the valley where the hob-goblins were," said Jo.

"I liked the place where the bundles fell off and tumbled downstairs," said Meg.

"I don't remember much about it, except that I was afraid of the cellar and the dark entry, and always liked the cake and milk we had up at the top. If I wasn't too old for such things, I'd rather like to play it over again," said Amy, who began to talk of renouncing childish things at the mature age of twelve.

"We never are too old for this, my dear, because it is a play we are playing all the time in one way or another. Our burdens are here, our road is before us, and the longing for goodness and happiness is the guide that leads us through many troubles and mistakes to the peace which is a true Celestial City. Now, my little pilgrims, suppose you begin again, not in play, but in earnest, and see how far on you can get before Father comes home."

"Really, Mother? Where are our bundles?" asked Amy, who was a very literal young lady.

"Each of you told what your burden was just now, except Beth. I rather think she hasn't got any," said her mother.

"Yes, I have. Mine is dishes and dusters, and envying girls with nice pianos, and being afraid of people."

Beth's bundle was such a funny one that everybody wanted to laugh, but nobody did, for it would have hurt her feelings very much.

"Let us do it," said Meg thoughtfully. "It is only another name for trying to be good, and the story may help us, for though we do want to be good, it's hard work and we forget, and don't do our best."

"We were in the Slough of Despond tonight, and Mother came and pulled us out as Help did in the book. We ought to have our roll of directions, like Christian. What shall we do about that?" asked Jo, delighted with the fancy which lent a little romance to the very dull task of doing her duty.

"Look under your pillows Christmas morning, and you will find your guidebook," replied Mrs. March.

They talked over the new plan while old Hannah cleared the table, then out came the four little work baskets, and the needles flew as the girls made sheets for Aunt March. It was uninteresting sewing, but tonight no one grumbled. They adopted Jo's plan of dividing the long seams into four parts, and calling the quarters Europe, Asia, Africa, and America, and in that way got on capitally, especially when they talked about the different countries as they stitched their way through them.

At nine they stopped work, and sang, as usual, before they went to bed. No one but Beth could get much music out of the old piano, but she had a way of softly touching the yellow keys and making a pleasant accompaniment to the simple songs they sang. Meg had a voice like a flute, and she and her mother led the little choir. Amy chirped like a cricket, and Jo wandered through the airs at her own sweet will, always coming out at the wrong place with a croak or a quaver that spoiled the most pensive tune. They had always done this from the time they could lisp...

Crinkle, crinkle, 'ittle 'tar,

and it had become a household custom, for the mother was a born singer. The first sound in the morning was her voice as she went about the house singing like a lark, and the last sound at night was the same cheery sound, for the girls never grew too old for that familiar lullaby.

THE ENCHANTED CASTLE by E. Nesbit.

(No chapter divisions in this version, so I cut it off rather arbitrarily. Also did a bit of editing for length at the beginning, and fixed quite a bit of punctuation.--LN)

There were three of them: Jerry, Jimmy, and Kathleen. Of course, Jerry's name was Gerald, and not Jeremiah, whatever you may think; and Jimmy's name was James; and Kathleen was never called by her name at all, but Cathy, or Cat. And they were at school in a little town in the West of England—the boys at one school, of course, and the girl at another, because the sensible habit of having boys and girls at the same school is not yet as common as I hope it will be some day. They used to see each other on Saturdays and Sundays at the house of a kind maiden lady; but it was one of those houses where it is impossible to play. You know the kind of house, don't you?

So they looked forward to the holidays, when they should all go home and be together all day long, in a house where playing was natural and conversation possible, and where the Hampshire forests and fields were full of interesting things to do and see. Their Cousin Betty was to be there too, and there were plans. Betty's school broke up before theirs, and so she got to the Hampshire home first, and the moment she got there she began to have measles, so that our three couldn't go home at all! You may imagine their feelings. After a lot of letters and telegrams, it was arranged that the boys should go and stay at Kathleen's school, where there were now no girls left and no mistresses except the French one.

"We ought to have some sort of play to keep us going through the holidays," said Kathleen, when tea was over, and she had unpacked and arranged the boys' clothes in the painted chests of drawers, feeling very grown-up and careful as she neatly laid the different sorts of clothes in tidy little heaps in the drawers. "Suppose we write a book."

"You couldn't," said Jimmy.

"I didn't mean me, of course," said Kathleen, a little injured; "I meant us."

"Too much work," said Gerald briefly.

"If we wrote a book," Kathleen persisted, "about what the insides of schools really are like, people would read it and say how clever we were."

"More likely expel us," said Gerald. "No; we'll have an out-of-doors game--bandits, or something like that. It wouldn't be bad if we could get a cave and keep stores in it, and have our meals there."

"There aren't any caves," said Jimmy, who was fond of contradicting everyone. "And, besides, your precious Mamselle won't let us go out alone, as likely as not."

"Oh, we'll see about that," said Gerald. "I'll go and talk to her like a father."

"Like that?" Kathleen pointed the thumb of scorn at him, and he looked in the glass.

"To brush his hair and his clothes and to wash his face and hands was to our hero but the work of a moment," said Gerald, and went to suit the action to the word.

It was a very sleek boy, brown and thin and interesting-looking, that knocked at the door of the parlour where Mademoiselle sat reading a yellow-covered book and wishing vain wishes. Gerald could always make himself look interesting at a moment's notice, a very useful accomplishment in dealing with strange grown-ups. It was done by opening his grey eyes rather wide, allowing the corners of his mouth to droop, and assuming a gentle, pleading expression, resembling that of the late little Lord Fauntleroy who must, by the way, be quite old now, and an awful prig.

"Entrez!" said Mademoiselle, in shrill French accents. So he entered.

"Eh bien?" she said rather impatiently.

"I hope I am not disturbing you," said Gerald, in whose mouth, it seemed, butter would not have melted.

"But no," she said, somewhat softened. "What is it that you desire?"

"I thought I ought to come and say how do you do," said Gerald, "because of you being the lady of the house."

He held out the newly-washed hand, still damp and red. She took it.

"You are a very polite little boy," she said.

"Not at all," said Gerald, more polite than ever. "I am so sorry for you. It must be dreadful to have us to look after in the holidays."

"But not at all," said Mademoiselle in her turn. "I am sure you will be very good childrens."

Gerald's look assured her that he and the others would be as near angels as children could be without ceasing to be human. "We'll try," he said earnestly.

"Can one do anything for you?" asked the French governess kindly.

"Oh, no, thank you," said Gerald. "We don't want to give you any trouble at all. And I was thinking it would be less trouble for you if we were to go out into the woods all day tomorrow and take our dinner with us something cold, you know so as not to be a trouble to the cook."

"You are very considerate," said Mademoiselle coldly. Then Gerald's eyes smiled; they had a trick of doing this when his lips were quite serious. Mademoiselle caught the twinkle, and she laughed and Gerald laughed too.

"Little deceiver!" she said. "Why not say at once you want to be free of surveillance, how you say overwatching without pretending it is me you wish to please?"

"You have to be careful with grown-ups, " said Gerald, "but it isn't all pretence either. We don't want to trouble you and we don't want you to..."

"To trouble you. Eh bien! Your parents, they permit these days at woods?"

"Oh, yes," said Gerald truthfully.

"Then I will not be more a dragon than the parents. I will forewarn the cook. Are you content?"

"Rather!" said Gerald. "Mademoiselle, you are a dear."

"A deer?" she repeated. "A stag?"

"No, a--a cherie," said Gerald "a regular A1 cherie. And you sha'n't repent it. Is there anything we can do for you wind your wool, or find your spectacles, or...?"

"He thinks me a grandmother!" said Mademoiselle, laughing more than ever. "Go then, and be not more naughty than you must."

"Well, what luck?" the others asked.

"It's all right," said Gerald indifferently. "I told you it would be. The ingenuous youth won the regard of the foreign governess, who in her youth had been the beauty of her humble village."

"I don't believe she ever was. She's too stern," said Kathleen.

"Ah!" said Gerald, "that's only because you don't know how to manage her. She wasn't stern with me."

"I say, what a humbug you are though, aren't you?" said Jimmy.

"No, I'm a dip... what's-its-name? Something like an ambassador. *Dipsomatist*, that's what I am. Anyhow, we've got our day, and if we don't find a cave in it, my name's not Jack Robinson."

Mademoiselle, less stern than Kathleen had ever seen her, presided at supper, which was bread and treacle spread several hours before, and now harder and drier than any other food you can think of. Gerald was very polite in handing her butter and cheese, and pressing her to taste the bread and treacle.

"Bah! it is like sand in the mouth of a dryness! Is it possible this pleases you?"

"No," said Gerald, "it is not possible, but it is not polite for boys to make remarks about their food!"

She laughed, but there was no more dried bread and treacle for supper after that.

"How do you do it?" Kathleen whispered admiringly as they said good night.

"Oh, it's quite easy when you've once got a grownup to see what you're after. You'll see, I shall drive her with a rein of darning cotton after this."

Next morning Gerald got up early and gathered a little bunch of pink carnations from a plant which he found hidden among the marigolds. He tied it up with black cotton and laid it on Mademoiselle's plate. She smiled and looked quite handsome as she stuck the flowers in her belt.

