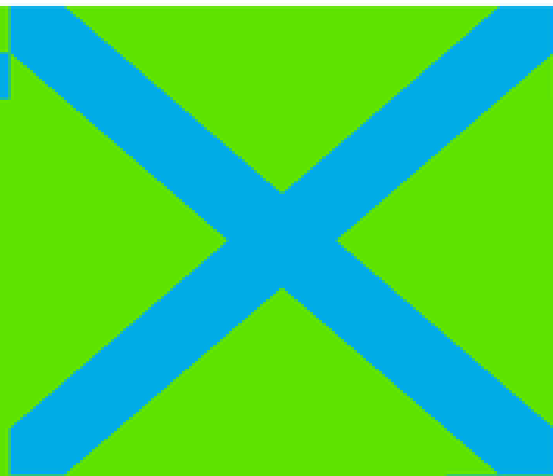


Everychild

A story which the old may interpret to the young and which the young may interpret to the old

Louis Dodge



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"Poor Cinderella."

[Frontispiece: "Poor Cinderella."]

EVERYCHILD

**A STORY WHICH THE OLD MAY INTERPRET TO THE
YOUNG
AND WHICH THE YOUNG MAY INTERPRET TO THE
OLD**

BY

LOUIS DODGE

**ILLUSTRATED BY
BLANCHE FISHER LAITE**

**NEW YORK
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TO FREDERICA BRITTON

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PART I

ARGUMENT:—EVERYCHILD ENCOUNTERS THE GIANT FEAR AND SETS FORTH ON A STRANGE JOURNEY.

CHAPTER I

THE TWO STRANGERS

It did not seem a very pleasant room. To be sure, there were a great many nice things in it. There was rose-colored paper on the wall, and the woodwork was of ivory, with gilt lines. There were pictures of ships on the ocean and of high trees and of the sun going down behind a hill, and there was one of an old mill with nobody at all in sight. And there was one picture with dogs in it.

There was a soft rug, also of rose-color, and a fine clock, shaped like a state capitol, on the mantel. There was a silver gong in the clock which made beautiful music. There was a nice reading table with books on it, and a lamp. The lamp had a shade made up of queerly-shaped bits of material like onyx, and a fringe of rose-colored beads. Yet for all this, it did not seem a pleasant room. You could feel that something was wrong. You know, there are always so many things in a room which you cannot see.

A lady and a gentleman sat at the reading-table, one on either side. It seemed they hadn't a word to say to each other. They did not even look at each other. The lady turned the pages of a magazine without seeing a single

thing. The gentleman sat staring straight before him, and after a long time he stretched himself and said: "Ho—hum!" And then he began to frown and to stare at an oak chair over against the wall.

You might have supposed he had a grudge against the chair; and it seemed that the chair might be crying out to him in its own language: "I am not merely a chair. Look at me! I was a limb on a mighty oak. I was a child of the sun and the rain and the earth. I used to sing and dance. Oh, do not look at me like that!" But the gentleman knew nothing of all this.

Both the lady and the gentleman were thinking of nothing but themselves and they continued to do this even when a door opened and their son entered the room.

Their son's name was Everychild; and because he is to be the most important person in this story I should like to tell you as much about him as I can. But really, there is very little I can tell. His mother often said that he was a peculiar child. It was almost impossible to tell what his thoughts were, or his dreams, or how much he loved this person or that, or what he desired most.

It was difficult for him to get into the room. He was carrying something which he could not manage very well. But no one offered to help him. Presently he had got quite into the room, leaving the door open.

The thing he carried was a kite, and he was holding it high to keep it free of the ground. The tail had got caught in the string and there was a rent in the blue paper.

The clock struck just as he entered and he stopped to count the strokes. Seven. The last stroke died away with a quivering sound. Then with faltering feet he approached his father.

His father was frowning. He stopped and pondered. He had seen that frown on his father's face many times before, and it had always puzzled him. Sometimes it would come while you watched, and you couldn't think what made it come. Or it would go away in the strangest manner, without anything having happened at all. It was a great mystery.

The frown did not go away this time; and presently Everychild approached his father timidly. It was rather difficult for him to speak; but he managed to say:

"Daddy, do you think you could fix it for me?" He brought the torn kite further forward and held it higher.

His father did not look at him at all!

Everychild's heart pounded loudly. How could one go on speaking to a person who would not even look? Yet he persisted. "Could you?" he repeated.

His father moved a little, but still he did not look at Everychild. He said rather impatiently: "Never mind now, son."

Then his mother spoke. She had glanced up from her magazine. "You've left the door open, Everychild," she said.

Everychild put his kite down with care. He returned to the door. It was a stubborn door. He pulled at it once and again. It closed with a bang.

"Everychild!" exclaimed his mother. The noise had made her jump a little.

"It always bangs when you close it," said Everychild.

"It wouldn't bang if you didn't open it," said his mother.

He returned and stood beside his father.

"You know you used to fix things for me," he said. He reflected and brightened a little. "And play with me," he added. "Don't you remember?"

But just then it seemed that his father and mother thought of something to say to each other. Their manner was quite unpleasant. They talked without waiting for each other to get through, and Everychild could not understand a thing they were saying. He withdrew a little and waited.

But when his parents had talked a little while, rather loudly, his father got up and went out. He put his hat on, pulling it down over his eyes. And *he* banged the door. But it was the outside door this time, which never banged at all if you were careful.

And then his mother got up and went to her own room—which meant that she mustn't be disturbed.

Everychild stood for a moment, puzzled; and then he thought of the broken kite in his hands. He plucked at it slowly. You would have supposed that he did not care greatly, now, whether the kite got mended or not. But little by little he became interested in the kite. He sat down on the floor and began to untangle the tail.

He scarcely knew when the inner door opened and the cook entered the room.

She was a large, plain person. Her face was redder than Everychild's mother's face, but not so pretty. Her eyes often seemed tired, but never too tired to beam a little.

"Are you all alone, Everychild?" she asked. She did not wait for a reply, but asked another question: "Is something wrong with your kite?" And again without waiting for a reply she added: "Maybe I could fix it for you!"

And she got down on the rug on her knees and took the kite from his hands.

Everychild, standing beside her, looked into her rather sad, kind eyes, which were closer to him than he remembered their ever having been before. There were little moist lines about them, and they were faded. Her hands were not at all like his mother's hands. Not nearly so nice: and yet how clever they were! She was really untangling the tail of the kite, moving it here and there with large gestures.

And then Everychild forgot all about the kite. Certain amazing things had begun to happen near by.

It had been getting dark in the room; and now it suddenly became quite bright, though no one had turned the lights on. And there was a sound of music—a short bit of a march, which ended all of a sudden. And then Everychild realized that by some strange process two persons had entered the room.

CHAPTER II

EVERYCHILD'S ENCOUNTER WITH THE GIANT

He was almost afraid to look at the two strange persons, because their being there seemed very mysterious, and he had the thought that if he looked at them steadily they might vanish. He knew at once that they were not to be treated just as if they were ordinary persons. It was not only that they had come into the room without making any noise, or that there had been that burst of music, or that the light had brightened.

It was rather because the cook went on untangling the kite, just as if nothing had happened.

He said to himself, "She does not know they are here. She does not know I have seen anything."

Then it occurred to him that the two strangers were not paying any attention to him at all, and that he might look at them as much as he pleased.

Suddenly he recognized one of them. He had seen his picture. It was Father Time. And he could have laughed to himself because Father Time was a much more pleasing person than he had been in his picture. It is true that he carried a scythe, just as he had been pictured as doing. There was a sand-glass too. It was in two parts, connected by a narrow stem through which the sand was running from one part to the other.

But he did not have a long white beard, and a dark robe, and a stern face. Not at all. His eyes were all ready to twinkle. They were the kindest eyes Everychild had ever seen. You could tell by looking at them that if you were to hurt yourself Father Time would pity you and comfort you. He had a rather jolly figure. You could imagine he might be very playful. And he wore the costume of a jester—though you did not feel like laughing at him, because his eyes were so friendly and kind. He stood as if he were waiting to begin some sort of play.

Then Everychild looked at the other stranger. She was a lady, and very distinguished looking. He did not recognize her, though he felt at once that she was a very important person. She was dressed all in shimmering white. She was very fair and her hair was dressed beautifully. She wore a band about her hair and there was a jewel in it, like a star. She wore a little mask over her eyes so that you could not be sure at once whether she was a kind person or not. She sat at a spinning wheel, and the wheel went round and round without making any noise. She was spinning something. She looked very tranquil.

Everychild was becoming greatly excited. He touched the cook on the hand. "Didn't it seem to you to get much lighter?" he asked.

"Lighter? No. It's getting darker," she replied.

"And—and didn't you hear any music, either?"

"I heard nothing."

It made him feel almost forlorn to have the cook say she had not noticed anything. He drew closer to her. "Never mind the kite now," he said. "I want you ... Oh, don't you see anything at all? Please look!" He stood with one finger on his lip, staring at Father Time and the Masked Lady.

She regarded him almost with alarm. "Lord bless the child, what's coming over him?" she exclaimed. "There's nothing there!" She followed the direction of his eyes, and then she looked at him with an indulgent smile. "There, put your kite away," she said. "It's all right now except for

that rent in it. I'll mend that to-morrow. And try to be a good boy. You mustn't be fanciful, you know!"

She patted him on the back and then she left the room.

He stood quite forlorn, watching her depart. Then with nervous haste he made as if to follow her. But at the door, which she had closed, he stopped. You could tell that he was making up his mind to do something. Then he turned slowly so that he faced Father Time and the Masked Lady. Presently he took a step in their direction. And at length, with a very great effort, he spoke.

"Please—tell me who you are!" he said.

It was Father Time who replied. He replied in a voice which was quite thrilling, though not at all terrifying:

"We are the true friends of Everychild!"

Everychild brought his hands together in perplexity. "Friends?" he said. "I—I think I never saw you before. I may have seen your picture. Yours, I mean. Not the—the lady's. And I'm not sure I know your right name. If you'd tell me, and if—if the lady would take her mask off——"

But Father Time interrupted him. In a solemn voice he said, "Everychild, I have come to bid you leave all that has been closest to you and set forth upon a strange journey."

At this Everychild was deeply awed. Perhaps he was a little frightened. "All that has been closest?" he repeated. "My mother and father—it is they who have always been closest."

"Everychild must bid farewell to father and mother," declared Father Time.

And now Everychild was indeed dismayed. "Bid farewell to them?" he echoed. "Oh, please ... and shall I never see them again?" He wished very much to approach Father Time and plead with him; but Father Time held up

an arresting hand and spoke again, almost as if he were a minister in church.

"It is not given to Everychild to know what the future holds," he said. And then he again made a polite gesture toward the Masked Lady. "Only she can tell what the end of the journey shall be," he said.

It was now that Everychild looked earnestly at the Masked Lady. If she would only take her mask off! With a great effort he asked—"And she—will she befriend me when I have gone from my father and mother?"

With the deepest assurance Father Time replied, "Give her your affection and she will befriend you in every hour of loss and pain, clear to the end of your journey—and beyond."

"But," said Everychild, "she—she doesn't look very—she looks rather—rather fearful, doesn't she?"

"She is beautiful only to those who love her," said Father Time.

This seemed reassuring; and now Everychild ventured to address the Masked Lady directly. "And—and will you go with me?" he asked timidly.

She replied with great earnestness: "Everychild, go where you will, you have only to desire me greatly and I shall be with you."

Then it seemed to Everychild that it would not be a very terrible thing to go away, after all.

It was plain that Father Time and the Masked Lady were waiting for him to go; and so without any more ado he boldly approached the door which opened out upon the street. But his heart failed him again. He drew back from the door and cried out—"No, no! I cannot. I cannot go out that way. Is there no other way for me to go?"

It seemed to him that his heart must cease to beat when Father Time exclaimed in a loud voice—

"Go, Everychild!"

Still he hung back. "But not that way!" he repeated. "The wide world lies that way, and I should be afraid."

"I know," said Father Time, "that the Giant Fear lives outside that door. But him you shall slay, and then the way will be clear."

"*I* shall slay him?" exclaimed Everychild wonderingly. "How shall I slay him?"

"Do not doubt, and a way shall be found."

It was just at this moment that something very terrifying occurred. There was a stealthy step outside the door—the sort of step you hear when it is dark and you are alone. And Everychild could not help shrinking back as he stood with his fascinated eyes held on the door. He was staring at the door, yet he knew that the Masked Lady and Father Time were listening to that stealthy step too. The Masked Lady had put aside her spinning wheel, and Father Time had become very grave.

There was a brief interval of suspense and then the door began to open, inch by inch, very slowly. Two terrible eyes became visible.

Everychild knew immediately that it was the Giant Fear, though for a moment he could see nothing but the peeping eyes which leered horribly. And when the Giant Fear perceived that Everychild was terrified, he thrust the door open wide and stood on the threshold.

He was, I may tell you at once, the most hideous creature in the world. His cruel grin was too evil a thing to be described. He carried a great bludgeon. From his lower jaw a yellow tusk arose at either corner of his mouth and projected beyond his upper lip. His ears covered the whole sides of his head. His jaws were as large around as a bushel basket.

At first, after he had entered the room, he did not perceive either Father Time or the Masked Lady. He dropped one end of his bludgeon to the floor with a thump, and there he stood leering at Everychild with a sinister and triumphant expression.

Only a moment he stood, and then he advanced a step toward Everychild. But just at that instant Father Time moved slightly and the intruder became aware of his presence. The wicked smile on his terrible face began to freeze slowly. The great creature shrank away from Father Time; and as he did so he became aware of the presence of the Masked Lady on his other side. For an instant he trembled from head to foot! And then more hurriedly he took another step toward Everychild.

Everychild was trying very hard to hold his ground; but in truth he could feel his knees giving way beneath him and it seemed that he must fall if the giant advanced another inch. Nor did the giant fail to note that Everychild was in distress, and at this he regained something of his boldness. In a loud, terrible voice he spoke to Everychild:

"Ah—ha! And so you were getting ready to defy me—hey?"

Everychild's teeth chattered as he replied: "Please go away!"

The giant nodded exultantly. In the same great voice he said, "You know me, I suppose?—the Giant Fear who always makes Everychild tremble?"

A calm voice interposed—the voice of Father Time: "The Giant Fear, whom Everychild may conquer!"

The voice was so reassuring, and the eyes of Father Time were so calm and friendly, that Everychild ceased to despair. With trembling limbs he ran to Father Time. "If you would lend me your scythe——" he gasped. He laid a hand on the scythe of Father Time.

But Father Time withheld the scythe. He said gently, "The scythe of Father Time is a wonderful weapon; but a better one is at Everychild's command. Behold!"

As he spoke he pointed majestically to the Masked Lady.

She had arisen, and Everychild saw that she held aloft a slim, shining sword!

A hush fell within the room; but presently Everychild, addressing Father Time, whispered: "A sword! And may I take it?"

With a very firm voice Father Time replied: "You may, and with it you shall prevail!"