"Do you think it's quite decent," Jimmy asked later, "sort of bribing people to let you do as you like, with flowers and things and passing them the salt?"

"It's not that," said Kathleen suddenly. "I know what Gerald means, only I never think of the things in time myself. You see, if you want grown-ups to be nice to you the least you can do is to be nice to them and think of little things to please them. I never

think of any myself. Jerry does; that's why all the old ladies like him. It's not bribery. It's a sort of honesty, like paying for things."

"Well, anyway," said Jimmy, putting away the moral question, "we've got a ripping day for the woods."

They had.

The wide High Street, even at the busy morning hour almost as quiet as a dream-street, lay bathed in sunshine; the leaves shone fresh from last night's rain, but the road was dry, and in the sunshine the very dust of it sparkled like diamonds. The beautiful old houses, standing stout and strong, looked as though they were basking in the sunshine and enjoying it.

"But are there any woods?" asked Kathleen as they passed the market-place.

"It doesn't much matter about woods," said Gerald dreamily. "We're sure to find something. One of the chaps told me his father said when he was a boy there used to be a little cave under the bank in a lane near the Salisbury Road; but he said there was an enchanted castle there too, so perhaps the cave isn't true either."

"If we were to get horns," said Kathleen, "and to blow them very hard all the way, we might find a magic castle."

"If you've got the money to throw away on horns..." said Jimmy contemptuously.

"Well, I have, as it happens, so there!" said Kathleen. And the horns were bought in a tiny shop with a bulging window full of a tangle of toys and sweets and cucumbers and sour apples.

And the quiet square at the end of the town where the church is, and the houses of the most respectable people, echoed to the sound of horns blown long and loud. But none of the houses turned into enchanted castles. Away they went along the Salisbury Road, which was very hot and dusty, so they agreed to drink one of the bottles of ginger-beer.

"We might as well carry the ginger-beer inside us as inside the bottle," said Jimmy, "and we can hide the bottle and call for it as we come back."

Presently they came to a place where the road, as Gerald said, went two ways at once.

"That looks like adventures," said Kathleen; and they took the right-hand road, and the next time they took a turning it was a left-hand one, "so as to be quite fair," Jimmy said, and then a right-hand one and then a left, and so on, till they were completely lost.

"Completely," said Kathleen; "how jolly!"

And now trees arched overhead, and the banks of the road were high and bushy. The adventurers had long since ceased to blow their horns. It was too tiring to go on doing that, when there was no one to be annoyed by it.

"Oh, krikky!" observed Jimmy suddenly, "let's sit down a bit and have some of our dinner. We might call it lunch, you know," he added persuasively.

So they sat down in the hedge and ate the ripe red gooseberries that were to have been their dessert.

And as they sat and rested and wished that their boots did not feel so full of feet, Gerald leaned back against the bushes, and the bushes gave way so that he almost fell over backward. Something had yielded to the pressure of his back, and there was the sound of something heavy that fell.

"Oh, Jimminy!" he remarked, recovering himself suddenly; "there's something hollow in there; the stone I was leaning against simply went!"

"I wish it was a cave," said Jimmy; "but of course it isn't."

"If we blow the horns, perhaps it will be," said Kathleen, and hastily blew her own.

Gerald reached his hand through the bushes. "I can't feel anything but air," he said; "it's just a hole full of emptiness. The other two pulled back the bushes. There certainly was a hole in the bank. "I'm going to go in," observed Gerald.

"Oh, don't!" said his sister. "I wish you wouldn't. Suppose there were snakes!"

"Not likely," said Gerald, but he leaned forward and struck a match. "It is a cave!" he cried, and put his knee on the mossy stone he had been sitting on, scrambled over it, and disappeared.

A breathless pause followed.

"You all right?" asked Jimmy.

"Yes; come on. You'd better come feet first; there's a bit of a drop."

"I'll go next," said Kathleen, and went feet first, as advised. The feet waved wildly in the air.

"Look out!" said Gerald in the dark; "you'll have my eye out. Put your feet down, girl, not up. It's no use trying to fly here, there's no room."

He helped her by pulling her feet forcibly down and then lifting her under the arms. She felt rustling dry leaves under her boots, and stood ready to receive Jimmy, who came in head first, like one diving into an unknown sea.

"It is a cave," said Kathleen.

"The young explorers," explained Gerald, blocking up the hole of entrance with his shoulders, "dazzled at first by the darkness of the cave, could see nothing."

"Darkness doesn't dazzle," said Jimmy.

"I wish we'd got a candle," said Kathleen.

"Yes, it does," Gerald contradicted. "...could see nothing. But their dauntless leader, whose eyes had grown used to the dark while the clumsy forms of the others were bunging up the entrance, had made a discovery."

"Oh, what!?" Both the others were used to Gerald's way of telling a story while he acted it, but they did sometimes wish that he didn't talk quite so long and so like a book in moments of excitement.

"He did not reveal the dread secret to his faithful followers till one and all had given him their word of honour to be calm."

"We'll be calm all right," said Jimmy impatiently. "Well, then," said Gerald, ceasing suddenly to be a book and becoming a boy, "there's a light over there—look behind you!"

They looked. And there was. A faint greyness on the brown walls of the cave, and a brighter greyness cut off sharply by a dark line, showed that round a turning or angle of the cave there was daylight.

"Attention!" said Gerald; at least, that was what he meant, though what he said was "Shun!" as becomes the son of a soldier. The others mechanically obeyed.

"You will remain at attention till I give the word "Slow march!" on which you will advance cautiously in open order, following your hero leader, taking care not to tread on the dead and wounded."

"I wish you wouldn't!" said Kathleen.

"There aren't any," said Jimmy, feeling for her hand in the dark; "he only means, take care not to tumble over stones and things"

Here he found her hand, and she screamed.

"It's only me," said Jimmy. "I thought you'd like me to hold it. But you're just like a girl."

Their eyes had now begun to get accustomed to the darkness, and all could see that they were in a rough stone cave, that went straight on for about three or four yards and then turned sharply to the right.

"Death or victory!" remarked Gerald. "Now, then Slow march!"

He advanced carefully, picking his way among the loose earth and stones that were the floor of the cave.

"A sail, a sail!" he cried, as he turned the corner.

"How splendid!" Kathleen drew a long breath as she came out into the sunshine.

"I don't see any sail," said Jimmy, following.

The narrow passage ended in a round arch all fringed with ferns and creepers. They passed through the arch into a deep, narrow gully whose banks were of stones, moss-covered; and in the crannies grew more ferns and long grasses. Trees growing on the top of the bank arched across, and the sunlight came through in changing patches of brightness, turning the gully to a roofed corridor of goldy-green. The path, which was of greeny-grey flagstones where heaps of leaves had drifted, sloped steeply down, and at the end of it was another round arch, quite dark inside, above which rose rocks and grass and bushes.

"It's like the outside of a railway tunnel," said James.

"It's the entrance to the enchanted castle," said Kathleen. "Let's blow the horns."

"Dry up!" said Gerald. "The bold Captain, reproving the silly chatter of his subordinates--"

"I like that!" said Jimmy, indignant.

"I thought you would," resumed Gerald. "...of his subordinates, bade them advance with caution and in silence, because after all there might be somebody about, and the other arch might be an ice-house or something dangerous."

"What?" asked Kathleen anxiously.

"Bears, perhaps," said Gerald briefly.

"There aren't any bears without bars in England, anyway," said Jimmy. "They call bears bars in America," he added absently.

"Quick march!" was Gerald's only reply.

And they marched. Under the drifted damp leaves the path was firm and stony to their shuffling feet. At the dark arch they stopped.

"There are steps down," said Jimmy.

"It is an ice-house," said Gerald.

"Don't let's," said Kathleen.

"Our hero," said Gerald, "who nothing could dismay, raised the faltering hopes of his abject minions by saying that he was jolly well going on, and they could do as they liked about it."

"If you call names," said Jimmy, "you can go on by yourself." He added, "So there!"

"It's part of the game, silly," explained Gerald kindly. "You can be Captain tomorrow, so you'd better hold your jaw now, and begin to think about what names you'll call us when it's your turn."

Very slowly and carefully they went down the steps. A vaulted stone arched over their heads. Gerald struck a match when the last step was found to have no edge, and to be, in fact, the beginning of a passage, turning to the left.

"This," said Jimmy, "will take us back into the road."

"Or under it," said Gerald. "We've come down eleven steps."

They went on, following their leader, who went very slowly for fear, as he explained, of steps. The passage was very dark.

"I don't half like it!" whispered Jimmy.

Then came a glimmer of daylight that grew and grew, and presently ended in another arch that looked out over a scene so like a picture out of a book about Italy that everyone's breath was taken away, and they simply walked forward silent and staring. A short avenue of cypresses led, widening as it went, to a marble terrace that lay broad and white in the sunlight. The children, blinking, leaned their arms on the broad, flat balustrade and gazed. Immediately below them was a lake just like a lake in "The Beauties of Italy," a lake with swans and an island and weeping willows; beyond it were green slopes dotted with groves of trees, and amid the trees gleamed the white limbs of statues. Against a little hill to the left was a round white building with pillars, and to the right a waterfall came tumbling down among mossy stones to splash into the lake. Steps led from the terrace to the water, and other steps to the green lawns beside it. Away across the grassy slopes, deer were feeding, and in the distance where the groves of trees thickened into what looked almost a forest were enormous shapes of grey stone, like nothing that the children had ever seen before.