Oddly enough, Everychild forgot for the moment that he was in peril. He drew near to the Masked Lady, and he could see that she was smiling. She placed the sword in his hand.

At first he held it awkwardly, yet he looked at it with shining eyes. Then he turned about, holding the sword forward, as the Masked Lady had held it. He could feel that the hilt of the sword was beginning to fit snugly into his hand.

Gradually a strange transformation occurred. His body straightened, his eyes shone more than ever. He took a step forward, and he knew that his knees were no longer trembling. In a clear voice he cried out to the Giant Fear:

"Defend yourself!"

But the giant reeled and trembled. He tried to hold his bludgeon aloft, but his hands shook so that it nearly fell. He became as pale as death, and it was quite impossible for him to meet Everychild's eye. He retreated with stumbling steps. It seemed that he would fall. His power had deserted him.

He made a last, terrible effort to lift his bludgeon; but Everychild darted forward with the speed of lightning, holding his sword before him. It was a very sharp sword, and it pierced the giant's body as easily as if the great creature had been made of paper.

The Giant Fear tottered. His bludgeon slipped from his grasp and his eyes became dim. He fell with a crash. He was dead!

At that very moment a sound of distant music could be heard. It was all very wonderful. The music drew nearer; it sounded more loudly.

Everychild turned and restored the slim sword to the Masked Lady.

"Do you not wish to keep it?" she asked.

But it seemed to Everychild that he had no need of the sword, now that the Giant Fear was dead. "Thank you, I shall not need it again," he said.

She said, in a strange, sad voice, "Alas, the greatest need of my sword arises after fear is gone!"

But he scarcely heeded her now. The sound of music was heard much nearer. He lifted his eyes and beheld the door which had always stood between him and the world. He drew nearer to the door. It was wide open.

He heard the voice of Father Time: "The moment has arrived for you to go, Everychild!"

He caught step with the music, which was very loud now.

He marched valiantly away.

CHAPTER III

EVERYCHILD ENCOUNTERS ALADDIN OF THE WONDERFUL LAMP

He knew he could go wherever he pleased, and so with very little delay he entered a deep forest. It was evening and the wind was sighing in the great trees. A winding road stretched before him like a gray ribbon.

Soon he came to where a boy sat by the side of the road. The boy sat on a small Oriental rug, and by his side stood a very peculiar lamp. The boy was clad in a purple garment made of silk, with slippers to match. He wore a very fine skull-cap, also of silk, and a pig-tail hung down his back. His

eyes were very peculiar. They were placed in his head a little on end; but they were bright and friendly. His mouth was like a little bow. The lips were merry and red. His cheeks were like peaches.

Everychild stopped and looked at the boy, and the boy smiled at him. "I am trying to think of your name," said Everychild, pondering. Surely he had seen this boy before—but where?

"Everychild knows me," returned the boy. "My name is Aladdin."

"Aladdin—of course!" said Everychild. He sat down by Aladdin on the Oriental rug. "And this is your lamp," he said, his eyes shining.

"Alas!—yes," replied Aladdin sadly; and Everychild was surprised that Aladdin could speak sadly. But Aladdin said no more about the lamp just then. He turned his eyes, which seemed a bit askew, upon Everychild. "You were marching bravely as you came along," he said. "I was watching you. And I thought to myself, 'How can any one walk bravely along a road like this?'"

For an instant Everychild's heart was troubled. "Isn't it a good road to walk on?" he asked.

Aladdin's reply was: "It is called The Road of Troubled Children."

Everychild thought a moment. That was a strange name, certainly. "It seems a little lonely," he ventured, thinking that perhaps Aladdin would explain why he did not like the road.

"It is lonely," said Aladdin; "yet all children walk here sometimes. You see, it is a very long road, so that many may walk on it without encountering one another."

Neither spoke for a moment, and there was no sound save the wind in the trees.

Then Aladdin said, "When you have walked here a little longer perhaps you will not walk so bravely." There was an obscure smile on his lips as he

said this.

But Everychild replied quickly, "Oh, yes, I shall. You see, I shall remember my friends."

"Your friends?" asked Aladdin.

"Father Time, for one. I wish you could have seen how he took my part!"

Aladdin nodded slowly. "I am hoping he will be a friend to me some day," he said.

"And then there is the Masked Lady," continued Everychild.

"The Masked Lady?" repeated Aladdin in a puzzled tone.

"She lent me her sword."

But Aladdin mused darkly until his eyes rested upon his lamp. "I'd rather persons didn't wear masks—of any sort," he said. "Sometimes they are dangerous enemies."

He seemed so troubled as he said this that Everychild asked him, "But you, Aladdin—why are you making a journey on the Road of Troubled Children?"

"I?" replied Aladdin in surprise. "Why, because I am the most troubled child of all!"

Everychild could scarcely believe this. "And yet," he said, "with your wonderful lamp you have only to wish for things, and they are yours!"

Aladdin made ready to tell his story. He adjusted himself more comfortably on the Oriental rug, and at last he sighed deeply. "The child who has everything is never happy," he said.

Everychild simply could not believe this; and Aladdin read the disbelief in his eyes.

"It is true," he said. "Having everything you wish for is like having more money than any one else. And in such a case, how could one be happy? How many things would be denied one!—pleasant solitude, simple friendships, even a good name. Those who had too little would envy you and hate you; and if you sought to relieve their distress they would hate you more than ever in their hearts, because you would have degraded them. You would have to be a spendthrift, which is vulgar, or you would have to be a miser, which is mean. There is an old saying in Chinese ... how shall I put it in your language? Runnings fleet, unhampered feet. You see? The rich have pampered feet. At best they tread soft places. No, it is an evil thing to have too much. I would that the lamp had never been mine."

"If it were mine," said Everychild, unconvinced, "I think I should be happy."

"To be happy," said Aladdin, "means to want something and believe you are going to get it after awhile. But when you've got everything it is a good deal worse than not having anything. Because there's nothing left for you to wish for. And wishing for things is really the greatest pleasure in the world."

"But to wish for things, and never to get them?" said Everychild, deeply puzzled.

"Let me explain," said Aladdin. "I remember when I was a little boy in Peking there came a spring when I wanted a kite. Oh, how I longed for a kite! And my mother said, 'Never mind, Aladdin. When your uncle comes back from Arabia, where he has gone with the camel train, perhaps he will bring you a kite!' And I was very happy all the spring and summer, thinking I should have a kite when my uncle came back from the camel train. And it was not until the next year, when I no longer cared very much about having a kite, that I learned how my uncle had died in the desert, quite early in the spring the year before."

"And then," asked Everychild, "were you not unhappy?"

"No. You see, by that time I had begun to wish for something else. This time it was a pair of little doves which a merchant had brought from far

away in the Himalaya mountains. And I dreamed by day and night of the time when I should own the little doves. No coin was too small to be saved. The little coins would become as much as a yen in time. And at last I was the proud possessor of a yen!"

"And then you got the little doves?"

"No. By that time I cared more for the yen than for the little doves—and besides, the doves had died."

"But with the—the yen, you could buy something else you wanted," suggested Everychild.

"Not so. By that time I coveted some ivory chessmen, worth many yen. And I was very happy, planning how some day I should become rich enough to buy the ivory chessmen."

"But if you only kept on wishing for things," murmured Everychild, "and never got them, you'd of course become very unhappy some day!"

But Aladdin slowly shook his head. "I cannot tell how it may be," he said. "But my poor mother was always happy, and she never really got what she wished for, unless it was the last thing of all."

"And that?" inquired Everychild.

"One thing led to another, in her case; and the last thing she wished for was heaven. And then she died."

A great wind roared through the forest and died away in a sigh.

Presently Aladdin spoke again: "And another great trouble about getting what you wish for is that in most cases when you get a thing you find that you didn't really want it, after all. It proves to be not quite what you thought it; or else it came too late."

This statement was completed in so mournful a tone that Everychild felt constrained to say, "Why shouldn't you throw the lamp away, if it makes you unhappy?"

"It isn't possible," was Aladdin's rejoinder. "There is only one way in which I can be rid of it, and I haven't been able to find that way as yet."

Everychild was so greatly puzzled by this statement that Aladdin explained: "I can never be rid of the lamp save on one condition. When I have wished for *the best thing of all* the lamp will disappear and I may rejoice in the thought that it will never be mine again."

"The best thing of all?" mused Everychild.

"You see how difficult it is. Who can tell what is the best thing of all? And so I must go on owning the lamp and being unhappy."

But Everychild found much of this simply bewildering. "Just the same," he said after a pause, "it must be very nice to have a lamp to rub, so that you may have so many things you really want."

He immediately regretted having said this; for Aladdin took up his lamp. "Very well," he said, placing the lamp in Everychild's hands. And there was a malicious gleam in his slanting eyes as he added, "Suppose you make a wish. But I charge you!—think twice before you wish."

Everychild could not take back his words; and besides, he was tempted. He touched the lamp with trembling fingers. He rubbed it, hoping that Aladdin would not laugh at him for being awkward or inexperienced. And sure enough, the genie of the lamp appeared.

Everychild became quite dumb. He cast an appealing glance at Aladdin. "Won't *you* make a wish?" he begged. "After all, it's very hard, knowing what to wish for."

"It is," admitted Aladdin. "No, I'll not make a wish. It was you who summoned the genie. You shall make your own wish!"

At this Everychild glanced at the genie as if in search of assistance. But he received no encouragement at all. The genie really looked like a person who had come to bring evil rather than good. And Everychild felt his heart

pounding painfully, and his head throbbing. But at last a happy thought occurred to him. He might make a very little wish!

"It is getting dark," he said to the genie, trying to speak as if he were thoroughly experienced in making wishes, "I wish I had a nice place to sleep, here in the forest."

He had scarcely spoken when he realized that he was all alone: Aladdin with his Oriental rug and his lamp was gone; the genie was gone. His hand was resting upon something very soft and cool. It seemed like a carpet, though finer than any carpet he had ever seen. And he remembered how his mother had scolded him more than once for lying on the carpet at home.

"But no one will scold me for lying here," he reflected.

So it came about that on his first night away from home he slept on the beautiful green carpet, with the Road of Troubled Children hard by.

And he could not know that the thing he had wished for, and which had been given him was the very thing which poor beggars, beloved of God, are granted every tranquil summer night.

CHAPTER IV

EVERYCHILD IS JOINED BY HANSEL AND GRETTEL

In the morning he went on his way along the Road of Troubled Children; and it seemed to him that he had gone a very great distance when he heard voices by the roadside. They were the voices of children, and it was plain to Everychild that they were in trouble.

He waited until they came close, and then his heart bounded, because he recognized them. He had often seen their pictures. They were Hansel and Grettel.

Hansel was saying sorrowfully, "I am afraid they are all gone, Grettel, and we shall never be able to find our home again."

It was then that Everychild stepped forward. "I know you," he said, trying to seem really friendly. "*You are Hansel and Grettel. Your parents lost you in the woods to be rid of you*—because there wasn't enough to eat at home."

"You are Hansel and Grettel."

[Illustration: "You are Hansel and Grettel."]

Hansel and Grettel looked at each other with round eyes. "It is true," they replied in unison. "But to think it should have got about already! Who are you?"

Everychild addressed himself to Hansel—who, by the way, was a fat boy with wooden shoes and a tiny homespun jacket and trousers of the same stuff, the trousers being very floppy about the ankles. "I am Everychild," he

said. "And if I were you I'd not try to go home to such a father and mother. You know, they still had half a loaf left."

"At least," said Hansel, "I'd like to go home until that half a loaf is gone!"

For a second Grettel looked at her brother as if she really could not think of a suitably severe rebuke. "Our poor father and mother!" she exclaimed. "No doubt they thought we should find food in the forest, or that we should encounter travelers who'd have a bite to spare."

"At any rate," said Everychild, "it's no use your searching any more. You're looking for the crumbs you dropped, so you'd find the way home. But I should think you could guess the birds had eaten them all up!"

Hansel turned to Grettel, his eyes more round than ever. "It must be true!" he exclaimed.

"Where you made your mistake was in not dropping pebbles, the way you did the first time—though I suppose you couldn't have got the pebbles, being locked up in your room the night before. Anyway, it's no use your trying to go back. Even if you found the way, the same thing would happen again. Your father made a great mistake when he agreed to lose you the first time, simply because your mother asked him to. You know what the book says: 'If a man yields once he's done for.' You'd much better go along with me."

Hansel became all curiosity at once. "Where to?" he asked.

Everychild undertook to reply quite frankly; but all of a sudden he became dumb. It had seemed to him that he knew very well where he was going. Even now he felt that the answer ought to be perfectly simple. Just the same, he could not think of a single word!

Then he heard a voice behind him. "He has set forth on a quest of Truth!" said the voice.

That was it, of course! He turned gratefully—and there was the Masked Lady! She seemed to be smiling to herself, as if she had thought of something which amused her. But on the whole her manner was really friendly and serious.

Nevertheless, Everychild was not at all sure that he was glad to see her. The mask she wore really did give her a very strange appearance. Still, he faced Hansel with a certain proud bearing. "That is it," he said.

And then he turned about again to look at the Masked Lady, for he had noted that there was something strange about her appearance. She had left her spinning wheel somewhere. Now she carried the crook of a shepherdess. One hand rested lightly on the limb of a tree. And there were sheep not far away. Some were lying on the grass resting; and some were moving about, their eyes and noses seemingly very much alive—and their tails. They wiggled their tails with the greatest energy.

"I didn't expect to see *you* here," said Everychild.

The Masked Lady replied, again with that queer smile about her lips, "I am very often near when you think I am far away."

And then Everychild perceived another person standing not far from the Masked Lady: a little man wearing large spectacles and thread-bare clothes. He was looking at nothing whatever save a note-book which he carried in his hand, and he was scribbling intently. Occasionally he lifted his hand high and touched the note-book with his pencil, and drew the pencil away with a precise movement. This was when he was making a period.

"And the—the gentleman," said Everychild. "Is he somebody who belongs to you?"

The Masked Lady seemed surprised by this question, until she perceived the little man with the note-book. Then she replied lightly—"Oh—him! That's Mr. Literal. No, he doesn't belong with me. Quite the contrary. Though I believe he likes to be seen in my company."

Everychild stared at the little man called Mr. Literal. "I don't like his looks at all," he admitted. "Maybe he'll go away after awhile?"

The Masked Lady aroused herself slightly. "I can tell you something about him," she said. "He's ... you know the kind of boy who is forever tagging along—when you want to go anywhere, I mean? Who is forever disagreeing with you, and wanting things done in a different way? Who winds up by tattling? A tattle-tale I think perhaps you call it."

Everychild nodded his head. "You mean a snitch?" he asked.

The Masked Lady flinched a little, though she smiled too. "Is that the word?" she asked. "Well, I've no doubt it's as good as another. If you like you may think of Mr. Literal as a—a snitch."

The little man made a period on his note-book and drew his pencil away with a precise movement. He looked at the Masked Lady with a smug smile. "That word *snitch*," he said. "It's entirely out of place, you know—after you've once introduced Aladdin and Hansel and Grettel in your story. And a giant. It's slang, and it came into use long after the race of giants became extinct."