"That chap at school..." said Gerald.

"It is an enchanted castle," said Kathleen.

"I don't see any castle," said Jimmy.

"What do you call that, then?" Gerald pointed to where, beyond a belt of lime-trees, white towers and turrets broke the blue of the sky.

"There doesn't seem to be anyone about," said Kathleen, "and yet it's all so tidy. I believe it is magic."

"Magic mowing machines," Jimmy suggested.

"If we were in a book it would be an enchanted castle--certain to be," said Kathleen.

"It is an enchanted castle," said Gerald in hollow tones.

"But there aren't any!" Jimmy was quite positive.

"How do you know? Do you think there's nothing in the world but what you've seen?" His scorn was crushing.

"I think magic went out when people began to have steam-engines," Jimmy insisted, "and newspapers, and telephones and wireless telegraphing."

"Wireless is rather like magic when you come to think of it," said Gerald.

"Oh, that sort!" Jimmy's contempt was deep.

"Perhaps there's given up being magic because people didn't believe in it any more," said Kathleen.

"Well, don't let's spoil the show with any silly old not believing," said Gerald with decision. "I'm going to believe in magic as hard as I can. This is an enchanted garden, and that's an enchanted castle, and I'm jolly well going to explore."

The dauntless knight then led the way, leaving his ignorant squires to follow or not, just as they jolly well chose. He rolled off the balustrade and strode firmly down towards the lawn, his boots making, as they went, a clatter full of determination. The others followed. There never was such a garden out of a picture or a fairy-tale. They passed quite close by the deer, who only raised their pretty heads to look, and did not seem startled at all. And after a long stretch of turf they passed under the heaped-up heavy masses of lime-trees and came into a rose-garden, bordered with thick, close-cut yew hedges, and lying red and pink and green and white in the sun, like a giant's many-coloured, highly-scented pocket-handkerchief.

"I know we shall meet a gardener in a minute, and he'll ask what we're doing here. And then what will you say?" Kathleen asked with her nose in a rose.

"I shall say we have lost our way, and it will be quite true," said Gerald.

But they did not meet a gardener or anybody else, and the feeling of magic got thicker and thicker, till they were almost afraid of the sound of their feet in the great silent place. Beyond the rose garden was a yew hedge with an arch cut in it, and it was the beginning of a maze like the one in Hampton Court.

"Now," said Gerald, "you mark my words. In the middle of this maze we shall find the secret enchantment. Draw your swords, my merry men all, and hark forward tallyho in the utmost silence."

Which they did. It was very hot in the maze, between the close yew hedges, and the way to the maze's heart was hidden well. Again and again they found themselves at the black yew arch that opened on the rose garden, and they were all glad that they had brought large, clean pocket-handkerchiefs with them. It was when they found themselves there for the fourth time that Jimmy suddenly cried, "Oh, I wish—" and then stopped short very suddenly. "Oh!" he added in quite a different voice, "where's the dinner?" And then in a stricken silence they all remembered that the basket with the dinner had been left at the entrance of the cave. Their thoughts dwelt fondly on the slices of cold mutton, the six tomatoes, the bread and butter, the screwed-up paper of salt, the apple turnovers, and the little thick glass that one drank the ginger-beer out of.

"Let's go back," said Jimmy, "now this minute, and get our things and have our dinner."

"Let's have one more try at the maze. I hate giving things up," said Gerald.

"I am so hungry!" said Jimmy.

"Why didn't you say so before?" asked Gerald bitterly.

"I wasn't before."

"Then you can't be now. You don't get hungry all in a minute. What's that?"

That was a gleam of red that lay at the foot of the yew-hedge a thin little line, that you would hardly have noticed unless you had been staring in a fixed and angry way at the roots of the hedge.

It was a thread of cotton. Gerald picked it up. One end of it was tied to a thimble with holes in it, and the other—

"There is no other end," said Gerald, with firm triumph. "It's a clew, that's what it is. What price cold mutton now? I've always felt something magic would happen some day, and now it has."

"I expect the gardener put it there," said Jimmy.

"With a Princess's silver thimble on it? Look! there's a crown on the thimble."

There was.

"Come," said Gerald in low, urgent tones, "if you are adventurers be adventurers; and anyhow, I expect someone has gone along the road and bagged the mutton hours ago."

He walked forward, winding the red thread round his fingers as he went. And it was a clew, and it led them right into the middle of the maze. And in the very middle of the maze they came upon the wonder.

The red clew led them up two stone steps to a round grass plot. There was a sun-dial in the middle, and all round against the yew hedge a low, wide marble seat. The red clew ran straight across the grass and by the sun-dial, and ended in a small brown hand with jewelled rings on every finger. The hand was, naturally, attached to an arm, and that had many bracelets on it, sparkling with red and blue and green stones. The arm wore a sleeve of pink and gold brocaded silk, faded a little here and there but still extremely imposing, and the sleeve was part of a dress, which was worn by a lady who lay on the stone seat asleep in the sun. The rosy gold dress fell open over an embroidered petticoat of a soft green colour. There was old yellow lace the colour of scalded cream, and a thin white veil spangled with silver stars covered the face.

"It's the enchanted Princess," said Gerald, now really impressed. "I told you so."

"It's the Sleeping Beauty," said Kathleen. "It is! Look how old-fashioned her clothes are, like the pictures of Marie Antoinette's ladies in the history book. She has slept for a hundred years. Oh, Gerald, you're the eldest; you must be the Prince, and we never knew it."

"She isn't really a Princess," said Jimmy. But the others laughed at him, partly because his saying things like that was enough to spoil any game, and partly because they really were not at all sure that it wasn't a Princess who lay there as still as the sunshine. Every stage of the adventure—the cave, the wonderful gardens, the maze, the clew—had deepened the feeling of magic, till now Kathleen and Gerald were almost completely bewitched.

"Lift the veil up, Jerry," said Kathleen in a whisper. "If she isn't beautiful we shall know she can't be the Princess."

"Lift it yourself," said Gerald.

"I expect you're forbidden to touch the figures," said Jimmy.

"It's not wax, silly," said his brother.

"No," said his sister, "wax wouldn't be much good in this sun. And, besides, you can see her breathing. It's the Princess right enough." She very gently lifted the edge of the veil and turned it back. The Princess's face was small and white between long plaits of black hair. Her nose was straight and her brows finely traced. There were a few freckles on cheekbones and nose.

"No wonder," whispered Kathleen, "sleeping all these years in all this sun!" Her mouth was not a rosebud. But all the same... "Isn't she lovely!" Kathleen murmured. "Not so dusty," Gerald was understood to reply. "Now, Jerry," said Kathleen firmly, "you're the eldest."

"Of course I am," said Gerald uneasily.

"Well, you've got to wake the Princess."

"She's not a Princess," said Jimmy, with his hands in the pockets of his knickerbockers; "she's only a little girl dressed up."

"But she's in long dresses," urged Kathleen.

"Yes, but look what a little way down her frock her feet come. She wouldn't be any taller than Jerry if she was to stand up."

"Now then," urged Kathleen. "Jerry, don't be silly. You've got to do it."

"Do what?" asked Gerald, kicking his left boot with his right.

"Why, kiss her awake, of course."

"Not me!" was Gerald's unhesitating rejoinder.

"Well, someone's got to."

"She'd go for me, as likely as not, the minute she woke up," said Gerald anxiously.

"I'd do it like a shot," said Kathleen, "but I don't suppose it'd make any difference me kissing her."

She did it; and it didn't. The Princess still lay in deep slumber.

"Then you must, Jimmy. I dare say you'll do. Jump back quickly before she can hit you."

"She won't hit him, he's such a little chap," said Gerald.

"Little yourself!" said Jimmy. "I don't mind kissing her. I'm not a coward, like Some People. Only if I do, I'm going to be the dauntless leader for the rest of the day."

"No, look here--hold on!" cried Gerald. "Perhaps I'd better " But, in the meantime, Jimmy had planted a loud, cheerful-sounding kiss on the Princess's pale cheek, and now the three stood breathless, awaiting the result.

And the result was that the Princess opened large, dark eyes, stretched out her arms, yawned a little, covering her mouth with a small brown hand, and said, quite plainly and distinctly, and without any room at all for mistake:

"Then the hundred years are over? How the yew hedges have grown! Which of you is my Prince that aroused me from my deep sleep of so many long years?"

"I did," said Jimmy fearlessly, for she did not look as though she were going to slap anyone.

"My noble preserver!" said the Princess, and held out her hand. Jimmy shook it vigorously.

THE BOXCAR CHILDREN by Gertrude Chandler Warner

Chapter 3: Shelter

When Jess opened her eyes it must have been about ten o'clock in the morning. She sat up and looked all around her. She could see dimly the opening where they had come into the woods. She looked around to see that her family was still safely by her. Then she looked up at the sky. At first she thought it must still be night, and then she realized that the darkness was caused by an approaching storm.

"Whatever, *whatever* shall we do now?" demanded Jess of the air.

She got up and looked in every direction for shelter. She even walked quite a little way into the woods, and down a hill. And there she stood, not knowing what to do next.

"I shall have to wake Henry up," she said at last. "Only how I hate to!"

As she spoke she glanced into the forest, and her feet felt as if they were nailed to the ground. She could not stir. Faintly outlined among the trees, Jess saw an old freight or box car. Her first thought was one of fear; her second, hope for shelter. As she thought of shelter, her feet moved, and she stumbled toward it.

It really was a freight car. She felt of it. It stood on rusty broken rails which were nearly covered with dead leaves. Then the thunder cracked overhead. Jess came to her usual senses and started back for Henry, flying like the wind. He was awake, looking anxiously overhead. He had not noticed that Jess was missing.

"Come!" panted Jess. "I've found a place! Hurry! hurry!"

Henry did not stop to ask questions. He picked up Benny, telling Violet to gather up the hay. And then they ran headlong through the thick underbrush in Jess' wake, seeing their way only too well by the sharp flashes of lightning.

"It's beginning to sprinkle!" gasped Henry.

"We'll get there, all right," Jess shouted back. "It's not far. Be all ready to help me open the door when we get there!"

By sheer good fortune a big tree stump stood under the door of the freight car, or the children never could have opened it. As it was, Jess sprang on the stump and Henry, pausing to lay Benny down, did likewise. Together they rolled back the heavy door about a foot.

"That's enough," panted Jess. "I'll get in, and you hand Benny up to me."

"No," said Henry quietly. "I must see first if anyone is in there."

"It will rain!" protested Jess. "Nothing will hurt me."

But she knew it was useless to argue with Henry, so she hastily groped in the bag for the matches and handed them to her brother. It must be confessed that Jess held her breath while Henry struck one and peered about inside the car.

"All's well!" he reported. "Come in, everybody!"

Violet passed the hay up to her brother, and crawled in herself. Then Jess handed Benny up like a package of groceries and, taking one last look at the angry sky and waving trees, she climbed in after him.

The two children managed to roll the door back so that the crack was completely closed before the storm broke. But at that very instant it broke with a vengeance. It seemed to the children that the sky would split, so sharp were the cracks of thunder. But not a drop of rain reached them in their roomy retreat. They could see nothing at all, for the freight car was tightly made, and all outside was nearly as black as night. Through it all, Benny slept on.

Presently the thunder grew fainter, and rumbled away down the valley, and the rain spent itself. Only the drip from the trees on the top of the car could be heard. Then Henry ventured to open the door.

He knelt on his hands and knees and thrust his head out.

The warm sunlight was filtering through the trees, making golden pools of light here and there. The beautiful trees, pines and white birches and oaks, grew thickly around and the ground was carpeted with flowers and wonderful ferns more than a yard high. But most miraculous of all was a miniature waterfall, small but perfect, where the same little brown brook fell gracefully over some ledges, and danced away down the glen.

In an instant Jess and Violet were looking over Henry's shoulder at the pretty sight.

"How different everything looks with the sun shining!" exclaimed Jess. "Things will soon be dry at this rate."

"It must be about noon," observed Henry, looking at the sun. And as he spoke the faint echo of mill bells in the distance was heard.

"Henry!" said Jess sharply. "Let's *live* here!"

"Live here?" repeated Henry dully.

"Yes! Why not?" replied Jess. "Nobody uses this car, and it's dry and warm. We're quite far away. And yet we are near enough to a town so we can buy things."

"And we're near water," added Violet.

Jess hugged her sister. "So we are, little mouse," she said—"the most important thing of all."

"But—" began Henry.

"*Please*, Henry," said Jess excitedly. "I could make this old freight car into the dearest little house, with beds, and chairs, and a table—and dishes—"

"I'd like to live here, too," said a determined little voice from the corner, "but I don't want to, unless—"

"Unless what?" asked Henry, panic-stricken.

"Unless I can have my dinner," Benny finished anxiously.

"We'll have something to eat right away, old fellow," said Henry, thankful it was no worse. For he himself was beginning to see what a cozy home the car really would make.

Jess cut the last loaf of bread into four pieces, but alas! it was very dry. The children were so hungry that they tore it with their teeth like little dogs, but Benny was nearly crying. He did not actually cry, however, for just at the crucial moment Violet started a funny story about Cinnamon Bear eating bread crusts out of the ash can.

"He ought to have milk," said Jess quietly to Henry.

"He *shall* have milk," replied Henry. "I'll go down the railroad track to the town and get some."

Jess counted out a dollar in ten dimes and handed it to Henry. "By the time our four dollars are gone, you will have some work to do," she said.

All the same Henry did not like to begin his trip. "How I hate to leave you alone, Jess!" he said miserably.

"Oh, don't you worry," began Jess lightly. "We'll have a surprise for you when you come back. You just wait and see!" And she nodded her head wisely as Henry walked slowly off through the woods.

The moment he was out of sight she turned to Benny and Violet. "Now, children," she said, "what do you think we're going to do? Do you know what I saw over in the sunny part of the woods? I saw some blueberries!"

"Oh, oh!" cried Benny, who knew what blueberries were. "Can't we have some blueberries and milk?"

"We certainly—" began Jess. But the sentence never was finished, for a sharp crackle of dry leaves was heard. Something was moving in the woods.

Chapter 4: A NEW HOME

"Keep still!" whispered Jess.

Benny obeyed. The three children were as motionless as stone images, huddled inside the freight car. Jess opened her mouth in order to breathe at all, her heart was thumping so wildly. She watched like a cat through the open door, in the direction of the rustling noise. And in a moment the trembling bushes parted, and out crawled a dog. He was an Airedale and was pulling himself along on three legs, whimpering softly.

Jess drew a long breath of relief, and said to the children, "It's all right. Only a dog. But he seems to be hurt."

At the sound of her voice the dog lifted his eyes and wagged his tail feebly. He held up his front foot.

"Poor doggie," murmured Jess soothingly, as she clambered out of the car. "Let Jess see your poor lame foot." She approached the dog carefully, for she remembered that her mother had always told her never to touch a strange dog unless he wagged his tail.

But this dog's tail was wagging, certainly, so Jess bent over without fear to look at the paw. An exclamation of pity escaped her when she saw it, for a stiff, sharp thorn had been driven completely through one of the cushions of the dog's foot, and around it the blood had dried.

"I guess I can fix that," said Jess briskly. "But taking the thorn out is going to hurt you, old fellow."

The dog looked up at her as she laid his paw down, and licked her hand.

"Come here, Violet and Benny," directed Jess.

She took the animal gently in her lap and turned him on his side. She patted his head and stroked his nose with one finger, and offered him the rest of her breadcrumb, which she had put in her apron pocket. The dog snapped it up as if he were nearly starved. Then she held the soft paw firmly with her left hand, and pulled steadily on the thorn with her right hand. The dog did not utter a sound. He lay motionless in her lap, until the thorn suddenly let go and lay in Jess' hand.

"Good, good!" cried Violet.

"Wet my handkerchief," Jess ordered briskly.

Violet did so, dipping it in the running brook. Jess wrapped the cool, wet folds around the hot paw, and gently squeezed it against the wound, the dog meanwhile trying to lick her hands.

"We'll s'prise Henry, won't we?" laughed Benny delightedly. "Now we got a dog!"

"To be sure," said Jess, struck with the thought, "but that isn't what I intended for a surprise. You know I was intending to get a lot of blueberries, and maybe find some old dishes in a dump or something—"

"Can't we look while you hold the dog?" asked Violet anxiously.

"Of course you can, Pet!" said Jess. "Look over there by those rocks."

Benny and Violet scrambled through the underbrush to the place Jess pointed out, and investigated. But they did not hunt long, for the blueberries were so thick that the bushes almost bent over with their weight.

"O Jessy," screamed Benny, "you never saw so many in your life! What'll we pick 'em into?"

"Come and get a clean towel," said Jess, who noticed that Benny was already "picking into" his own mouth.

"But that's just as well," she thought. "Because he won't get so hungry waiting for the milk." She watched the two children a moment as they dropped handfuls of the bluish globes on the towel. Then she carefully got up with her little patient and went over and sat down in the center of the patch. The berries were so thick she did not have to change her position before the towel held over a quart.

"Oh, dear," sighed Jess. "I wish I could hunt for some dishes, so we could have blueberries and milk."

"Never mind tonight," said Violet. "We can just eat a handful of berries and then take a drink of milk, when Henry comes."

But it was even better than that, for when Henry came he had two bottles of milk under one arm, a huge loaf of brown bread under the other, and some golden cheese in waxed paper in his pocket.

But you should have seen Henry stare when he saw what Jess was holding!

"Where in the world—" began the boy.

"He *came* to us," volunteered Benny. "He came for a s'prise for you. And he's a nice doggie."

Henry knelt down to look at the visitor, who wagged his tail. "It wouldn't be a bad thing to have a watchdog," said Henry. "I worried about you all the time I was gone."

"Did you bring some milk?" inquired Benny, trying to be polite, but looking at the bottles with longing eyes.

"Bless his heart!" said Jess, struggling to her feet with the dog. "We'll have dinner right away—or is it supper?"