The Masked Lady replied calmly: "The race of giants has never become extinct."

Mr. Literal had not ceased to smile in his smug fashion. "Ah, well," he said; and he began to scribble again, and while he did so he wandered away. You'd have said he had not the slightest idea where he was. He had not even seen Hansel and Grettel!

Everychild looked after the retreating Mr. Literal until he remembered suddenly that he had asked Hansel and Grettel to go along with him. Then he heard Grettel say in a really eager voice: "A quest of Truth! That sounds very interesting to me!"

But Hansel had to spoil it all by saying: "It would sound more interesting to me if he said he was looking for something to eat."

Grettel said, "Oh, Hansel!" in such a tone that Everychild regarded her more closely. She was really quite charming in her wooden shoes, and her ample blue skirt, somewhat short, and her waist of terra-cotta color, with white sleeves. She had on a linen cap shaped somewhat like a sunbonnet. She turned to her brother and spoke with a good deal of emphasis. "Anyway, it's plain you'll not find any sausages growing on the trees. For my part, I'd rather go somewhere. Especially since we've got a nice boy to go with us. Anything would be better than spending another night in the woods. I simply don't believe I could bear it. The noises ... there's something dreadful about the noises, when you can't bar a door between you and them."

Hansel grunted very inelegantly. "Noises!" he retorted. "That's just like a girl. The only noise that bothers me is the rumbling of my insides. I'm *hungry*."

Grettel closed her eyes as if this were really too much. She seemed unable to think of a word to say.

Then Hansel said to Everychild: "I don't mind going with you. Only, you'll have to let Grettel go along too and you can't go very far with a girl without something happening."

"Of course, she'd go along," said Everychild. "As for something happening, it might be something nice more likely than not."

At this Grettel clasped her hands in ecstasy. "What a nice boy!" she exclaimed.

But Hansel only gave her a lofty look. "I haven't seen him do anything great," he said. "Now, if he could show us something to eat ..."

"At least," said Grettel, "he wants to keep on going, while you're all for turning back. I think he speaks very sensibly." And she came forward with a pretty blush on her cheeks and took a seat demurely by Everychild's side.

She was really startled when Hansel, in his most offensive voice, exclaimed—"Grettel! Don't you know you're not allowed to sit on the

ground in your best dress?"

But she managed to say, with a certain amount of independence, "Oh, Hansel—as if anything mattered now! Don't you see that if we're not going back we'll have to make rules for ourselves from now on? I've always wanted to do whatever I pleased in my best dress, and I'm not going to miss the chance now!"

Hansel looked knowingly at Everychild, and jerked his head toward Grettel. "Females!" he said. "That's why you have to sit on them. They're like kites. Once you let them go they're over in the next field standing on their heads."

But Everychild thought he should rather talk to Grettel. He looked at her with a smile, and immediately she began to pluck at her skirt and pat her hair and look at him out of a corner of her eye. He said: "It was good of your parents, wasn't it, to put your best clothes on you when they meant to lose you?"

She replied promptly: "I should have thought it very mean of them if they hadn't."

Hansel seemed to agree with his sister for once; and he added to what she had said, "And you'll notice they didn't put any bread and cheese in the pockets, so far as anybody can find out."

But Grettel threw her hands up and permitted her head to wilt over on one side. "There! We might just as well be going," she said. "Hansel never has a decent word to say. When he's hungry he growls; and when he's eaten he nods. For my part, it would be a relief to see him nod awhile. Come, let's be getting along!"

CHAPTER V

A DASHING YOUTH IN THE FOREST

And so they set forth along the road. They had not gone far, however, when they espied a youth crossing the road before them.

It could be seen at once that he was on a very important mission, and Everychild said to his companions, "Perhaps we ought not to disturb him. Let us wait, and it may be that he will cross the road and go on his way."

But the youth did not do this. He had heard the children approaching, and he remained standing in the road, waiting for them to come up.

Grettel was already looking at the youth out of the corner of her eye and smiling.

"I'm going to speak to him," declared Hansel.

"Hansel!" exclaimed Grettel; "we mustn't disturb him!" And she glanced at Everychild for approval—though she hastily turned again so that she was observing the strange youth out of the corner of her eye, and she smiled more invitingly than ever.

"I don't care!" retorted Hansel. "He looks like a rich man's son, and he might tell us where we could get something to eat."

Just then the strange youth began to approach them with a proud air. He was really very handsome. He was very sturdy, and he was clothed smartly in a velvet jacket and knee breeches. A fine cloak fell loosely from his shoulders. He wore a plumed hat and carried a sword.

As he drew near Hansel said: "Hello! Have they been trying to lose you too?"

It was then that Everychild recognized the strange youth as Jack the Giant Killer; and at the same time he heard Grettel whispering:

"How handsome he is!"

Jack the Giant Killer replied smilingly to Hansel: "Lose me? Not at all! It's plain you don't know who I am." He touched his breast lightly with his forefinger. "I am Jack the Giant Killer." He then brought his heels together and removed his hat with a wide gesture, and made a fine bow.

"I recognized you," said Everychild, "though I didn't know you lived in this neighborhood. I mean, near Hansel and Grettel."

Jack replied with a certain neat air: "I don't live anywhere in particular. Did you never hear of my seven-league hoots? I have a way of bobbing up wherever there are any giants."

In the meantime Grettel had sat down on a grassy bank beside the road. "It's very tiresome, walking," she said. And then, very politely (to Jack), "Won't you sit down?"

He accepted this invitation, and Everychild and Hansel also sat down.

Grettel sighed and said: "I'd like so much to hear about your fights with the giants. It must be wonderful to know how to fight."

Jack could not help saying "Ho—hum!" in a rather bored way, though he politely placed his hand over his mouth. "There's nothing great about it," he said, "when you're fixed for it. I've my seven-league boots, and my invisible cloak, and my sword of sharpness. You can't help winning with them. Of course, there's my wit, too."

Grettel smiled mysteriously and nodded her head. "It's your wit first of all," she declared knowingly.

Hansel was pouting. "Your wit?" he said; "does it help you to get what you want? If it does, I'd like to know about it."

Grettel had wriggled herself into a comfortable position; but now she sat up stiffly. She put her hand over her mouth and whispered, "Please, Hansel, don't say anything about *food*!" But she quickly turned an untroubled face to Jack, who was saying:

"There's the way I got old Blunderbore, for example. You've heard about that, haven't you?" And he looked anxiously at all three, one after another.

Everychild and Hansel looked at each other dubiously, but Grettel saved the situation by saying, "It was rather a long time ago. If you'd just go over it again ..."

"That was my most famous piece of work," said Jack. "You see, I carry a leather pouch under my cloak. It's filled with food——"

There was an almost violent interruption by Hansel. "Food!" he exclaimed. But Grettel edged closer to him so that she could tug at his sleeve without being seen.

"Of course!" continued Jack. "Well, one day after I'd had dinner with Blunderbore I boasted that I could do something he couldn't do. He laughed—and I knew I had him. Says I, 'Very well, I'll show you. I'm going to rip my stomach open without feeling it.' We'd been eating ginger-bread, and I'd slipped a piece into my pouch."

A strange light had come into Hansel's eyes, and he sighed with ecstasy "Ginger-bread!"

"So," resumed Jack, "I plunged my knife into my pouch hidden under my cloak, and a fine bit of ginger-bread tumbled out."

Everychild repeated the words—"Into the pouch hidden under your cloak." And Jack concluded with—

"Of course—so."

He made an expert pass with his sword, and instantly a number of red apples and a dozen fine tarts rolled from under his cloak and were lying there on the grass.

Without even a hint of ceremony Hansel flung himself forward on his stomach and seized upon the tarts greedily.

Even Grettel could not conceal her desire for food, and she exclaimed joyously, "Oh, tarts! Could I have one?"

"Why not?" replied Jack lightly; whereupon Everychild placed a number of the tarts in her lap, and she began to eat heartily.

"This comes of wearing one's good dress," said Grettel between tarts. "If I'd been wearing an old rag I'd have seen no tricks, that's certain."

Jack regarded her a little curiously. "As I was saying," he resumed, "old Blunderbore shouted 'Pooh-hoo!' at what I had done. That was his ugly, boasting way, you know. He jabbed his knife into his own stomach to show he wasn't to be outdone—and down he fell, dead as a doornail."

Everychild's heart was beating hard and his face wore a troubled expression. "I suppose," he said after a thoughtful pause, "Blunderbore was a very wicked giant—like the Giant Fear?"

Jack was frankly surprised at this question. "A giant is a giant," he said shortly.

But the troubled expression did not leave Everychild's face. What if there were a few good giants?—and what if a good giant should encounter Jack?

His reflections were broken in upon by a triumphant voice—Jack's voice—exclaiming, "Here's luck for you! Here's one of them coming now!"

It was true. A very large giant was approaching through the forest. And the strangest part of it all was that Everychild knew quite well that this was a good giant. His eyes began to shine and he was thrilled through and through.

He had never seen so wonderful a creature: so splendid, so powerful, so fascinating. The giant seemed almost to tread on air. He held his face up so that the sun shone on it. His eyes were filled with magic. He wore a wreath of leaves about his hair. A garment like a toga fell gracefully from his shoulders. He was shod with sandals. He carried his hands before him as if

they would gather in the sunshine. A smile half sly and half gentle was on his lips.

Everychild clasped his hands eagerly as he gazed at the giant. He seemed to know that this splendid stranger would lead him presently, and he was not certain whether he should wish to be led or not—whether it would be good or evil to be led by him.

His musing and wonder were broken in upon by Jack, who was again speaking. "I'll give you a little exhibition of my skill," he said, "I'll have his life before your very eyes."

Everychild became greatly troubled. He could not speak for a moment. He could not bear to think that the giant should be slain. He even ventured to hope that he had no cause for fear—that so powerful a creature might be depended upon to protect himself. Yet Jack the Giant Killer seemed just now a very valiant figure, and it was plain that he believed it to be his duty to slay the approaching giant.

It was Grettel who replied to Jack. "Dear me!" she exclaimed incredulously, "How shall you do it?"

"I haven't thought of a way yet," was the response. "It takes wit, you know. I'll think of a way before long. Don't speak so loud."

The giant had come quite close to them by this time. "Good morning," he said pleasantly.

Not one of the children recognized him, and Everychild ventured to say, in a polite tone, "Good morning ... though I don't believe we know who you are." He was thinking: "If he will only explain that he is a good giant!"

"I am known as the giant, Will o'Dreams," was the reply.

Everychild was charmed by the beauty of his voice; but he was startled when Jack cried out sternly,—

"And what are you doing here?"

The giant regarded Jack with thoughtful eyes. "A natural question, I am sure," he said after a pause. "Permit me to say, then, that I have merely been looking at a few masterpieces."

At this Everychild felt a delightful sense of mystery stir within him. The words seemed tremendous—and yet he could not think what they meant!

But Jack the Giant Killer nodded his head shrewdly. And almost instantly he said, "Well, you'll look at no more masterpieces—whatever they are!"

The giant seemed to be simply amused. "Say you so?" he replied.

Grettel clasped her hands with delight. "How suitably he talks!" said she.

"I do," said Jack. "You don't know me, eh? I'm Jack the Giant Killer. And you're just about my size."

It was here that Everychild interfered. "Maybe he's a good giant," he said to Jack. And to the giant he added courteously, "Won't you sit down and rest awhile, Will o'Dreams?"

"I thank you," responded the giant; and he sat down by the side of Everychild.

And instantly the thought came to Everychild that at whatever cost he must save the splendid stranger from that terrible sword of sharpness which Jack the Giant Killer was even now drawing from its scabbard.

CHAPTER VI

A FIGHT WHICH WAS STRANGELY ENDED

It was plain that Jack was in a determined mood. He was no longer seated with the others. He drew off a little and capered in a very confident manner. For the moment he was content to say nothing more to the giant. He had drawn his sword; and now he hopped about, cutting the heads from tall grasses and tender twigs from the trees.

You would have said that his mind was very far away but for the fact that he occasionally glanced at the others to see if this or that skilful pass had been witnessed; and occasionally he gazed at the giant in a very stern manner.

As for the giant, he spoke pleasantly to Everychild, asking him whither he was bound; and when Everychild replied, quite simply, that he had set out in quest of Truth, the giant nodded his approval.

It was Everychild who introduced the subject of Jack and the threat he had made. "Maybe he'll not do anything when he finds you're a good giant," he said; "and anyway, I suppose you'll know how to defend yourself—a big fellow like you?"

He was greatly disturbed by the giant's reply. "I'm a big fellow, yes," said Will o'Dreams, "and I can hold my own with other big fellows. You know how to take them. But when you're a giant it seems you don't know how to take the little chaps. I've always regarded Jack the Giant Killer as a brave and honorable youth. But some of the little fellows are hard to handle. They're full of tricks and deceit. I've had many a tussle in my time; but when it comes to a fair test, give me a man who's got honest strength—who's ashamed to do mean tricks."

Everychild was considering this when he heard a voice behind him; and turning his head, he was surprised to perceive that the Masked Lady was standing there, quite close to him, and that Mr. Literal was only a step or two distant. Mr. Literal held his note-book before him, and he had just lifted his hand with a flourish, after putting a period after something he had written. It was he who was speaking.

"It's all very well," said Mr. Literal to the Masked Lady, "for him to be making friends with that giant," and he nodded his head toward Everychild

and his companion, "but just the same, I could wish to see him in better company. Look at the giant's eyes. Visionary eyes. Very little precise thinking going on back of a pair of eyes like that!"

The Masked Lady replied quietly: "It's only little creatures who consider precision the first of all merits. Let them alone."

Everychild's attention was attracted then by Jack, whose manner had suddenly changed and who now approached the giant with a mysterious smile on his lips.

"You know," said Jack, "I was only joking awhile ago when I spoke roughly to you."

"Ah, it's all right then," replied the giant in a tone of relief.

"Yes, I was only joking. Just my way of getting acquainted." And he continued to smile.

Presently he added meditatively. "A big chap like you—it must be wonderful to be as strong as you are. The way you ought to be able to handle a sword—I suppose you carry a sword, of course?"

"Nothing like it!" replied the giant.

"You don't say so! A terrible bludgeon then, no doubt?"

"No. You see, my taste doesn't run in that direction. When I'm wishing for power or fame I think of ... it's a little difficult to explain. Wings. I wish for powerful big wings, so that time and space couldn't hold me back."

"Wings! That sounds funny!" said Jack. "But a sling-shot, at least—of course you carry a fine sling-shot around with you?"

"No, nor a sling-shot." The giant extended his arms with a candid gesture, so that Jack might see he was wholly unarmed.

Then a very amazing thing happened. Jack the Giant Killer suddenly uttered a cry of triumph. "Fool that you are!" he exclaimed, "to confess that

you are helpless! Do you suppose we are deceived by your make-believe friendliness? Prepare to die!" And he lowered his sword with a swift flourish.