"Call it supper," suggested Henry, "for it's the last thing we'll have to eat today."

"And then tomorrow we'll start having three meals every day," laughed Jess.

It was certainly a queer meal, whatever it was. Jess, who liked above all things to be orderly, spread out the big gray laundry bag on the pine needles for a tablecloth. The brown loaf was cut by a very excited little hostess into five thick squares; the cheese into four.

"Dogs don't eat cheese," Benny remarked cheerfully. The poor little fellow was glad of it, too, for he was very hungry. He could hardly wait for Jess to set the milk bottles in the center of the table and heap the blueberries in four little mounds, one at each place.

"I'm sorry we haven't cups," Jess remarked. "We'll just have to drink out of the same bottle."

"No, we won't," said Henry. "We'll drink half of each bottle, so that will make at least two things to drink out of."

"Good for you, Henry," said Jess, much relieved. "You and Benny use one, and Violet and I will use the other."

So the meal began. "Look, Benny," directed Henry. "Eat a handful of blueberries, then take a bite of brown bread, then a nibble of cheese. Now, a drink of milk!"

"It's good! It's good!" mumbled Benny to himself all through the meal.

You must not imagine that the poor wandering dog was neglected, for Jess fed him gently, as he lay in her lap, poking morsels of bread into his mouth and pouring milk into her own hand for him to lap up.

When the meal was over, and exactly half of each bottle of milk remained, Jess said, "We are going to sleep on *beds* tonight, and just as soon as we get our beds made, we are all going to be washed."

"That'll be fun, Benny," added Violet. "We'll wash our paws in the brook just the way Cinnamon does."

"First, let's gather armfuls of dry pine needles," ordered Jess. "Get those on top that have been lying in the sunshine." Jess laid the dog down on a bed of moss as she spoke, and started energetically to scoop up piles of the fragrant needles. Soon a pile as high as her head stood just under the freight-car door.

"I think we have enough," she said at last. Taking the scissors from Violet's workbag, she cut the laundry bag carefully into two pieces, saving the cord for a clothesline. One of the big squares was laid across Benny's hay and tucked under. That was the softest bed of all. Violet's apron and her own, she cut off at the belt.

"I'll sleep next to Benny," said Henry, "with my head up by the door. Then I can hear what is going on." A big pile of pine needles was loaded into the freight car for Henry's bed, and covered with the other half of the laundry bag.

The remainder of the needles Jess piled into the farthest corner of the car for herself and Violet. "We'll all sleep on one side, so we can call it the bedroom."

"What'll be the other side?" inquired Benny.

"The other side?" repeated Jess. "Let me think! I guess that'll be the sitting room, and perhaps some of the time the kitchen."

"On rainy days, maybe the dining room," added Henry with a wink.

"Couldn't it be the parlor?" begged Benny.

"Certainly, the parlor! We forgot that," agreed Jess, returning the wink. She was covering the last two soft beds with the two aprons. "The tops of these aprons are washcloths," she said severely. Then armed with the big cake of soap she led the way to the brook. The dog watched them anxiously, but when Jess said, "Lie still," he obeyed. From the moment Jess drew the thorn from his foot he was her dog, to obey her slightest command and to follow her wherever she went.

The clean cool brook was delightful even to Benny. The children rolled up their sleeves and plunged their dusty arms into its waters, quarreling good-naturedly over the soap, and lathering their stained faces and necks with it. When they were well rinsed with clear water they dried themselves with the towel. Then Jess washed both towels nicely with soap, rinsed them, and hung them on the clothesline of tape, which she had stretched between two slender birch trees. They flapped lazily in the wind.

"Looks like home already, Jess," said Henry, smiling at the washing.

The tired children clambered into the "bedroom," Jess coming last with the wounded dog.

"We'll have to leave the door open, it's so hot," said Henry, lying down with a tired sigh.

And in less than ten minutes they were fast asleep, dog and all—asleep at six o'clock, asleep without naming the dog, without locking the door, without fear, for this was the first night in four that they had been able to go to sleep *at night*, as children should.

THE SCARLET PIMPERNEL by the Baroness Orczy

CHAPTER I — PARIS: SEPTEMBER, 1792

A surging, seething, murmuring crowd of beings that are human only in name, for to the eye and ear they seem naught but savage creatures, animated by vile passions and by the lust of vengeance and of hate. The hour, some little time before sunset, and the place, the West Barricade, at the very spot where, a decade later, a proud tyrant raised an undying monument to the nation's glory and his own vanity.

During the greater part of the day the guillotine had been kept busy at its ghastly work: all that France had boasted of in the past centuries, of ancient names, and blue blood, had paid toll to her desire for liberty and for fraternity. The carnage had only ceased at this late hour of the day because there were other more interesting sights for the people to witness, a little while before the final closing of the barricades for the night.

And so the crowd rushed away from the Place de la Grève and made for the various barricades in order to watch this interesting and amusing sight.

It was to be seen every day, for those aristos were such fools! They were traitors to the people of course, all of them, men, women, and children, who happened to be descendants of the great men who since the Crusades had made the glory of France: her old *noblesse*. Their ancestors had oppressed the people, had crushed them under the scarlet heels of their dainty buckled shoes, and now the people had become the rulers of France and crushed their former masters—not beneath their heel, for they went shoeless mostly in these days—but beneath a more effectual weight, the knife of the guillotine.

And daily, hourly, the hideous instrument of torture claimed its many victims—old men, young women, tiny children, even until the day when it would finally demand the head of a King and of a beautiful young Queen.

But this was as it should be: were not the people now the rulers of France? Every aristocrat was a traitor, as his ancestors had been before him: for two hundred years now the people had sweated, and toiled, and starved, to keep a lustful court in lavish extravagance; now the descendants of those who had helped to make those courts brilliant had to hide for their lives—to fly, if they wished to avoid the tardy vengeance of the people.

And they did try to hide, and tried to fly: that was just the fun of the whole thing. Every afternoon before the gates closed and the market carts went out in procession by the various barricades, some fool of an aristo endeavoured to evade the clutches of the Committee of Public Safety. In various disguises, under various pretexts, they tried to slip through the barriers which were so well guarded by citizen soldiers of the Republic. Men in women's clothes, women in male attire, children disguised in beggars' rags: there were some of all sorts: *ci-devant* counts, marquises, even dukes, who wanted to fly from France, reach England or some other equally accursed country, and there try to rouse foreign feeling against the glorious Revolution, or to raise an army in order to liberate the wretched prisoners in the Temple, who had once called themselves sovereigns of France.

But they were nearly always caught at the barricades. Sergeant Bibot especially at the West Gate had a wonderful nose for scenting an aristo in the most perfect disguise. Then, of course, the fun began. Bibot would look at his prey as a cat looks upon the mouse, play with him, sometimes for quite a quarter of an hour, pretend to be hoodwinked by the disguise, by the wigs and other bits of theatrical make-up which hid the identity of a *ci-devant* noble marquise or count.

Oh! Bibot had a keen sense of humour, and it was well worth hanging round that West Barricade, in order to see him catch an aristo in the very act of trying to flee from the vengeance of the people.

Sometimes Bibot would let his prey actually out by the gates, allowing him to think for the space of two minutes at least that he really had escaped out of Paris, and might even manage to reach the coast of England in safety, but Bibot would let the unfortunate wretch walk about ten mètres towards the open country, then he would send two men after him and bring him back, stripped of his disguise.

Oh! that was extremely funny, for as often as not the fugitive would prove to be a woman, some proud marchioness, who looked terribly comical when she found herself in Bibot's clutches after all, and knew that a summary trial would await her the next day and after that, the fond embrace of Madame la Guillotine.

No wonder that on this fine afternoon in September the crowd round Bibot's gate was eager and excited. The lust of blood grows with its satisfaction, there is no satiety: the crowd had seen a hundred noble heads fall beneath the guillotine to-day, it wanted to make sure that it would see another hundred fall on the morrow.

Bibot was sitting on an overturned and empty cask close by the gate of the barricade; a small detachment of citizen soldiers was under his command. The work had been very hot lately. Those cursed aristos were becoming terrified and tried their hardest to slip out of Paris: men, women and children, whose ancestors, even in remote ages, had served those traitorous Bourbons, were all traitors themselves and right food for the

guillotine. Every day Bibot had had the satisfaction of unmasking some fugitive royalists and sending them back to be tried by the Committee of Public Safety, presided over by that good patriot, Citoyen Fouquier-Tinville.

Robespierre and Danton both had commended Bibot for his zeal, and Bibot was proud of the fact that he on his own initiative had sent at least fifty aristos to the guillotine.

But to-day all the sergeants in command at the various barricades had had special orders. Recently a very great number of aristos had succeeded in escaping out of France and in reaching England safely. There were curious rumours about these escapes; they had become very frequent and singularly daring; the people's minds were becoming strangely excited about it all. Sergeant GrosPierre had been sent to the guillotine for allowing a whole family of aristos to slip out of the North Gate under his very nose.