So terrible was his manner that it seemed the giant was really lost. Every one felt this. Grettel clasped her hands tensely and a light at once fearful and eager leaped into her eyes. Hansel drew back as if to be out of the way of danger. The giant, pale yet unflinching, arose.

It was then that Everychild, springing to the side of the giant, cried out in a ringing tone—

"Stay!"

The giant calmly lifted his hand and gazed into space; and at that moment, from out the depths of the forest, came a commanding voice, exclaiming—

"Jack the Giant Killer! Jack the Giant Killer!"

The voice was distant, yet sonorous and stern.

Everychild looked to see who it was that had spoken: and whom should he behold emerging from the forest but Father Time! He carried his scythe and sand-glass, and he moved forward with majesty, yet with haste. He fixed his gaze upon Jack and uttered one more thrilling word—"Stop!"

To Everychild he seemed a changed person as he adjusted both his scythe and his sand-glass in his left hand and advanced with his right hand uplifted. He seemed very stern. His eyes traveled from one face to another until at length they rested only on Jack. Then upon the shoulder of Jack the Giant Killer his hand descended.

Everychild could scarcely believe his own eyes for a moment or two. A tragic change occurred in the youth who had been so splendid.

He had become old and infirm! His clothes were in tatters, his form was bent, his sword was covered with rust.

Then Jack—trembling and helpless—looked wonderingly and forlornly at Father Time. "What have you done to me?" he asked in a quivering voice.

Father Time replied calmly: "I have laid my hand on your shoulder!"

"Yes—but I don't mean that," said Jack. "Something strange ... my boots: see, they have been changed. They were new and wonderful. In them I could take steps seven leagues long!"

Father Time replied: "Jack the Giant Killer, when I have laid my hand upon you again and yet again, you shall possess the true seven-league boots. They shall carry you seventy times seven leagues—and beyond."

"And my invisible cloak—it was rich and fine before you came; and now it is ragged."

"Jack the Giant Killer, when I have laid my hand upon you again and yet again, it shall be given to you to wear the true and only invisible cloak."

Jack looked ruefully at his sword. With a sob he exclaimed, "And my sword of sharpness!..."

Father Time replied, "Jack the Giant Killer, beneath my touch the sword of sharpness becomes the sword of rust."

For an instant Jack searched the faces of the others. "Have I no friend here?" he demanded. "Will no one take my part?"

Everychild's heart was touched with pity; but before he could speak Father Time continued:

"I am your friend. And I bid you go home and cultivate those virtues which you know not. Be patient, and contentment shall come: a friend more unfailing than a strong arm. And hope shall come: a friend more fleet than seven-league boots. And faith shall be yours: far better raiment than your cloak which was invisible."

But Jack hung his head. "And my beautiful sword that was my pride ..."

To the amazement of all it was the giant, Will o'Dreams, who stepped forward to comfort Jack. In a voice which was marvelously kind he said:

"I know you for a brave youth, Jack the Giant Killer; and as for me, it has been said that I am generous. Listen: I alone among all the race of giants have power to bid Father Time move speedily, or to retrace his steps. Let us see what I can do."

He solemnly lifted his hand, and Father Time, walking backward, disappeared in the forest.

At that very moment the Masked Lady took a step forward, saying in a soft and soothing voice:

"Jack the Giant Killer, if you will come to me with all your heart and place your hand in mine, I can make you beautiful and strong, despite all that Father Time has done."

Jack lifted his troubled eyes to hers. "You?" he asked. And then he tried to approach her, but he had become too infirm. "I cannot!" he cried despairingly.

He would have fallen, but the gentle hand of the giant, Will o'Dreams, was instantly about him, supporting him. "Let me help," he said.

Everychild's heart was beating loudly. "Let me help too!" he cried. "I have always been fond of Jack the Giant Killer."

Between these two, then, the infirm little old man, who had been the gay youth, moved totteringly toward the Masked Lady. With a slow, tremulous gesture he placed his hand in hers, which was stretched out to him.

A miracle! He was instantly the brave and gallant youth again, seven-league boots, invisible cloak, sword of sharpness and all!

He lifted his sword with a great shout of joy. And then, remembering his manners, he said to the Masked Lady, "I thank you, lady!" And to Everychild he said, "They shall never be deceived who put their faith in

you." And to the giant, Will o'Dreams, he said, after a solemn pause—"It may be that you shall see me fight again; but when that day comes, I shall be fighting on your side!"

And so he marched gallantly away into the forest.

It was then that Everychild observed that the night was falling. "Perhaps we ought to sleep awhile," he said to his companions. "This seems a very nice place, and we may have to go a long distance to-morrow."

They all found places on the grassy bank, the giant Will o'Dreams lying down beside Everychild like a true friend.

They had no sooner taken their places than it was really night. Insects in the forest about them made a droning sound. A distant bell rang faintly. One by one the members of the band fell asleep.

All save Everychild. He alone was wakeful. And he knew that the Masked Lady had taken a step forward and was looking down at him.

He lifted himself on his elbow and looked away toward the sky where it appeared through the trees. And suddenly he exclaimed. "Oh, wonderful! I think I saw a star fall!"

The Masked Lady spoke to him soothingly: "Perhaps. They fall every little while."

Everychild had not known this. "Do they?" he asked; "I wonder why?"

The Masked Lady said, "Perhaps it is so we may know that they don't amount to very much, after all."

"Not amount to much! But they are worlds, aren't they?"

"Yes, they are worlds."

"Then if they don't amount to a great deal, is there anything that does?"

"Nothing but human beings."

"Human beings ... and why do they?"

"Because every human being—even the most obscure or humble or wayward—is a little bit of God."

Everychild pondered that. It gave him a deep feeling of comfort. He gazed away into the mysterious sky. He mused, "What a journey I shall have to-morrow, with my new friend by my side."

He fell asleep repeating the words, "A little bit of God—a little bit of God ..."

CHAPTER VII

THE ADVENTURE OF WILL O'DREAMS

Scarcely had he fallen asleep when a stealthy figure emerged from the gloom of night and sought out the place where Will o'Dreams lay sleeping. The stealthy figure proved to be none other than Mr. Literal; and after he had stood looking down upon the sleeping band an instant, he kicked the Giant's foot warily.

The giant was up in an instant. His first thought was that his services were needed. There was no hint of resentment in his heart; and he proved his gentle qualities by moving carefully, so that the others would not be disturbed.

He bent his head above Mr. Literal to hear what he had to say.

"Follow me!" said Mr. Literal coldly; and without more ado he turned and led the way into the depths of the forest, the giant following him wonderingly.

They came before long to an old house with all the blinds drawn save at one window, through which the beams of a lamp shone dimly.

Mr. Literal opened the front door, which creaked angrily. He lighted a hall lamp so that he and the giant might find their way up a flight of stairs in safety. A musty odor filled the giant's nostrils, causing him to wrinkle his nose slightly. But he said nothing.

Up the stairway they proceeded, and into a study. It was in this room that a lamp had been left burning.

Mr. Literal approached a table and drew forth two chairs. "Sit down," he said, still without looking at the giant. And Will o'Dreams seated himself in one of the chairs and waited for Mr. Literal to explain his somewhat peculiar behavior.

As an immediate explanation did not seem to be forthcoming, he employed his spare time in looking about the room. There was dust everywhere, and frayed rugs and faded hangings. But there were a number of busts which were really a delight to the eye: of Shakespeare, of Burns, of Victor Hugo, of Dickens and of others. And there were book cases filled to overflowing with books—all dust-covered, as if they had not been touched for years.

Mr. Literal took a seat at last; and for a moment there was silence in the room and throughout the old house, save that a window rattled somewhere in the night breezes. Then Mr. Literal leaned forward deliberately, his finger tips fitted together and his lips drawn into very prim lines. And at last he spoke.

"Listen to me, *Mr. Will o'Dreams*: I know you!" His tone was triumphant, merciless.

But the giant only nodded politely and said, "Very well, Mr. Literal; and I know you, too!"

"At least," said Mr. Literal icily, "I do not go about under an assumed name!"

"Nor do I," replied the other.

"It is false!" exclaimed Mr. Literal. "I know you too well. You are that evil creature, Imagination."

"I am sometimes called so," admitted the giant candidly. "The name has a somewhat formidable sound. I prefer to be known as Will o'Dreams—that is all."

"You are trying to evade the truth," declared Mr. Literal. "Well do you know that if you were to make your real name known, honest folk would shun you."

The giant only waved his hand lightly. "I will not argue with you," he said.

"But I have something else to say to you," said Mr. Literal. "Your statement to those children on the road—that was false too."

"What statement?" inquired the giant, his brows lifting slightly.

"You informed them that you were looking for masterpieces; yet you know well that your real purpose was to becloud the young minds of those children—to turn them from the quest of Truth. Dare you deny this?"

"I do indeed. I assert again: I was looking for masterpieces."

"Masterpieces indeed!—in a forest! *There* are masterpieces"—and he pointed to the bookcases. "But you were not even looking for my house."

"Masterpieces indeed!—in a forest! There are masterpieces."

[Illustration: "Masterpieces indeed!—in a forest! *There* are masterpieces."]

"I was not thinking of books," admitted the giant.

"I grant, there are other kinds of masterpieces," said Mr. Literal; "but they are not to be found in a forest."

"Ah, Mr. Literal!" cried the giant. "I would that I might open your eyes. Believe me, the forest is filled with masterpieces of such perfection as the hand of man can never know."

"So—then name me one!"

"The tiniest leaf that falls from its stem. Not all the human race could duplicate it. The humblest plant. The human eye has no power to take in all its marvels. And as for the trees—what has the world produced that can match them?"

Mr. Literal was flushing uncomfortably. "That is a large boast," he said. "The world has produced Karnac; it has produced the Petit Trianon, and St. Peter's and St. Paul's."

"But my dear sir," cried the giant warmly, "cannot you see that the most labored structure of man is crude and clumsy and artificial, when compared with any tree in all the world? Houses are dead, pathetic things. They begin to decay the moment they are built. Rightly seen they are hideous, save when they are considered in relation to some simple human need. They keep the wind and rain away—for which, God knows, we should be the better sometimes. They have no beauty save the spirit of human striving that is within them—and that too often is a tarnished thing. But a tree! There are fairies under the trees, truly! True aspirations hover about them, and beautiful dreams." He lowered his voice and said reverently, "The Holy Spirit is all about them."

"They are simply trees," said Mr. Literal harshly.

"Yes," agreed the giant, nodding and smiling, "they are simply trees."

But Mr. Literal hitched his chair forward angrily. "We are talking nonsense," he declared. "It is your plan to divert me from my purpose. But you shall not do so. Listen: I forbid you to associate with those innocent

children. You would corrupt them. It shall be my duty to expose you if you do not cease from following after them. Do you hear?"

The giant bowed his head thoughtfully. "You ask too much," he said. "I know I have done evil in my time. But I am repentant. Come, believe me when I say that I would be only a friendly companion to those children. I would add to their innocent joys and take from their sorrows. You do not know me, really. I have no wish to offend you; but I tell you you ask too much when you bid me turn aside from that pleasant company."

He arose and turned toward the door.

"You are warned," said Mr. Literal. "Persist in your present course and I shall bring you to your knees."

"Abandon Everychild?" said the giant musingly. And he shook his head. "No," he said. Then, wishing to conciliate the old man, he looked about him to where the busts reposed. "They are all friends of mine," he said with a pleasant smile.

"They are all dead," said Mr. Literal coldly.

"What!—Shakespeare dead?" cried the giant in amazement. But he did not remain for other words. Mr. Literal was staring stupidly at nothing. He went out into the hall and closed the door behind him. He would have descended the stairs then, but some one brushed against him lightly and whispered, "Why do you waste your time in there?"

"I went in against my will," said the giant.

The stranger said in glad tones, "I know you well."

The giant replied, "My name is Will o'Dreams."

"Yes, yes," said the other. "My name is Will, too. Though certain well-meaning persons have always preferred to refer to me as William. I used to write plays, you know."

The giant gazed at him in the dim light. "Of course," he said.

"I used to live beside the Avon," said the other.

The giant's heart grew soft. "It is a beautiful stream," he said. "And children play along its banks, just as in the old days, and men and women passing that way are the happier because you once dwelt there."

But the other held up a cautioning finger. His eyes twinkled mischievously in the dim light. "Not so loud," he said. "Old Mr. Literal will hear you—and you know he doesn't know I am here!"

They parted then; and the giant went back to his place where the children lay asleep.

PART II

**ARGUMENT: EVERYCHILD PITIES THE SORROWS OF
CINDERELLA AND REJOICES IN HER RELEASE
FROM BONDAGE; HE ENCOUNTERS A DOG THAT
LOOKS UPON HIM WITH FAVOR.**

CHAPTER VIII

A PURSUIT IN THE DARK

Everychild thought perhaps he had been asleep a long time when he was awakened by the sound of a clock in a distant tower striking the hour of 1. He became quite wide awake.

He looked to his right and to his left. Hansel and Grettel were on one side of him, sleeping deeply. Hansel was even snoring. The giant, on his other side, lay motionless.

He looked to see if the Masked Lady had remained near him, but she was nowhere to be seen. Mr. Literal also had disappeared.

Then he sat up suddenly, his heart thumping loudly. There was the sound of hurrying feet on the road nearby. And there was something about the sound ... you could tell that it was some one who was lost, or in trouble. Presently there was a sound of weeping too.

Everychild sat with his hands clasped about his knees, staring at the road: and before long, there she was—a girl running as if she were in great peril. And as she drew nearer Everychild felt quite sure he knew who the

girl was. He could not be sure how he knew. But a name came into his mind, and he said to himself, "It is Cinderella."

She raced past him as if she were a leaf caught in the wind. Again he heard her weeping. And then, without at all knowing what he intended to do, he sprang to his feet and dashed down the road after her. It would be fine to speak to her, he thought. And besides, it seemed almost certain that she needed help.

But it was amazing how fast she could run. He thought: "That's the kind of a girl you would like to play with—a girl who can run like that."

Still, he hoped she would become tired before long, so that he might overtake her. After all, it was rather uncomfortable, pursuing her in the dark. His own feet made a fearful noise—a ghostly patter which awoke the night echoes.

Moreover, certain wild creatures of the forest were disturbed. An owl dashed from its branches overhead and went sailing down the avenues of the forest. A rabbit, sitting on a little hummock, dropped its forefeet to the ground and went prancing away, to wheel presently and look at the road suspiciously.

"I'll never overtake her," thought Everychild. He could just see her now: a mere blur in the shadows far ahead of him. He could no longer hear the sound of her feet. Then quite suddenly she disappeared.

Had she fallen? Had she hidden behind a tree? Was she afraid of him?

He ran more softly. If she were hiding he must not frighten her. If he could only speak to her once she would know very well that she need not fear him.

But when he came to the spot where she had disappeared he perceived immediately that she had not hidden. At this point a path turned away from the road, and it seemed clear that she had taken the path.

The path led into a deeper forest. It became very silent and black. He could barely see the path beneath his feet. And it seemed to him that he was now all surrounded by living, hidden creatures, who knew that he was passing. But he could not feel that Cinderella was anywhere near him.

The path turned into a lane, and the lane entered a region where there were vague fields on either side, fields in which things had been planted. And then he stopped suddenly, not knowing whether he should continue on his way, or return to his companions by the side of the road. He had discerned a house before him, standing on the top of a hill. And although it was very late, a single light burned in one of its windows.

For just a moment he reflected; and then he continued on his way, in the direction of that lighted window.

CHAPTER IX

CINDERELLA AT HOME

For just a few moments let us enter that house of the lighted window, that we may witness certain strange happenings.

We come into an immense, old-fashioned kitchen or scullery.

A candle burned on a mantel, sending its tranquil light out into the room and creating ghostly shadows. Under the mantel, in the deepest shadows of all, andirons and a crane seemed to be slinking back as if they were hiding.

In the center of the room there was a rough wooden table. Over against the wall, near the door which opened to the highway, stood a grandfather's clock, ticking severely, as if it were dissatisfied with the way things were going in the house. There were a number of other doors visible, all closed as if they were saying, "This is an orderly house, and everybody has gone to bed, of course!"

But everybody hadn't gone to bed! Over beyond the wooden table, against the wall, there was a bed, and there was nobody in it. Moreover, there was a figure seated at the wooden table: the figure of a woman, who silently polished the spoons which were scattered before her. She had already scoured certain pots and pans which were piled in a heap near her hand.

Suddenly the strange happenings began.

A mouse appeared among the pots and pans on the table. It sat an instant, with alert eyes and fidgety nose and whiskers, and then it scrambled down the leg of the table and crossed the floor in the direction of the grandfather's clock. An instant later there it was again, climbing up the white face of the clock!

The clock ticked more severely than ever. The mouse disappeared amid the works of the clock: and presto! The clock loudly struck one.

The mouse darted into sight again, slipping down across the face of the clock. Then it disappeared.

The vibrations of the clock, filling the room as with a great clamor, slowly died away.

Then there was another sound: a nervous rattling of the latch on the door opening to the highway. The door opened rather abruptly, and Cinderella, panting and pale, stood on the threshold.

For an instant she seemed afraid to enter; yet plainly she was also afraid to remain standing there on the threshold. She glanced swiftly about the room and then she entered and closed the door sharply behind her. She stood for a moment, panting and leaning against the door.

There was something very strange about her; for although she was weary and frightened, and clad in the shabbiest old dress imaginable, her face nevertheless shone with rapture.

Need I tell you what had occurred to her? She had forgotten what the good fairy had told her about coming home before one o'clock; and as a result her coach-and-four and her coachman had been changed back to what they had originally been: a pumpkin, a rat, and four mice. What a disaster!

Yet after she had stood against the door long enough to catch her breath she advanced into the room, thrusting her arms upward and forward as if she were embracing a lovely vision. Her eyes burned with a glorious light.

She had not seen the figure at the table, bending over the spoons. It was plain that in imagination she was seeing something far different. And then she uttered these words (to nobody at all!):

"Oh, the wonder of it, the wonder of it!"

Then something else happened. One of the inner doors opened and a young lady stood craning her neck so that she could look into the room. She stood so an instant, and then she was joined by another young lady, and both came into the room.

They were both simply glorious in party-frocks, though on the skirt of one the ruffles had been bunched clumsily, and the bodice of the other was slightly twisted.

They were Cinderella's sisters.

The first sister had opened the door just in time to hear what Cinderella said; and now she rather cleverly imitated Cinderella's words and manner—

"Oh, the wonder of it! The wonder of what?"

For a moment longer Cinderella gazed into space, her eyes holding a glorious vision. Then, lowering her gaze and observing her sisters, she said, a little less fervently, "Oh ... everything!"

The second sister now spoke. There was a pitying note in her voice as she said to the first sister, "*As if she had the slightest idea of anything as wonderful as the things we've seen!*"

To which the first sister replied with a sigh—"Poor Cinderella!"

But Cinderella only turned away from them that she might hide the secret in her eyes. She sat down before the fireplace, and the two sisters seated themselves on either side of her. None of them had taken the slightest notice of the figure at the wooden table in the middle of the room.

Cinderella seemed to be dreaming again, while the two sisters were plainly overflowing with excitement. They glanced at each other across Cinderella as if to say, "Shall we tell her?" And each nodded eagerly to the other.

Then said the second sister: "It is we who have seen the truly wonderful things, Cinderella."

"Yes," said Cinderella dreamily, "I know."

Said the first sister: "But you don't know—not the half. You know we've been to the ball, but you don't know what happened there."

Cinderella leaned forward, resting her cheeks in her hands. Her sisters could not see her eyes. "Tell me what happened," she said.

"The most wonderful princess came to the ball," said the first sister. "Quite a stranger—not a soul knew her. She was a sensation."

The second sister could scarcely wait to add, "The loveliest creature ever seen!"

Cinderella looked at her sisters now, one after the other. Her eyes seemed to caress them. "Ah, tell me about her," she said.

Said the first sister: "She first came last night—and then again to-night. She came late, from nobody knew where in an equipage the like of which was never seen before. She came late and left early."

Cinderella forgot herself a little. "Yes, I know," she said, "but where _____"

"How should *you* know?" demanded the second sister sharply.

Cinderella hastened to say, "I mean—tell me more about her."

It was the first sister's turn to speak. "We could never describe her," she said. "Her eyes—they were like certain bright flowers shining in the dusk ..."

"Oh, were they!" cried Cinderella softly.

And now the second sister said, "And her form—it was like a young poplar tree in the wind ..."

"Oh, how good of you to tell me!" cried Cinderella.

The first sister could scarcely wait to say, "And her dress—it was like dew on the grass!"

Cinderella brought her hands together with rapture. "Was it truly?" she asked.

"Quite like it," said the first sister. "And her hair and cheeks—they were—they were like yours, poor Cinderella, only of course much more beautiful!"

Cinderella's hands were still clasped. "Oh, much more beautiful, I know!" she murmured softly.

Then a silence fell upon all the sisters. Cinderella clasped her hands about her knees and gazed dreamily into the fireplace. Her sisters stole pitying glances at her. They noted her wretched dress, and gentle regret shone in their eyes.

At length the first sister said generously, "You know, Cinderella, we should be very glad to have you go places with us and have a good time, too, if mother——"

But the second sister interrupted dutifully, "If it were the custom for the younger sister to be treated like the older sisters."

Cinderella nodded, "I know it is a custom—that's all," she said. "Maybe my turn will come when you've both got good husbands and fine establishments of your own."

The two sisters arose. The first began to yawn loudly; but remembering her manners she patted her lips with her finger tips, changing the yawn into a smile. She advanced toward the door by which she had entered. The second sister made as if to follow her, but turned for a final word.

"It's lovely of you not to be jealous of us, Cinderella," she said. "I hope your turn will come, too. Good-night."

Cinderella had already relapsed into her dreamy mood. "Good-night," she called. And she continued to sit and gaze into the fireplace.

But suddenly she started up excitedly and turned about. She fixed her gaze upon the door opening to the highway. Her left hand moved unconsciously to her heart.

Some one was timidly knocking on the door!

She stood for a moment as if to make sure that she had not dreamed that some one had knocked. It was very late, and the house was in a lonely spot. Then she advanced, marveling yet unafraid, and removed the bar from before the door.

The door opened quietly and Everychild stood on the threshold.

CHAPTER X

CINDERELLA'S DECISION

Everychild's eyes beamed with delight. "Then you *did* come to this house," he said. "I thought you did; but you ran so fast—I couldn't be sure

where you went." It is true that he was breathing quickly, but he was perfectly happy.

Cinderella stood regarding him, two finger tips pressed against her cheek. "Have I—have I ever met you before?" she asked wonderingly.

He did not really reply to this. "I was beside the road with my companions," he said. "We were lying down. I saw you hurry by. I could tell something was the matter. I followed you. I hope you don't mind!"

She regarded him dubiously. "You look like a very nice boy," she said. "But it's fearfully late for you to be out or for me to ask you to come in. Still _____"

"Please let me come in," pleaded Everychild. "There's something I want very much to ask you."

After a pause she said, "Well, yes, you may come in." She stood aside, watching him with a whimsical smile as he advanced into the room.

He stopped in surprise when he saw the figure at the table, bending over the spoons. It was the Masked Lady. She had put aside her shepherdess's crook and had become a house-servant. But he was so full of the thought of Cinderella that he paid little heed to the Masked Lady.

He sat down in one of the chairs the sisters had occupied; and when Cinderella followed and sat down by him he gazed at her intently.

"Tell me—what was it you wished to know?" asked Cinderella.

He had trouble finding the right words; but at length he began, "Your mother—does she whip you? You know, you were running so, and you seemed so frightened ..."

Cinderella looked beyond him. She seemed to speak to herself rather than to Everychild. "She doesn't whip me," she said. "If it were only being whipped I shouldn't mind so much. A whipping ... it's soon over and little harm done. No, she doesn't whip me."

"Or perhaps she tries to lose you," said Everychild. "You were really in a dreadful state, you know, as you came running along the road."

But Cinderella continued to speak musingly, as if to herself. "She doesn't whip me. But to know that you're never to be praised or loved; to have your mother look at you coldly, and say nothing—or just to have her pay no attention at all, but to act as if a wrong had been done her somehow ... a whipping would be easy, compared with that."

Everychild took her up with swift comprehension. "I know what you mean," he declared. "Not to have them listen when you speak, as if you were in the way ..."

Cinderella gazed at him darkly. "Child, what do you know of such things?" she demanded.

Everychild answered simply, "Our mothers were like that too. I know what it means."

Cinderella said, "Your mothers?"

"First it was just me," explained Everychild. "And then it was Hansel and Grettel."

"Ah, those poor children!" exclaimed Cinderella. "I've heard how their parents took them out into the woods to lose them. I'm surprised they ever went back."

"They're not going back again. They're going with me. With me and the giant and——"

"But where?" interrupted Cinderella.

"And you shall go with us," concluded Everychild. "That's what I wanted to tell you. We're going to find the truth."

But this only brought a sad smile to Cinderella's lips. "Ah," she said, "I wonder if it would be really wise to do that. Sometimes I think our hearts never break until we know the whole truth."

Everychild could not understand this; and he was relieved when the Masked Lady spoke. She was still polishing spoons slowly. Now she said, without looking up, "Our hearts break when we know only half the truth. They are healed when all the truth is known."

"Come, it will be great to have you go too," declared Everychild urgently.

Cinderella slowly relaxed in her chair. She rested her chin in her palm and gazed at the floor. Her eyes presently took in the fact that she had lost a slipper.

"I don't see how I could manage it," she said. "I seem to have lost a slipper. One of the pretty glass ones. But there, you don't know about that." She aroused herself and began looking about for her old slippers. She looked here and there. She found them at last under the bed. She took them into her hands and turned them over and over, regarding them sadly. Then without seeming cause she started guiltily and fixed her gaze on the door through which her sisters had made their entrance and exit.

"Some one is coming!" she whispered excitedly,

Everychild sprang to his feet.

"It's my mother, I think," added Cinderella. "I'm afraid there'll be trouble. Please run away. No, I don't think I could go with you, after all."

Everychild stood undecided an instant; and then he could see the inner door opening. He would have run away, then, but it was too late; and Cinderella seized him by the arm. It was plain that she was trying to think of a place where he might hide.

He knew what to do in a second. He dropped to the floor and rolled under Cinderella's bed! From his hiding-place under the bed he saw the door open wide and a very pompous-appearing matron enter the room.

This was Cinderella's mother, who began immediately, in a rage:

"So, my fine girl, you are here ahead of me!"

Cinderella bowed her head. "I am here, mother," she said in a low voice.

"Without your fine clothes, I see!"

"My fine clothes, mother?" said Cinderella, with downcast eyes.

"None of that, my lass! A mother's eyes are not deceived. I knew it was you! All those jewels and silks, finer than your poor dear sisters can afford to wear, did not deceive me. And the prince dancing with you shamelessly while your poor sisters sat by as if they had wooden legs ... did you suppose for an instant you could deceive me?"

Of course Cinderella knew she had been found out. She replied in a tone of sad resignation: "I could scarcely have expected to deceive you, mother. I've had so little experience in doing so. You know I've always been obedient—always before. Deceit isn't easy. I had only changed my dress, after all, while you had put on a gracious manner—and yet I knew you instantly."

"Precisely ... *What?* Oh, you shall pay for that!"

The angry creature looked about for some means of inflicting a cruel punishment, and her eyes came upon a closet door. "Come, to bed with you!" she exclaimed. "In the closet! It will do very well for such as you. I'll have you under lock and key to-night, and to-morrow I'll look into your case, you impudent, disobedient wretch!"

Seeing what her mother's intention was, Cinderella cried in a mournful tone, "Oh, mother!"

But her mother stamped her foot violently. "In with you!" she cried. Whereupon she removed a key from its peg on the wall and unlocked the closet door. With one movement she forced Cinderella into the closet. Then she locked the door and replaced the key on its peg.

"Unless the child is a witch in disguise—which I shouldn't put apast her, for how else should she get the silks and jewels she wore to-night?—she'll not be able to show her face again until I come to let her out. I *wore a gracious manner*, did I?—and she knew me instantly in spite of it! There's a dutiful child for you. A dutiful child? A shameless hussy!"

And the furious creature blew out the candle on the mantel and left the room. You could hear her slam the door.

A faint cry of distress came from the locked closet: "Mother—mother!"

In the darkness Everychild's voice could be heard speaking cautiously, "Wait, Cinderella—wait until I can make a light."

The voice from the closet was heard again: "Mother—mother!"

And then Everychild's voice: "I must make a light, so that I can find the key!"

For the last time Cinderella's voice could be heard faintly—"Mother!"

And then there was the calm voice of the Masked Lady: "Now you can see!"

The room was lighted again! The Masked Lady had arisen from her place. She was holding the lighted candle above her head.

Not a second was wasted by Everychild. He hurriedly crossed the room and took the key from its peg. He unlocked the closet door.

Cinderella thrust the door open and burst into the room.

"I couldn't leave you there, you know," said Everychild.

Cinderella regarded him intently. "You could not leave me there—no," she said; "and you shall not leave me in this house, where I meet only indignities and abuse. Come, I am going with you."

Not another word was needed. Hand in hand they approached the outer door. For a moment Everychild disengaged his hand to remove the bar from before the door. He opened the door, and then hand in hand they passed the threshold.

As if she were moving quite absent-mindedly the Masked Lady went and closed the door behind them. She put the bar back in its place. She pondered a moment and then she re-locked the closet door, replacing the key on its wooden peg.

There was a sound of footsteps approaching; and instantly the light went out, though the Masked Lady had not blown upon it.

Pitch darkness for a moment, then the flash of a light. The mother of Cinderella was standing near the mantel, lighting the candle, which was back in its place again. The Masked Lady was seated by the wooden table, polishing spoons.