It was asserted that these escapes were organised by a band of Englishmen, whose daring seemed to be unparalleled, and who, from sheer desire to meddle in what did not concern them, spent their spare time in snatching away lawful victims destined for Madame la Guillotine. These rumours soon grew in extravagance; there was no doubt that this band of meddling Englishmen did exist; moreover, they seemed to be under the leadership of a man whose pluck and audacity were almost fabulous. Strange stories were afloat of how he and those aristos whom he rescued became suddenly invisible as they reached the barricades and escaped out of the gates by sheer supernatural agency.

No one had seen these mysterious Englishmen; as for their leader, he was never spoken of, save with a superstitious shudder. Citoyen Fouquier-Tinville would in the course of the day receive a scrap of paper from some mysterious source; sometimes he would find it in the pocket of his coat, at others it would be handed to him by someone in the crowd, whilst he was on his way to the sitting of the Committee of Public Safety. The paper always contained a brief notice that the band of meddling Englishmen were at work, and it was always signed with a device drawn in red—a little star-shaped flower, which we in England call the Scarlet Pimpernel. Within a few hours of the receipt of this impudent notice, the citoyens of the Committee of Public Safety would hear that so many royalists and aristocrats had succeeded in reaching the coast, and were on their way to England and safety.

The guards at the gates had been doubled, the sergeants in command had been threatened with death, whilst liberal rewards were offered for the capture of these daring and impudent Englishmen. There was a sum of five thousand francs promised to the man who laid hands on the mysterious and elusive Scarlet Pimpernel.

Everyone felt that Bibot would be that man, and Bibot allowed that belief to take firm root in everybody's mind; and so, day after day, people came to watch him at the West Gate, so as to be present when he laid hands on any fugitive aristo who perhaps might be accompanied by that mysterious Englishman.

“Bah!” he said to his trusted corporal, “Citoyen GrosPierre was a fool! Had it been me now, at that North Gate last week . . .”

Citoyen Bibot spat on the ground to express his contempt for his comrade's stupidity.

“How did it happen, citoyen?” asked the corporal.

“GrosPierre was at the gate, keeping good watch,” began Bibot, pompously, as the crowd closed in round him, listening eagerly to his narrative. “We've all heard of this meddlesome Englishman, this accursed Scarlet Pimpernel. He won't get through *my* gate, *morbleu!* unless he be the devil himself. But GrosPierre was a fool. The market carts were going through the gates; there was one laden with casks, and driven by an old man, with a boy beside him. GrosPierre was a bit drunk, but he thought himself very clever; he looked into the casks—most of them, at least—and saw they were empty, and let the cart go through.”

A murmur of wrath and contempt went round the group of ill-clad wretches, who crowded round Citoyen Bibot.

“Half an hour later,” continued the sergeant, “up comes a captain of the guard with a squad of some dozen soldiers with him. 'Has a cart gone through?' he asks of GrosPierre, breathlessly. 'Yes,' says GrosPierre, 'not half an hour ago.' 'And you have let them escape,' shouts the captain furiously. 'You'll go to the guillotine for this, citoyen sergeant! that cart held concealed the *ci-devant* Duc de Chalis and all his family!' 'What!' thunders GrosPierre, aghast. 'Aye! and the driver was none other than that cursed Englishman, the Scarlet Pimpernel.'”

A howl of execration greeted this tale. Citoyen GrosPierre had paid for his blunder on the guillotine, but what a fool! oh! what a fool!

Bibot was laughing so much at his own tale that it was some time before he could continue.

“‘After them, my men,' shouts the captain,” he said, after a while, “‘remember the reward; after them, they cannot have gone far!’ And with that he rushes through the gate, followed by his dozen soldiers.”

“But it was too late!” shouted the crowd, excitedly.

“They never got them!”

“Curse that GrosPierre for his folly!”

“He deserved his fate!”

“Fancy not examining those casks properly!”

But these sallies seemed to amuse Citoyen Bibot exceedingly; he laughed until his sides ached, and the tears streamed down his cheeks.

“Nay, nay!” he said at last, “those aristos weren't in the cart; the driver was not the Scarlet Pimpernel!”

“What?”

“No! The captain of the guard was that damned Englishman in disguise, and every one of his soldiers aristos!”

The crowd this time said nothing: the story certainly savoured of the supernatural, and though the Republic had abolished God, it had not quite succeeded in killing the fear of the supernatural in the hearts of the people. Truly that Englishman must be the devil himself.

The sun was sinking low down in the west. Bibot prepared himself to close the gates.

“*En avant* the carts,” he said.

Some dozen covered carts were drawn up in a row, ready to leave town, in order to fetch the produce from the country close by, for market the next morning. They were mostly well known to Bibot, as they went through his gate twice every day on their way to and from the town. He spoke to one or two of their drivers—mostly women—and was at great pains to examine the inside of the carts.

“You never know,” he would say, “and I'm not going to be caught like that fool GrosPierre.”

The women who drove the carts usually spent their day on the Place de la Grève, beneath the platform of the guillotine, knitting and gossiping, whilst they watched the rows of tumbrils arriving with the victims the Reign of Terror claimed every day. It was great fun to see the aristos arriving for the reception of Madame la Guillotine, and the places close by the platform were very much sought after. Bibot, during the day, had been on duty on the Place. He recognized most of the old hags, “tricotteuses,” as they were called, who sat there and knitted, whilst head after head fell beneath the knife, and they themselves got quite bespattered with the blood of those cursed aristos.

“Hé! la mère!” said Bibot to one of these horrible hags, “what have you got there?”

He had seen her earlier in the day, with her knitting and the whip of her cart close beside her. Now she had fastened a row of curly locks to the whip handle, all colours, from gold to silver, fair to dark, and she stroked them with her huge, bony fingers as she laughed at Bibot.

“I made friends with Madame Guillotine's lover,” she said with a coarse laugh, “he cut these off for me from the heads as they rolled down. He has promised me some more to-morrow, but I don't know if I shall be at my usual place.”

“Ah! how is that, la mère?” asked Bibot, who, hardened soldier though he was, could not help shuddering at the awful loathsomeness of this semblance of a woman, with her ghastly trophy on the handle of her whip.

“My grandson has got the small-pox,” she said with a jerk of her thumb towards the inside of her cart, “some say it's the plague! If it is, I sha'n't be allowed to come into Paris to-morrow.”

At the first mention of the word small-pox, Bibot had stepped hastily backwards, and when the old hag spoke of the plague, he retreated from her as fast as he could.

“Curse you!” he muttered, whilst the whole crowd hastily avoided the cart, leaving it standing all alone in the midst of the place.

The old hag laughed.

“Curse you, citizen, for being a coward,” she said. “Bah! what a man to be afraid of sickness.”

“*Morbleu!* the plague!”

Everyone was awe-struck and silent, filled with horror for the loathsome malady, the one thing which still had the power to arouse terror and disgust in these savage, brutalised creatures.

“Get out with you and with your plague-stricken brood!” shouted Bibot, hoarsely.

And with another rough laugh and coarse jest, the old hag whipped up her lean nag and drove her cart out of the gate.

This incident had spoilt the afternoon. The people were terrified of these two horrible curses, the two maladies which nothing could cure, and which were the precursors of an awful and lonely death. They hung about the barricades, silent and sullen for a while, eyeing one another suspiciously, avoiding each other as if by instinct, lest the plague lurked already in their midst. Presently, as in the case of Gropierre, a captain of the guard appeared suddenly. But he was known to Bibot, and there was no fear of his turning out to be a sly Englishman in disguise.

“A cart, . . .” he shouted breathlessly, even before he had reached the gates.

“What cart?” asked Bibot, roughly.

“Driven by an old hag. . . . A covered cart . . .”

“There were a dozen . . .”

“An old hag who said her son had the plague?”

“Yes . . .”

“You have not let them go?”

“*Morbleu!*” said Bibot, whose purple cheeks had suddenly become white with fear.

“The cart contained the *ci-devant* Comtesse de Tournay and her two children, all of them traitors and condemned to death.”

“And their driver?” muttered Bibot, as a superstitious shudder ran down his spine.

“*Sacré tonnerre,*” said the captain, “but it is feared that it was that accursed Englishman himself—the Scarlet Pimpernel.”

PETER PAN by J.M.Barrie

Chapter 3 COME AWAY, COME AWAY!

For a moment after Mr. and Mrs. Darling left the house the night-lights by the beds of the three children continued to burn clearly. They were awfully nice little night-lights, and one cannot help wishing that they could have kept awake to see Peter; but Wendy's light blinked and gave such a yawn that the other two yawned also, and before they could close their mouths all the three went out.

There was another light in the room now, a thousand times brighter than the night-lights, and in the time we have taken to say this, it had been in all the drawers in the nursery, looking for Peter's shadow, rummaged the wardrobe and turned every pocket inside out. It was not really a light; it made this light by flashing about so quickly, but when it came to rest for a second you saw it was a fairy, no longer than your hand, but still growing. It was a girl called Tinker Bell exquisitely gowned in a skeleton leaf, cut low and square, through which her figure could be seen to the best advantage.

A moment after the fairy's entrance the window was blown open by the breathing of the little stars, and Peter dropped in. He had carried Tinker Bell part of the way, and his hand was still messy with the fairy dust.

"Tinker Bell," he called softly, after making sure that the children were asleep, "Tink, where are you?" She was in a jug for the moment, and liking it extremely; she had never been in a jug before.

"Oh, do come out of that jug, and tell me, do you know where they put my shadow?"

The loveliest tinkle as of golden bells answered him. It is the fairy language. You ordinary children can never hear it, but if you were to hear it you would know that you had heard it once before.

Tink said that the shadow was in the big box. She meant the chest of drawers, and Peter jumped at the drawers, scattering their contents to the floor with both hands, as kings toss ha'pence to the crowd. In a moment he had recovered his shadow, and in his delight he forgot that he had shut Tinker Bell up in the drawer.

If he thought at all, but I don't believe he ever thought, it was that he and his shadow, when brought near each other, would join like drops of water, and when they did not he was appalled. He tried to stick it on with soap from the bathroom, but that also failed. A shudder passed through Peter, and he sat on the floor and cried.

His sobs woke Wendy, and she sat up in bed. She was not alarmed to see a stranger crying on the nursery floor; she was only pleasantly interested.

“Boy,” she said courteously, “why are you crying?”

Peter could be exceeding polite also, having learned the grand manner at fairy ceremonies, and he rose and bowed to her beautifully. She was much pleased, and bowed beautifully to him from the bed.

“What's your name?” he asked.

“Wendy Moira Angela Darling,” she replied with some satisfaction. “What is your name?”

“Peter Pan.”

She was already sure that he must be Peter, but it did seem a comparatively short name.

“Is that all?”

“Yes,” he said rather sharply. He felt for the first time that it was a shortish name.

“I'm so sorry,” said Wendy Moira Angela.

“It doesn't matter,” Peter gulped.

She asked where he lived.

“Second to the right,” said Peter, “and then straight on till morning.”

“What a funny address!”

Peter had a sinking. For the first time he felt that perhaps it was a funny address.

“No, it isn't,” he said.

“I mean,” Wendy said nicely, remembering that she was hostess, “is that what they put on the letters?”

He wished she had not mentioned letters.

“Don't get any letters,” he said contemptuously.

“But your mother gets letters?”

“Don't have a mother,” he said. Not only had he no mother, but he had not the slightest desire to have one. He thought them very over-rated persons. Wendy, however, felt at once that she was in the presence of a tragedy.

“O Peter, no wonder you were crying,” she said, and got out of bed and ran to him.

“I wasn't crying about mothers,” he said rather indignantly. “I was crying because I can't get my shadow to stick on. Besides, I wasn't crying.”

“It has come off?”

“Yes.”

Then Wendy saw the shadow on the floor, looking so dragged, and she was frightfully sorry for Peter. “How awful!” she said, but she could not help smiling when she saw that he had been trying to stick it on with soap. How exactly like a boy!

Fortunately she knew at once what to do. "It must be sewn on," she said, just a little patronisingly.

"What's sewn?" he asked.

"You're dreadfully ignorant."

"No, I'm not."

But she was exulting in his ignorance. "I shall sew it on for you, my little man," she said, though he was tall as herself, and she got out her sewing bag, and sewed the shadow on to Peter's foot.

"I daresay it will hurt a little," she warned him.

"Oh, I shan't cry," said Peter, who was already of the opinion that he had never cried in his life. And he clenched his teeth and did not cry, and soon his shadow was behaving properly, though still a little creased.

"Perhaps I should have ironed it," Wendy said thoughtfully, but Peter, boylike, was indifferent to appearances, and he was now jumping about in the wildest glee. Alas, he had already forgotten that he owed his bliss to Wendy. He thought he had attached the shadow himself. "How clever I am!" he crowed rapturously, "oh, the cleverness of me!"

It is humiliating to have to confess that this conceit of Peter was one of his most fascinating qualities. To put it with brutal frankness, there never was a cockier boy.

But for the moment Wendy was shocked. "You conceit [braggart]," she exclaimed, with frightful sarcasm; "of course I did nothing!"

"You did a little," Peter said carelessly, and continued to dance.

"A little!" she replied with pride; "if I am no use I can at least withdraw," and she sprang in the most dignified way into bed and covered her face with the blankets.

To induce her to look up he pretended to be going away, and when this failed he sat on the end of the bed and tapped her gently with his foot. "Wendy," he said, "don't withdraw. I can't help crowing, Wendy, when I'm pleased with myself." Still she would not look up, though she was listening eagerly. "Wendy," he continued, in a voice that no woman has ever yet been able to resist, "Wendy, one girl is more use than twenty boys."

Now Wendy was every inch a woman, though there were not very many inches, and she peeped out of the bed-clothes.

"Do you really think so, Peter?"

"Yes, I do."

"I think it's perfectly sweet of you," she declared, "and I'll get up again," and she sat with him on the side of the bed. She also said she would give him a kiss if he liked, but Peter did not know what she meant, and he held out his hand expectantly.

"Surely you know what a kiss is?" she asked, aghast.

“I shall know when you give it to me,” he replied stiffly, and not to hurt his feeling she gave him a thimble.

“Now,” said he, “shall I give you a kiss?” and she replied with a slight primness, “If you please.” She made herself rather cheap by inclining her face toward him, but he merely dropped an acorn button into her hand, so she slowly returned her face to where it had been before, and said nicely that she would wear his kiss on the chain around her neck. It was lucky that she did put it on that chain, for it was afterwards to save her life.

When people in our set are introduced, it is customary for them to ask each other's age, and so Wendy, who always liked to do the correct thing, asked Peter how old he was. It was not really a happy question to ask him; it was like an examination paper that asks grammar, when what you want to be asked is Kings of England.

“I don't know,” he replied uneasily, “but I am quite young.” He really knew nothing about it, he had merely suspicions, but he said at a venture, “Wendy, I ran away the day I was born.”

Wendy was quite surprised, but interested; and she indicated in the charming drawing-room manner, by a touch on her night-gown, that he could sit nearer her.

“It was because I heard father and mother,” he explained in a low voice, “talking about what I was to be when I became a man.” He was extraordinarily agitated now. “I don't want ever to be a man,” he said with passion. “I want always to be a little boy and to have fun. So I ran away to Kensington Gardens and lived a long long time among the fairies.”

She gave him a look of the most intense admiration, and he thought it was because he had run away, but it was really because he knew fairies. Wendy had lived such a home life that to know fairies struck her as quite delightful. She poured out questions about them, to his surprise, for they were rather a nuisance to him, getting in his way and so on, and indeed he sometimes had to give them a hiding [spanking]. Still, he liked them on the whole, and he told her about the beginning of fairies.

“You see, Wendy, when the first baby laughed for the first time, its laugh broke into a thousand pieces, and they all went skipping about, and that was the beginning of fairies.”

Tedious talk this, but being a stay-at-home she liked it.

“And so,” he went on good-naturedly, “there ought to be one fairy for every boy and girl.”

“Ought to be? Isn't there?”

“No. You see children know such a lot now, they soon don't believe in fairies, and every time a child says, 'I don't believe in fairies,' there is a fairy somewhere that falls down dead.”

Really, he thought they had now talked enough about fairies, and it struck him that Tinker Bell was keeping very quiet. "I can't think where she has gone to," he said, rising, and he called Tink by name. Wendy's heart went flutter with a sudden thrill.

"Peter," she cried, clutching him, "you don't mean to tell me that there is a fairy in this room!"

"She was here just now," he said a little impatiently. "You don't hear her, do you?" and they both listened.

"The only sound I hear," said Wendy, "is like a tinkle of bells."

"Well, that's Tink, that's the fairy language. I think I hear her too."

The sound came from the chest of drawers, and Peter made a merry face. No one could ever look quite so merry as Peter, and the loveliest of gurgles was his laugh. He had his first laugh still.

"Wendy," he whispered gleefully, "I do believe I shut her up in the drawer!"

He let poor Tink out of the drawer, and she flew about the nursery screaming with fury. "You shouldn't say such things," Peter retorted. "Of course I'm very sorry, but how could I know you were in the drawer?"

Wendy was not listening to him. "O Peter," she cried, "if she would only stand still and let me see her!"

"They hardly ever stand still," he said, but for one moment Wendy saw the romantic figure come to rest on the cuckoo clock. "O the lovely!" she cried, though Tink's face was still distorted with passion.

"Tink," said Peter amiably, "this lady says she wishes you were her fairy."

Tinker Bell answered insolently.

"What does she say, Peter?"

He had to translate. "She is not very polite. She says you are a great [huge] ugly girl, and that she is my fairy."

He tried to argue with Tink. "You know you can't be my fairy, Tink, because I am an gentleman and you are a lady."

To this Tink replied in these words, "You silly ass," and disappeared into the bathroom. "She is quite a common fairy," Peter explained apologetically, "she is called Tinker Bell because she mends the pots and kettles [tinker = tin worker]." [Similar to "cinder" plus "elle" to get Cinderella]

They were together in the armchair by this time, and Wendy plied him with more questions.

"If you don't live in Kensington Gardens now—"

"Sometimes I do still."

"But where do you live mostly now?"

“With the lost boys.”

“Who are they?”

“They are the children who fall out of their perambulators when the nurse is looking the other way. If they are not claimed in seven days they are sent far away to the Neverland to defray expenses. I'm captain.”

“What fun it must be!”

“Yes,” said cunning Peter, “but we are rather lonely. You see we have no female companionship.”