"I thought I heard a voice!" mused the mother of Cinderella.

She inspected the outer door. The bar was in its place. She looked at the closet door. It was locked. The key was on its peg.

CHAPTER XI

SOME ONE PASSES WITH A SONG ON THE ROAD OF TROUBLED CHILDREN

The sun came up and filled the woodland with patches of gold. Birds began to sing. The forest was awake.

The children began to awaken, one after another: Hansel, first. He got up and rubbed his eyes morosely and said, "I'm hungry as a wolf!"

His movements aroused Grettel. She said, "No wonder, Hansel. We really must have something to eat."

Then Everychild stirred; and then Cinderella, who was lying by his side. Next, the giant, Will o'Dreams, sprang to his feet and viewed the sun-patches far and near, and lifted his arms in delight. For the moment he quite forgot the threat which Mr. Literal had made against him. He was perfectly happy.

They all went a little distance and found a brook, where they washed their faces and quenched their thirst. Then Everychild remarked, "We ought to have breakfast."

Hansel looked at him almost contemptuously. "Ought we, indeed!" he exclaimed. "And I suppose you know where we're going to get it?"

"We must think," said Everychild.

And at that very moment there was the sound of some one coming along the road, singing. They all looked to see who it was.

"Aladdin!" exclaimed Everychild excitedly.

It was indeed Aladdin. His pigtail hung down adorably and his rosy mouth expressed nothing but happiness. He was singing—

"Tla-la-la ... tla-la-la ..."

He perceived the children standing in a row, gazing at him. He stopped short. His song ended. He stood there smiling.

"Good morning!" said Everychild. He added in a voice which faltered just enough to make his question seem in good taste, "Have you got your lamp?"

Aladdin moved a little, so that they might all see his lamp. He held it aloft and looked at it, and then at Everychild.

"And so you haven't been able to think of the best thing of all?" asked Everychild.

"Alas, no," replied Aladdin, his eyes suddenly becoming somber.

Everychild thought again, as he had done before, how strange it was that Aladdin should wish to be rid of his lamp. But he thought it best to speak cheerfully. "We were just wishing for breakfast," he said. "But of course it didn't do any good, because we hadn't any lamp."

Aladdin's eyes began to twinkle again. "What did you wish for breakfast?" he asked.

Hansel made haste to say, "Sausages—and plenty of them!"

Grettel reflected and said: "Eggs. Some nice poached eggs."

They all looked at Cinderella, who hesitated and then said reluctantly—"If I could just have a little marmalade and seed-cake——"

The giant said nothing at all; and at last Everychild spoke: "I'm not particular," he said. "Just anything that happens to be convenient."

This response pleased Aladdin best of all. He said, "Well, I'll wish for you." He pushed his soft loose sleeves back and held his lamp up. He rubbed it in a certain fashion, and sure enough a great genie appeared.

"If you'd just kindly prepare something nice for breakfast," said Aladdin to the genie courteously. And the genie made a salaam which delighted Grettel particularly, and then he began to pluck things out of the air—just as the magician in the theater does: a small stove from which a blue flame arose; a sauce-pan; a nice table covered with a white cloth; plates and knives and forks—everything. He placed a white cap on his head and held the sauce-pan over the blue flame. He kept smiling mischievously all the while; and at last he carried the sauce-pan to the table and poured something into every dish. Then he made another salaam, and that was all there was to him.

The children all eagerly took their places. They looked excitedly to see what the genie had prepared for them.

It was bread and milk in every case.

They all shouted gleefully because of the trick the genie had played on them. Then they looked about for Aladdin, who for the moment was nowhere to be seen.

Far down the road they heard him singing as he went on his way. His voice was faint and musical—

"Tla-la-la ... tla-la-la ..."

CHAPTER XII

EVERYCHILD BECOMES ACQUAINTED WITH A POOR DOG

After they had finished their breakfast they all decided it would be a wise plan to have a serious talk among themselves, so that they might agree upon their plans for the future.

"We ought to know just what we want to do," said Everychild.

"And how we're going to do it," said Cinderella.

Said Hansel: "I'm for keeping right ahead on this road, so we'll overtake that boy with the lamp."

Grettel could not think of a suggestion, and she contented herself with saying in a critical tone, "Oh, Hansel!"

"It might be that we ought to find some other road," said Everychild. "You know this is called the Road of Troubled Children."

"I am told," said the giant, speaking for the first time, "that if you watch for the guide-posts it presently turns into the Road of Happy Children."

A harsh voice behind them exclaimed. "It is false!" And turning his head, the giant beheld Mr. Literal glowering down upon him from behind. However, he paid not the slightest attention.

"Anyway," said Everychild, "it doesn't matter so much what road we take if we only find the truth at the end. We mustn't forget that's what we're looking for."

"You'll find that in a book," declared the harsh voice of Mr. Literal.

"I think we'll find it, no matter what road we take," said the giant.

"You'll find it in your hearts," another voice was heard to say. And now it was to be noted that the Masked Lady had also appeared.

"And when we find it," said Cinderella, "—then what shall we do?"

"When we find it we shall know what to do," said the giant.

"When you find it you'll be prepared to die," declared Mr. Literal.

"When they find it they shall be prepared to live," the voice of the Masked Lady was heard to say.

A laugh like the crackling of dry fagots was heard; and Mr. Literal exclaimed musingly: "The little simpletons! They seek to find the truth at their age! Little do they know that I have spent my whole life anxiously seeking it!"

The Masked Lady said softly: "It is found by those who have ceased to seek it anxiously."

Then the members of the band sat in silence for a time, each trying to decide what the truth would mean. Hansel was thinking that it would mean the secret of getting something to eat at every hour of the day and night. Cinderella decided it would mean a way of finding the prince who had danced with her at the ball. And Everychild got no further than the decision that it would mean something that would make every day perfectly delightful.

In the meantime the forest had become glorious with the heat and light of the ascending sun. The waking noises of the birds had given place to the business of being boldly active. And the children, with a common impulse, would have resumed their journey. But just at that moment a traveler was seen to be approaching.

It was Everychild who went forward to salute the traveler, who proved to be a boy with hanging head and lagging feet. His hands were thrust into his pockets and there were tear-stains on his cheeks.

"Good morning," said Everychild.

"Don't bother me," said the boy. "I'm running away."

"I didn't see you run," said Everychild.

The boy stopped and looked at Everychild reproachfully. "It's called running away," he said; "though everybody knows you don't run, and for that matter, there's no *away* about it. Mostly you turn around and go back. But I call it running away just the same. It takes a load off my mind."

"I know how it is," declared Everychild. "My friends and I have taken to the road, too; and if you like, you may join us."

The boy thought this over a moment; and at length he said, "I'll do it. I'll not get any further away, being with others, and it'll not be any harder to go back, when I weaken. I'm ready to join you now, only it might look better if I just drop in on my mother for a minute to tell her good-by."

If seemed to Everychild that perhaps this would be a wise thing to do. "And shall we wait for you?" he asked.

"You might just go along with me, if the others will wait, to make sure there isn't any foul play."

To this plan Everychild readily agreed; and after he had explained the situation to his companions, he set off with the new boy along a path which branched off from the road.

"My name is Tom," explained the boy. "Tom Hubbard." And after that they continued their way in silence.

They arrived, after no great journey, at a very prim little house, set down in a very prim little garden. Curtains hung in the windows just so, and the door-knob shone like gold. The only friendly thing about the place was a little black dog with a rough coat and great wistful eyes, which came running down the walk to leap up before the boy Tom, trying to lick his hands.

They entered the house, and the instant Everychild crossed the threshold he realized that he had never seen a house quite like this one. It made you think of a very careful drawing. Everything was at right angles with everything else. A small table stood precisely in the middle of the floor, and two really silly little chairs were placed before it. A spick-and-span cupboard, with a perforated tin front, stood over against the wall.

The little black dog ran over to the cupboard immediately and stood on his hind legs, gazing at the perforated doors.

"We'd better sit on the floor." said Tom, after he had glanced uneasily about the room.

This seemed a bit strange to Everychild, but he said politely, "I'm very fond of sitting on the floor myself."

And so they sat down on the floor and clasped their hands about their knees.

"And so this is where you live!" said Everychild, looking about him with frank interest.

"It is where I *did* live. I'll live here no more, now that I've found somebody to run away with. When she comes in—my mother, I mean—I'll just say good-by and light out."

"What's been the matter?" asked Everychild.

"It's no fit place for a boy to live," said Tom. "In the first place, nobody's ever home. Mother's always gadding about somewhere. She gives lectures on *The Home*, and she's never here except between lectures. And even then her mind is somewhere else. You don't dare to speak to her. She stares at nothing—so. And all she says is, 'For goodness' sake, don't shout so;' or '*Must* you make that noise when you're eating?' or 'Can't you walk without shaking the floor like that?' and finally, 'I think you'll drive me insane at last—such a careless creature you are!'"

"It must be very bad," said Everychild.

"I've been so I was afraid to move, knowing she would complain. I've sat for hours studying her, trying to understand her. I used to think the fault was all mine."

"It does make you feel that way, doesn't it?" said Everychild. "And sometimes I've thought fathers were as bad as mothers about making you feel so."

Tom lapsed into a dreamy mood. "Fathers ... I don't remember much about my father," he said. "But he used to be uncomfortable about the house the same as me. The things she says to me—they come easy to her now, because she learned to say them long ago, to my father. He couldn't have a friend in to see him. It was always: 'Why don't they go home for their meals?' or 'Why don't they track dirt into their own houses?' or 'Why don't they fill their own curtains with tobacco smoke?' You know how they talk. And he quit bringing his friends home. He stayed away more and more himself. I've not seen him now for years."

"I'm not sure I ever heard of your father," said Everychild.

"You wouldn't have heard of him. Mother always made so much noise that you only heard of her. You wouldn't have overlooked *her*, with her finding fault all the time, and pretending not to be appreciated at home. She was always pitied by the neighbors, who knew only her side of the story. Oh, everybody's heard of Old Mother Hubbard. But who ever heard of Old Father Hubbard? She drove him away with her precise little ways, and now he's forgotten."

Everychild could scarcely conceal his surprise. He hadn't supposed it was *that* Hubbard. "And so this is where Old Mother Hubbard lives," he said, looking about him with new interest.

"It's where you'll find her at odd times," said Tom, "when she hasn't got a committee meeting to attend, or a board meeting, or a convention, or something. I shouldn't say she *lives* anywhere."

"Still, everything is nice enough in its way," remarked Everychild, "and I always thought she was very poor."

"Not at all," said Tom. "It was her 'poor dog.' That's what you have in mind, I suppose. And there never was a poor dog except one with a mean master or mistress."

At that moment, the little black dog, weary of looking at the cupboard, approached Tom and flopped down beside him.

"And that's her dog," said Everychild musingly.

"He's mine, really," explained Tom, "though I always try to think of him as hers. You take a fellow like me and he'd rather not own a dog. He has to go out into the world sooner or later; and if he has a dog he keeps thinking about him when he's away, and about there not being any one to put water in his bowl, and open the gate for him or go with him for a run. A dog likes to be with you, you know; and when you're gone you keep seeing him all the while: waiting at the gate for you, or outside your door. And you know all the time that some day when you're gone he'll grow old at last, and lie

alone dreaming of you, and looking—while there's none but strangers by to spurn him. No, sometimes I think it's better not to have a dog for a friend."

Everychild was thinking about this when Tom suddenly reached for his hat, which he had placed by his side. "Perhaps we'd better be getting along," he said, "without waiting to tell her good-by. After all, there's no telling when she'll be here."

Everychild did not like to go without having seen Old Mother Hubbard; but there seemed no way to suggest this, and he was just rising to his feet when there was a bustling sound outside the door.

"She's coming now," said Tom in a whisper. "She'll be here right away." He was dreadfully uneasy. He added in a tone of apology, "Just make the best of it, won't you, if she's ugly? It will blow over in a minute or two."

And then the front door was opened briskly and Old Mother Hubbard entered the room.

CHAPTER XIII

A TERRIBLE LADY AT HOME

She came into the room in the manner of one who was about to say, "Fellow-citizens!" But she said nothing just at first. She took a few steps further, walking as if she expected to have a badge pinned on her, or to receive a prize. She had a double chin; and when she began to speak, which she did a moment later, it developed that she had a deep baritone voice.

Her first words were: "Away with you!"

They were for the little black dog, who had rushed toward her with swaying tail.

Then she saw her son and Everychild. *She sniffed as if there were a fire somewhere as she said to her son, "And who is this, pray?"*

She sniffed as if there were a fire somewhere.

[Illustration: She sniffed as if there were a fire somewhere.]

Everychild would have felt almost alarmed but for the fact that something extraordinary occurred just then. The Masked Lady entered the room and stood just inside the door. Still more remarkable, Mr. Literal appeared just behind her.

"This," replied Tom to his mother, "is—is a boy who came home with me."

"Is it, indeed!" exclaimed Old Mother Hubbard icily. She added, "What I meant to inquire was. What is his name?"

Tom was blushing. "His name is Everychild, mother," he said, "and he's _____"

Old Mother Hubbard had removed her bonnet, which was a little affair of black velvet and jet ornaments. She touched her hair with her finger tips here and there. "I might have known as much!" she said. "Everychild! And I suppose you think it is quite right for Everychild to come tagging home after you, making work for other people?"

Tom cried out forlornly, "Oh, mother ..."

As for Everychild, he was thinking—"She'll never let him go!" He was standing with one foot on top of the other in a very uncomfortable manner. Still, he was trying to smile, as if to convey the idea that Old Mother Hubbard must be joking, of course.

But the old lady continued severely: "I've warned you before. You ought to know by this time that a house is a—a house."

Here Everychild managed to say, "I'll not be a bit of trouble, Mother Hubbard, and—and I'm very glad to meet you."

She stared at him as if she were really seeing him for the first time. But her temper broke forth again. "Don't tell me!" she exclaimed. "I know what boys are. You'll not deny, I suppose, that you get ravenously hungry three times a day?"

Everychild was so amazed by this that he looked helplessly at Tom.

"Precisely!" continued Old Mother Hubbard. "Well, you should have heard our President's address yesterday afternoon on *The Superfluous Table*."

Her son interrupted in great embarrassment, "Oh, mother, he doesn't even know what you mean!"

"Per'aps not. You've not told him, then, that your mother is Vice-President of the Mother Goose Auxiliary of the Amalgamated Associations of Notable Ladies?"

"No, mother," said Tom, bending his head in shame.

"Well, at all events ... the President went on to say that the dinner table was a relic of barbarism. And she was quite right. She cited cases known to all we ladies ..."

Mr. Literal, from his place in the background, could not help saying to the Masked Lady, "Why is it that ladies with baritone voices *always* have trouble with their objective case?"