“Are none of the others girls?”

“Oh, no; girls, you know, are much too clever to fall out of their prams.”

This flattered Wendy immensely. “I think,” she said, “it is perfectly lovely the way you talk about girls; John there just despises us.”

For reply Peter rose and kicked John out of bed, blankets and all; one kick. This seemed to Wendy rather forward for a first meeting, and she told him with spirit that he was not captain in her house. However, John continued to sleep so placidly on the floor that she allowed him to remain there. “And I know you meant to be kind,” she said, relenting, “so you may give me a kiss.”

For the moment she had forgotten his ignorance about kisses. “I thought you would want it back,” he said a little bitterly, and offered to return her the thimble.

“Oh dear,” said the nice Wendy, “I don't mean a kiss, I mean a thimble.”

“What's that?”

“It's like this.” She kissed him.

“Funny!” said Peter gravely. “Now shall I give you a thimble?”

“If you wish to,” said Wendy, keeping her head erect this time.

Peter thimble her, and almost immediately she screeched. “What is it, Wendy?”

“It was exactly as if someone were pulling my hair.”

“That must have been Tink. I never knew her so naughty before.”

And indeed Tink was darting about again, using offensive language.

“She says she will do that to you, Wendy, every time I give you a thimble.”

“But why?”

“Why, Tink?”

Again Tink replied, “You silly ass.” Peter could not understand why, but Wendy understood, and she was just slightly disappointed when he admitted that he came to the nursery window not to see her but to listen to stories.

“You see, I don't know any stories. None of the lost boys knows any stories.”

“How perfectly awful,” Wendy said.

“Do you know,” Peter asked “why swallows build in the eaves of houses? It is to listen to the stories. O Wendy, your mother was telling you such a lovely story.”

“Which story was it?”

“About the prince who couldn't find the lady who wore the glass slipper.”

“Peter,” said Wendy excitedly, “that was Cinderella, and he found her, and they lived happily ever after.”

Peter was so glad that he rose from the floor, where they had been sitting, and hurried to the window.

“Where are you going?” she cried with misgiving.

“To tell the other boys.”

“Don't go Peter,” she entreated, “I know such lots of stories.”

Those were her precise words, so there can be no denying that it was she who first tempted him.

He came back, and there was a greedy look in his eyes now which ought to have alarmed her, but did not.

“Oh, the stories I could tell to the boys!” she cried, and then Peter gripped her and began to draw her toward the window.

“Let me go!” she ordered him.

“Wendy, do come with me and tell the other boys.”

Of course she was very pleased to be asked, but she said, “Oh dear, I can't. Think of mummy! Besides, I can't fly.”

“I'll teach you.”

“Oh, how lovely to fly.”

“I'll teach you how to jump on the wind's back, and then away we go.”

“Oo!” she exclaimed rapturously.

“Wendy, Wendy, when you are sleeping in your silly bed you might be flying about with me saying funny things to the stars.”

“Oo!”

“And, Wendy, there are mermaids.”

“Mermaids! With tails?”

“Such long tails.”

“Oh,” cried Wendy, “to see a mermaid!”

He had become frightfully cunning. “Wendy,” he said, “how we should all respect you.”

She was wriggling her body in distress. It was quite as if she were trying to remain on the nursery floor.

But he had no pity for her.

“Wendy,” he said, the sly one, “you could tuck us in at night.”

“Oo!”

“None of us has ever been tucked in at night.”

“Oo,” and her arms went out to him.

“And you could darn our clothes, and make pockets for us. None of us has any pockets.”

How could she resist. “Of course it's awfully fascinating!” she cried. “Peter, would you teach John and Michael to fly too?”

“If you like,” he said indifferently, and she ran to John and Michael and shook them. “Wake up,” she cried, “Peter Pan has come and he is to teach us to fly.”

John rubbed his eyes. “Then I shall get up,” he said. Of course he was on the floor already. “Hallo,” he said, “I am up!”

Michael was up by this time also, looking as sharp as a knife with six blades and a saw, but Peter suddenly signed silence. Their faces assumed the awful craftiness of children listening for sounds from the grown-up world. All was as still as salt. Then everything was right. No, stop! Everything was wrong. Nana, who had been barking distressfully all the evening, was quiet now. It was her silence they had heard.

“Out with the light! Hide! Quick!” cried John, taking command for the only time throughout the whole adventure. And thus when Liza entered, holding Nana, the nursery seemed quite its old self, very dark, and you would have sworn you heard its three wicked inmates breathing angelically as they slept. They were really doing it artfully from behind the window curtains.

Liza was in a bad temper, for she was mixing the Christmas puddings in the kitchen, and had been drawn from them, with a raisin still on her cheek, by Nana's absurd suspicions. She thought the best way of getting a little quiet was to take Nana to the nursery for a moment, but in custody of course.

“There, you suspicious brute,” she said, not sorry that Nana was in disgrace. “They are perfectly safe, aren't they? Every one of the little angels sound asleep in bed. Listen to their gentle breathing.”

Here Michael, encouraged by his success, breathed so loudly that they were nearly detected. Nana knew that kind of breathing, and she tried to drag herself out of Liza's clutches.

But Liza was dense. “No more of it, Nana,” she said sternly, pulling her out of the room. “I warn you if you bark again I shall go straight for master and missus and bring them home from the party, and then, oh, won't master whip you, just.”

She tied the unhappy dog up again, but do you think Nana ceased to bark? Bring master and missus home from the party! Why, that was just what she wanted. Do you

think she cared whether she was whipped so long as her charges were safe? Unfortunately Liza returned to her puddings, and Nana, seeing that no help would come from her, strained and strained at the chain until at last she broke it. In another moment she had burst into the dining-room of 27 and flung up her paws to heaven, her most expressive way of making a communication. Mr. and Mrs. Darling knew at once that something terrible was happening in their nursery, and without a good-bye to their hostess they rushed into the street.

But it was now ten minutes since three scoundrels had been breathing behind the curtains, and Peter Pan can do a great deal in ten minutes.

We now return to the nursery.

“It's all right,” John announced, emerging from his hiding-place. “I say, Peter, can you really fly?”

Instead of troubling to answer him Peter flew around the room, taking the mantelpiece on the way.

“How topping!” said John and Michael.

“How sweet!” cried Wendy.

“Yes, I'm sweet, oh, I am sweet!” said Peter, forgetting his manners again.

It looked delightfully easy, and they tried it first from the floor and then from the beds, but they always went down instead of up.

“I say, how do you do it?” asked John, rubbing his knee. He was quite a practical boy.

“You just think lovely wonderful thoughts,” Peter explained, “and they lift you up in the air.”

He showed them again.

“You're so nippy at it,” John said, “couldn't you do it very slowly once?”

Peter did it both slowly and quickly. “I've got it now, Wendy!” cried John, but soon he found he had not. Not one of them could fly an inch, though even Michael was in words of two syllables, and Peter did not know A from Z.

Of course Peter had been trifling with them, for no one can fly unless the fairy dust has been blown on him. Fortunately, as we have mentioned, one of his hands was messy with it, and he blew some on each of them, with the most superb results.

“Now just wiggle your shoulders this way,” he said, “and let go.”

They were all on their beds, and gallant Michael let go first. He did not quite mean to let go, but he did it, and immediately he was borne across the room.

“I flew!” he screamed while still in mid-air.

John let go and met Wendy near the bathroom.

(Wendy) “Oh, lovely!”

(John) “Oh, ripping!”

(Michael) "Look at me!"

(Wendy) "Look at me!"

(John) "Look at me!"

They were not nearly so elegant as Peter, they could not help kicking a little, but their heads were bobbing against the ceiling, and there is almost nothing so delicious as that. Peter gave Wendy a hand at first, but had to desist, Tink was so indignant.

Up and down they went, and round and round. Heavenly was Wendy's word.

"I say," cried John, "why shouldn't we all go out?"

Of course it was to this that Peter had been luring them.

Michael was ready: he wanted to see how long it took him to do a billion miles. But Wendy hesitated.

"Mermaids!" said Peter again.

(all children) "Oo!"

"And there are pirates."

"Pirates," cried John, seizing his Sunday hat, "let us go at once."

It was just at this moment that Mr. and Mrs. Darling hurried with Nana out of 27. They ran into the middle of the street to look up at the nursery window; and, yes, it was still shut, but the room was ablaze with light, and most heart-gripping sight of all, they could see in shadow on the curtain three little figures in night attire circling round and round, not on the floor but in the air.

Not three figures, four!

In a tremble they opened the street door. Mr. Darling would have rushed upstairs, but Mrs. Darling signed him to go softly. She even tried to make her heart go softly.

Will they reach the nursery in time? If so, how delightful for them, and we shall all breathe a sigh of relief, but there will be no story. On the other hand, if they are not in time, I solemnly promise that it will all come right in the end.

They would have reached the nursery in time had it not been that the little stars were watching them. Once again the stars blew the window open, and that smallest star of all called out:

"Cave, Peter!"

Then Peter knew that there was not a moment to lose. "Come," he cried imperiously, and soared out at once into the night, followed by John and Michael and Wendy.

Mr. and Mrs. Darling and Nana rushed into the nursery too late. The birds were flown.