But the Masked Lady did not reply, and Old Mother Hubbard continued: "There was the case of Mrs. Horner's son—her dear, dutiful little Jack. When he ate his Christmas pie, where was he sitting? *In a corner!* No dinner table there to cause a lot of work and worry. And please note that he was delighted when he *pulled out a plum*. Yet the plum is one of the simplest forms of—of sustenance. And there was Miss Muffet, daughter of the highly honored Mrs. Alonso Muffet. During that meal which has become historic, where did she sit? *On a tuffet!*"

Everychild could not help asking, "What *is* a tuffet?"

But Old Mother Hubbard only regarded him blankly, as if there had been no interruption, and then she proceeded. "And you will note what she was eating. *Curds and whey*—perfectly simple yet nutritious fare. There were other instances showing that the wasteful dinner table must go. It was a wonderful address. A treat. A feast of good things. A *spiritual* feast."

Her son tried to lift his head. "Yes, mother," he said, "but you know I've sometimes thought how good it would seem to see you in the house, dressed for staying in instead of going out, and maybe sitting by the window sewing, or in the kitchen paring apples, or lifting the lid from a pot and letting the steam out in a cloud ..."

"A survival of the male superstition that Woman was born into perpetual bondage," was the crisp response.

It seemed to Everychild that some one ought to change the subject. He tried. "It's really very interesting, Mother Hubbard," he said; "and—and that's a very nice dog you've got!"

"Do you think so? Take him away with you—do! I see nothing nice about him."

By this time her son could endure no more. "He's going to take him away, mother," he said. "And he's going to take me, too. I just came to tell you good-by."

For the first time the old lady was strangely quiet. She gasped an instant and then she cried out angrily, "Good-by? And where are you going?"

"I'm going with Everychild. We're going to find the truth."

His mother turned aside. "The boy is mad!" she said. Then facing him again she demanded, "Do you know what the truth is? I'll tell you. It's this: When you get hungry and come back home, standing with one foot on top of the other outside my door, *you'll find the door shut!*"

There was an impressive silence for a moment, and then the Masked Lady remarked tranquilly, "If he finds the truth, no door will ever be closed

to him again."

Then Tom, turning to Everychild, said—"Come, we'll go."

They left the house together. The little dog bounded after them. The door swung to.

The old lady, clearly alarmed, went to the door as if she would open it and cry out. But pride prevented her from doing so. She stood with one hand on the wall, listening. And at last she did open the door; but not a living creature was in sight.

CHAPTER XIV

MR. LITERAL'S WARNING

Everychild was in a high state of excitement as he and Tom made their way back to where the other members of the band awaited them.

He had scarcely dared to hope that Tom would be able to get away from his mother so easily. She had seemed really terrible. But now there was little danger of her overtaking them and making her son go back.

He was delighted that there was to be a new member of the band; while the thought of having a dog along with them seemed almost too good to be true. It would be much more interesting, having a dog with them. He could not know, of course, what exciting events lay in wait for him, and it seemed to him that having the dog might be the most wonderful part of the entire journey.

He was just thinking that the band was now large enough, even if no other children appeared to go with them, when something occurred to mar his perfect happiness.

Tom had been walking ahead, because he knew the path better; and all of a sudden some one caught step with him and began to talk to him.

It was Mr. Literal; and the little old man was smiling in a very hypocritical manner and rubbing his hands together.

"Just a word of caution," said Mr. Literal, by way of beginning.

Everychild knew it was going to be something disagreeable, but he only said, "What is it?"

"That fellow who calls himself your friend——"

"You mean the giant," said Everychild.

"He's a bad lot. Better keep an eye on him."

Everychild stared at the path before him.

"I'll tell you a little something about him—then you'll know whether I'm right or not. Did he ever tell you where his home is?"

"No," said Everychild, very uncomfortably.

"Of course not. Well, he was driven away from his home, years ago. He'd not dare to go back."

"Why?" asked Everychild.

"For telling lies. Every word he speaks is false. He doesn't know how to tell the truth. His own mother doesn't know him any more. That's how bad he is."

"He seems a very pleasant boy," said Everychild.

"There you are! Of course. It's easy to have a name for being pleasant if you're willing to say the first thing that comes to hand."

"But wouldn't you find people out if they did that?" asked Everychild.

"Of course!"

"Well, when I find the giant out I'll remember what you've said."

He was glad that the path broadened into a road just then. He ran forward a few steps and walked by the side of Tom. He didn't want to hear anything more against the giant. In truth, it had begun to seem to him the best thing of all, having the giant as a companion. He even hoped that after a time the Masked Lady would take some other road and leave them. It was rather uncomfortable, her happening to be places when you were not thinking about her. And if she were to go away there would be an end to Mr. Literal too. They both might be all right in their way, but it ought to be a band of children, with nobody else about.

And so he put Mr. Literal and the Masked Lady, too, out of his mind. He was talking eagerly to Tom when they got back to where the others were. He called out gladly, when he came within hearing of them, "He's going with us. And what do you think? We've got a dog!"

There was general rejoicing when the dog made his appearance, running from one to another to get acquainted. And then, as they had already been delayed quite a little, they made haste to continue on their journey.

PART III

**ARGUMENT: EVERYCHILD VIEWS WITH AMAZEMENT
A FAMOUS DWELLING-PLACE, AND IS GRIEVED
BY THE PLIGHT OF AN UNFORTUNATE PRINCE.**

CHAPTER XV

A STRANGE HOUSE IN THE FOREST

Together they traveled along the road the greater part of the day without mishap and without any experience worth recording.

As was her custom, the Masked Lady did not make her appearance among them as long as they were quite light-hearted, and Everychild went so far as to congratulate himself upon having seen the last of her.

Toward evening they came within sight of a path leading into the road on which they traveled, and on a stile which stood in the way of the path they observed a little boy who was plainly in trouble.

With much difficulty the little boy crawled up the stile, step by step; and when he got to the top step and paused a minute, he turned about, just as small children will do, and began climbing down the stile on the other side, moving feet foremost.

Now and again he looked over his shoulder to be sure that his feet had been safely placed before he put his weight on them; and when he did this you could see his face, showing two eyes very bright with excitement and fear.

At last he had got clear over the stile; and then he stood erect and put his finger in his mouth. You could tell that he was trying to think what to do now.

In the meantime Everychild and his companions had come up.

"Such a cute little chap," said Everychild. Then he spoke to the child. "Where are you going, little boy?" he asked.

The little boy looked at Everychild blankly. He looked at him quite a long time. Then he looked at the other members of the band. Finally he looked at Everychild again, still with a blank expression. But at last he replied, "I want to go home, but I dasn't."

The band of travelers all laughed at this; whereupon the little boy looked at all of them, one after another. He still had his finger in his mouth, where he kept crooking it and uncrooking it.

Then Cinderella asked: "Why dare you not go home?"

The little boy lowered his eyes until they rested on the ground. "Because I dasn't," he said.

"But why?" persisted Cinderella.

A pause; and then, "Because I'll catch a lickin'."

It seemed to Everychild that the little boy was much too small to be whipped; and he said with assurance, "You may go with us, if you will, and then you'll never get a whipping again."

But the little boy only shook his head. Clearly there was a difficulty in the way of accepting the invitation. And presently he began, falteringly, "My brothers and sisters ..."

"Oh," said Cinderella, understanding, "he doesn't want to leave his brothers and sisters."

"But we could take your brothers and sisters, too," said Everychild to the little boy.

The little boy now gazed at Everychild, and the blank expression in his eyes was there no more.

"Come, we'll get them," declared Everychild. "Do you live far away?"

"There," said the little boy, pointing away into the forest, where not a sign of a house was visible.

Here Grettel spoke for the first time: "Let's not," she said. "I don't think I care about wandering away into the woods."

"We might get lost," suggested Cinderella.

And now the giant interposed. "I agree with Everychild that we ought to take the little boy and his brothers and sisters with us," he said; "and as for wandering away into the woods, that will not be necessary. I'll take you to the house where the little boy lives by a secret method which I understand."

With that he faced the depths of the forest and stood very erect, with hands uplifted. There was a very solemn expression in his eyes. And suddenly it seemed that the nearby trees began to lift and disappear; and presto!—Everychild and his companions were standing quite close to one of the most famous and remarkable houses ever heard of.

Everychild had too little time just then to marvel at the strange feat which had been performed by the giant. He was lost in amazement at the house before which he stood.

It was really an immense, dilapidated shoe, patched and broken. The toe was about to gape open, though it was held here and there by a few threads. The laces were gone and the whole upper sprawled shapelessly. In brief, it was precisely like any old shoe you will see on a vacant lot, save for its immense size. Its size was prodigious. It was as large as a small house.

A stovepipe stuck out where the little toe would be, and smoke was pouring out of the pipe just as if some one had been putting a supply of fuel on the fire. It was woodsmoke and had a pleasant smell. It seemed that perhaps some one was preparing supper.

Not a soul was in sight about the house—or the shoe—nor about the premises. Yet you could see that some one had been hard at work only a short time before. The wash had been hung out to dry and it was still damp. It hung from a line which was suspended from the highest point of the shoe—where the strap is that you pull it on by—to the limb of a nearby tree. You could tell by the garments that there were a lot of children about. There were best shirts and every-day shirts and petticoats and trousers. There were many colors, so that they all made a rather gay spectacle. And some were of ordinary size, and some were quite tiny.

There were many trees in the background; and one of these cast its shade over the immense shoe in a very pleasing way. There was a table under the tree, and a kind of dinner-bell hanging from a limb of the tree. There were chairs about the table. Finally, there was a ladder standing against the shoe, so that you could climb up and get in at the top.

"And so," said Everychild in a tone of wonder, "this is where you live!" He had taken the little boy by the hand.

The little boy was about to reply when something almost alarming happened. The little boy slipped his hand away from Everychild's and shrank back until he was hiding behind Cinderella's skirt. An astonishing head and shoulders appeared above the top of the shoe!

The Old Woman who Lived in the Shoe had heard them. She remained perched in her place, glaring severely about the yard below.

Nor was this all. Other individuals inside the shoe had evidently heard the voice of Everychild. And now they began to peep out in the most extraordinary fashion. Three pairs of eyes appeared at the broken toe of the shoe. And up the double row of eye-holes, all the way up the front of the shoe, startled faces were to be seen. You could see excited eyes with hair hanging down before them.

All this proved too much for the little black dog, who had gone forward from Tom's side to inspect the shoe. Now he began barking excitedly at the half-hidden faces.

Everychild stood in his place, wide-eyed and with beating heart.

The Old Woman arose more fully into view. She stared down at Everychild. She flung the hair back from her face.

"Humph!" she said.

CHAPTER XVI

AN ELABORATION OF ONE OF HISTORY'S MOST SUCCINCT CHAPTERS

Everychild's companions drew back behind the shelter of a convenient bush. The Old Woman's countenance really did seem, for the moment, quite ferocious. But Everychild did not move.

The Old Woman arose still higher and stepped out of the top of the shoe to the top rung of the ladder. She carried a steaming pot in one hand, and thus handicapped she descended the ladder.

She placed the steaming pot on the table and then turned her attention to Everychild. She exclaimed dubiously: "You're not one o' mine!"

He shook his head. "No, ma'am," he replied.

She sat down deliberately, drawing a long breath, but without taking her eyes from Everychild. "Just an idler," she said, "like all the rest of the young ones. I don't know what's the matter with them these days—children. When I was young I had to work. I expected nothing less. And I tell mine what was good enough for me is good enough for them."

She made this statement as if she hadn't left a single thing to be said.

It seemed rather obscure to Everychild. He tried to think of a more agreeable subject. He looked the Old Woman's house over, up and down. "It's rather a funny house, isn't it?" he remarked.

The Old Woman's manner became more sullen than ever. She seized upon a ladle and began stirring the steaming pot. "It does very well," she declared. "Houses are funny or otherwise according to what goes on in them. When you've got your hands full of children who don't want to work you can't say that your house is exactly funny. Its being an old shoe—if that's what you mean ... that's a matter of taste. I prefer it, for my part. I'd never have been able to settle down anywhere else. You see, I had to be on my feet mostly all the time from little on, and now it comes natural, being in a shoe. I can imagine I'm on the go, even if I never get out from one week's end to another."

She lifted the ladle from the pot. She pressed one hand to her bosom and with the other lifted the ladle to her lips, testing the stew. There was a thoughtful look in her eyes. Then she continued:

"As for living in a shoe ... there's plenty of females that live in two. Always on the go, they're that restless. I tell my undergrowth it's no more disgrace to live in one shoe than in two, so long as you've got one that's big enough."

"As for living in a shoe ... there's plenty of females that live in two."

[Illustration: "As for living in a shoe ... there's plenty of females that live in two."]

She seemed so pleased with this remark that she had to stir the pot vigorously, as a relief to her emotions.

There was a surprising interruption just here. The Masked Lady and Mr. Literal were there, after all, standing close behind Everychild. And Mr. Literal was saying: "She seems to be a bit of a cynic. That reference to women on the go ... *what period should you say she belongs to?*"

"To every period," said the Masked Lady. After which, fortunately, they remained silent. "And your children," said Everychild. "I don't see them anywhere."

"They'll be here soon enough. I hire 'em out by the day—the boys. I tell 'em if they won't work for me I'll put 'em under masters who'll make 'em work. They gather fagots—the boys. The girls are in the house. They did the wash to-day and I keep 'em under my eye until it's time to take the clothes in. Nothing like keeping a girl under your eye if you want to know where she is."

She got up with an air of great industry and went to the line where the wash was hanging.

She tried the garments with her hand. It seemed they were now dry enough to be taken in. She stepped to the bell suspended from the tree and struck it sharply with a little mallet which had been provided for this purpose.

Wonder of wonders!—the top of the shoe began to overflow with girls! They were rather carelessly dressed, and there was hair in their eyes—they took after their mother in this matter—but being young, they were all fresh and blooming in a way.

They could leave the shoe only one at a time. They began descending the ladder in a sort of procession. You would have thought the last one would never make her appearance.

They paid very little attention to Everychild. They began taking in the wash. Some held their arms out to receive the clothes which others removed from the line. They took the line down the last thing of all. They wound it up carefully.

Just at this time there were stealthy movements all about the house, as if robbers were coming. From among the trees the boys began to steal home. They came from various directions, all walking on tip-toe. Many of them hung back fearfully, though two of them found courage enough to come up close to Everychild.

"You must be the boys coming home," said Everychild.

The first son nodded, but kept his eyes fixed anxiously on the Old Woman. She was glaring at a girl ascending the ladder. "Look sharp where you put those things, now," she was saying. "I'll be inside in a minute, and if you haven't put them away properly I'll know the reason why!"

Everychild felt that he was fully justified in saying (to the first son) "She seems to be pretty bad, doesn't she!"

The first son fairly jumped. "Not so loud!" he whispered. "She might hear you."

The Old Woman really had heard. She stared at her first son in a terrible manner. "So you've come, have you?" she exclaimed. "And I suppose you'll tell me you've been working hard all day?"

"Yes, mother," replied the first son, "We've carried more fagots than you ever saw. Such fine fagots! Didn't we?" He turned to the second son to have his report verified.

"You wouldn't believe how many fine fagots we carried," declared the second son.

The other sons began to appear one by one, now that the first shock of battle was over. They all stared up at the Old Woman as if they were prepared to run if she so much as sneezed.

"Well, you know what's coming to you now," said the Old Woman. "Come on, all of you!"

They all began to make wry faces. "If we could only have some bread with it, mother!" pleaded the first son.

"You'll take what's offered you!" exclaimed the Old Woman grimly.

"And if you wouldn't whip us to-night, mother—anyway, not so soundly," said the second son.

To this the Old Woman retorted: "Who does the whipping around here, I'd like to know? Come here this instant!"

It seemed that there was to be a brief respite, however; for the Old Woman turned to the steaming pot and began testing its contents with great seriousness, lifting the ladle to her lips again and again, and looking abstractedly far away into the forest.

In the meantime more of the children gathered around Everychild. A few of the girls now joined their brothers. They looked at Everychild with unconcealed admiration.

"What do you suppose she is going to do to you?" asked Everychild of the group about him.

The first son replied to this: "I should think you'd know. Haven't you been told how she whips us something terrible?"

Everychild inquired in amazement: "All of you?"

The first daughter now spoke. "All of us," she said. "Every last one of us. That's just before she puts us to bed, you know."

"Of course—I remember now," said Everychild. "She 'whips you all soundly.'"

"That's no word for it," declared the first son. "You know she's had an awful lot of experience all these years. And there's so many of us."

He concluded this sentence in so meek a manner that Everychild exclaimed indignantly, "I think it ought to be stopped. If I were you ... did you ever try hiding her whip?"

The first daughter replied hopelessly, "We couldn't do that. Her whip ... it's the kind of whip that grows, you understand."

"Some sort of limb?"

"You might call it that. But it's her own limb."

"Yes, if she got it first."

"She did. It's her hand."

"Do you mean," demanded Everychild, "that she whips all of you with her hand?"

"And does a thorough job, too," said the first daughter.

Everychild assumed a very grave air. "How often does this happen?" he asked.

"Every night," he was assured.

He made a very wry face. "But such things ..." He couldn't think of the right word at first. Then he asked, "But isn't it all very—very vulgar?"

The first daughter sighed. "I suppose so," she admitted. "But when there are so many children you can't help being a little vulgar."

The first son put in here: "And you mustn't think too hard of mother. You can imagine her position: so many of us, and the high cost of living, and all. Sometimes I think she whips us just to get our minds off our stomachs. You know, a supper of broth without any bread—and that's just what it is—is about as bad as nothing at all. But if you've been whipped soundly you forget about being hungry. You think about running away, or something like that. And the next thing you know it's morning."

Everychild still felt very uncomfortable. "But how does she manage about breakfast?" he asked.

"Oh, she has to feed us well in the morning—to keep us from starving," explained the first son.

Everychild nodded as if the matter had been made perfectly clear. And then the Old Woman cried out quite alarmingly, "Are you coming, or shall I have to fetch you?"

Several of the children replied to this: "We're coming!" Nevertheless they did not go immediately. The first daughter would not go without saying to Everychild, "Of course we ought to invite you to have supper with us—but you see it isn't quite like a regular supper." She blushed painfully.

Everychild reassured her immediately. "Don't think of it," he said.

The second son also had something else to say. "I suppose there aren't so many of you at your house?" he asked.

"So many children?" replied Everychild. "No. Not any, now. I was the only child."

This had the effect of exciting all the sons and daughters. The second son voiced the amazement which they all felt. "You don't say so!" he exclaimed. "But how did you ever get anything to wear? If there was no one ahead of you, how could they make anything over for you?"

Everychild really did not understand this. "Why, my mother used to get things for me," he said.

"Your mother, certainly," said the second son. "But who wore your clothes before you got them?"

"No one, I suppose. You mean that your clothes ... ?"

"They're made over from the things the older children have grown too big for."

Everychild was more and more puzzled. "Yes," he said, "but the oldest one of all—there had to be a beginning!"

The second son laughed. "In the beginning," he explained, "they have to be cut down from father's things."

"Oh—your father's!" exclaimed Everychild. Then in a polite murmur, "I—I never heard of your father."

The second son explained this simply. "You never do, when there are so many children," he said.

While Everychild was nodding slowly in reply to this the scene suddenly changed.

The Old Woman took two or three steps in the direction of her sons and daughters; and the sons and daughters, seeing there was no hope for them, approached her with hanging heads.

The scene which followed was such that Everychild felt certain he could never forget it. One after another the children were seized and fed a few spoonfuls of the broth without any bread. Then each was spanked most soundly. Then one by one they quickly escaped up the ladder until the last of them had disappeared. It was all over in a very short time.

Everychild had now been joined by his companions, who saw the last of the Old Woman's children scramble up the ladder and disappear.

As for the Old Woman, she stood a moment, panting, as well she might, and then she made her way around behind the shoe. Just before she disappeared she glared at Everychild and actually *made a face at him!*

Everychild addressed his companions. "I think we ought to get them to go with us," he said. "That's no way for them to be treated—to be whipped and sent to bed like that."

The giant began dreamily—"There ought to be some way ..."

Everychild's eyes brightened. "If we could only open the toe of the shoe—though of course we couldn't!"

"We could," declared the giant.

They went forward stealthily. Will o'Dreams following the example of Everychild and moving without a sound.

The giant slipped his fingers under the loose ends of the toe of the shoe and tugged with all his might. After resisting a moment the toe lifted.

What a sight do we behold! One child after another came tumbling out of the shoe until all the Old Woman's sons and daughters had been liberated. They sprang to their feet excitedly, dusting their garments and looking grateful and relieved.

Everychild addressed them briefly, in a low voice: "You're going away with us, all of you. You're not going to stand such treatment any longer. We're all going on a great adventure, and you shall go with us."

The sons and daughters all made eager signs of assent, though they were careful not to speak a word. Only the little black dog violated the rule of silence. He fairly danced about the entire group of children. And then they all slipped away into the forest.

Let us, however, remain a moment to note what took place about the shoe.

Presently the Old Woman emerged from behind the shoe. She was yawning prodigiously. Slowly she climbed the ladder. She disappeared. But was this to be the last of her? Not so!

Only a moment later her head and shoulders again appeared. Her eyes were staring wildly. She looked this way and that, all about her. Her eyes clearly revealed that she had realized her loss. At last she began beating her bosom with both hands. Her hair fell down until you could scarcely see her face.

And far off in the forest her children were speeding on their way.

CHAPTER XVII

EVERYCHILD WITH ADDITIONAL COMPANIONS FINDS REFUGE IN AN OLD HOUSE

Everychild and his companions were now journeying through a country where the evenings were very long; and thus it chanced that after they had all departed from the Old Woman who lived in a shoe, there was still a considerable period of daylight before them.

Their number was now greatly augmented by the sons and daughters of the Old Woman, and as a result, they were merrier than they had been before. Just the same, they began to be hungry before night fell, and they were greatly puzzled as to where they might satisfy their hunger.

Indeed, it may be confessed that Hansel became really disagreeable, and remarked—in a muttering fashion, so that no one could be sure of understanding him—that they might be on the right road to find the truth, but that if they did not find food in greater abundance before long, he, for his part, should take some other direction.

There were moments when Everychild was tempted to turn back; but he could not doubt that if they all persevered they would come to a glorious end to their adventure sooner or later, and perhaps very soon.

Unfortunately, they made so much noise as they journeyed that such travelers as might have been on the road, and who might by good chance have offered them food, turned aside and hid from them, fearing, no doubt, that they were the Forty Thieves, or some other equally rapacious band.

Only one incident occurred to break the monotony of the evening hour. They came upon two adorable little children whom they found clinging together and weeping freely.

One of these they recognized immediately as Little Boy Blue; and as they had never known of his having to bear any very grievous misfortune, they suspected that his tears might be of the sort that are easily dried. Yet it developed that Little Boy Blue had not wept until he had borne up a long time with great fortitude.

The band paused and Everychild asked, "Why are you weeping, Little Boy Blue?"

The reply came between broken sobs. "I could bear it no longer," said Little Boy Blue. "I was required to watch the cows and the sheep from early morn till dark, and often I must needs arise at night to run forth to the fold when there was an alarm of wolves. Day after day my head grew heavier from want of sleep, until at last I could keep my eyes open no longer. I stole under the haystack to snatch a few extra winks, and when I was discovered my shame and disgrace were heralded forth to all the world." And again the poor child sobbed without restraint.

"And this dear little girl with you," asked Cinderella, who had been walking side by side with Everychild, "who is she?"

Little Boy Blue checked his grief long enough to stare at Cinderella incredulously. "Is it possible that there is anywhere a person who does not recognize Little Bo-Peep?" he asked.

"So it is!" exclaimed Cinderella. And bending tenderly above the form of Little Bo-Peep she asked, "And why do you weep so bitterly, Little Bo-Peep?"

The child could scarcely speak, so spent was she with weeping; but little by little Cinderella drew from her the truth. The little thing was much too small to be entrusted with the care of sheep, and her life had been made wretched by fear of the great dogs which were never absent from the flocks, and by the dark rumors of wolves which the shepherds were forever repeating.

Grettel expressed her opinion of the case without reserve. "It may be hysteria," she said, "though it looks more to me like a complete nervous break-down."

"I hardly think so," said Cinderella smiling. "We'll just take them along with us, and they'll be all right."

And so, with the addition of yet another pair to their numbers, they quickened their pace along the road.

They were becoming hungrier every minute—even the sons and daughters of the Old Woman who lived in a shoe, who, as we have seen, had had far too light a supper—and while they were willing to sleep without shelter, if they were called upon to do so, they all hoped that they need not go to sleep supperless.

While there was still a short period of daylight remaining they came into an ancient town situated at the foot of a hill on which a castle stood; and upon questioning a number of the townspeople they learned that they had entered the realm of a cruel king, who resided in the castle on the hill.

"Take my advice and escape while ye may," said one ancient man with a long white beard. He had addressed Everychild. He added, "The king hath a grudge against one manly little lad who greatly resembles you, and if he once sets eyes on you I should tremble for the consequences."

Everychild thanked the old man for this well-meant counsel. "But," said he, "my friends and I are weary, and we must think of resting for the night before we set forth on our way again."

"Then," said the old man, "you might find shelter in yonder house, which hath long remained empty, because it is said to be haunted." And he pointed to a neglected old house hard by the road. "Though," he added, "I can assure you that the story which hath it that there are specters in the house is but an idle one. The truth is this: there once dwelt a good woman and her fair daughter in the house; and the cruel king seeing the daughter, he commanded straightway that she be brought to him to become his bride. The good woman, desiring to save her daughter, escaped; and the henchmen of the king, not wishing the real truth to be known, invented the story of a ghost in the house. And since that day no one has ventured to occupy the house after sundown."

Everychild thanked the old man again; and then, together with all his companions, he entered the old house which had been pointed out to him.

There was, indeed, no trace of ghostly occupants of the house; but on the contrary, the rooms, upstairs and down, speedily became the scene of much jollity. It seemed, also, that the old man had spread the report among the

townspeople that a band of children had taken refuge in the house for the night; and many kindly-disposed folk came and brought food and drink, so that there was an abundance for all the children.

After eating heartily, and looking from the windows to observe the castle wherein the king dwelt, they all sought a good night's rest.

And now once again we must leave Everychild and his companions for a little while, and take our place among surroundings at once strange and cruel.

CHAPTER XVIII

HOW THE HAND OF A CHAMBERLAIN TREMBLED

We are now in a room in the castle of the cruel king, on top of the hill.

The four walls of the room were grim and forbidding of aspect. The tapestry covering them in places was old and of somber design. There were two doors opening to the room: one on the right and one on the left. At the far side of the room there was a deep-silled window with leaded panes through which a dreary light struggled.

At first you would have said that the room was empty; and then you would have perceived the Masked Lady and Mr. Literal, occupying a position among the shadows, not far from the deep-silled window.

The Masked Lady was again wearing the white garment in which we first beheld her. She was seated before a desk, writing in a large book in which you could see a few initial letters in red, outlined in gold.

Mr. Literal stood by her, regarding her with an impatient, puzzled air. And presently it would have seemed that he could no longer endure her silence; for he asked in a fault-finding tone:

"Can you tell me what you're doing here? This place is—is genuine. And of late it has been your fancy to haunt places which have existed only in the imaginations of the story-tellers."

Without looking up from the Book of Truth (for this was the volume in which she was writing) the Masked Lady replied: "Did you say that this place is genuine?"

"Of course," said Mr. Literal. "We are in a medieval castle in Northampton—the castle of King John of England. King John or his chamberlain is likely to enter at any moment. And goodness knows what they'd say at finding you here."

The Masked Lady turned a page. "King John would not see me here if he were to enter," said she; "no, neither here nor anywhere. And as for honest old Hubert de Burgh ... well, perhaps I have a purpose in being here. You have said this place is genuine; yet I sometimes wonder if any place in all the world is so unreal as the palace of a king." She gazed before her dreamily for an instant and added, "I can see a day coming when all such palaces will be viewed by wondering, emancipated people, their minds filled with incredulity: because they will realize that kings' palaces have represented the most terrible delusion of all."

There was a footfall without at that moment, and the Masked Lady resumed her writing.

A bluff, soldierly-appearing man of middle age entered the room: a bearded man of harsh visage, yet with an eye in which justice sat enthroned. He looked about the room with an air of dawning relief; and when two villainous-looking rascals followed him into the room he remarked, with a sigh: "He's not here. And that's a bit of luck at least—to have no one about whilst we mix this devil's brew." Then more briskly: "A red-hot iron—red-hot, do you hear?—in a hurry!"

The first attendant, to whom he had spoken, glanced darkly at the second door of the room, which remained closed. "A hot iron? Yes, sir," he said, trying to speak naturally. "It shall be prepared."

The second attendant seemed incapable of remaining silent—after the manner of sorry men. "It will be quite simple, sir," he said.

Hubert de Burgh (for the soldierly-appearing man was he) turned upon them fiercely. "Enough!" he exclaimed. "I don't know how men of your breed go about a task like this, but Hubert de Burgh has always faced the truth. Listen: When you've fetched me the hot iron you'll hide behind the tapestry there. And when I stamp on the floor you'll come quickly and bind him hand and foot."

The first attendant found courage to say: "Bind him? A little lad like that? A man might do the job with one hand without half trying."

But Hubert de Burgh gazed at the man darkly. "Look you, fellow," he said, "there are forces besides a man's hands which are powerful. His very helplessness and innocence ... I think they shall paralyze my hands and make me helpless. Do as I say: bind the boy and stand near, ready to lend a hand."

Whereupon the first and second attendants withdrew, staring as if with terror at the unopened door near which they had to pass.

Hubert de Burgh took no further notice of them, but dropped into a chair and stared straight before him.

At this point Mr. Literal began rubbing his hands and smiling with pleased excitement. "It seems," he remarked to the Masked Lady, "that we're to be in on a really famous event—the slaying of Prince Arthur. It's a great opportunity of its kind. It will give me a chance to confute the historians who have quarreled among themselves about how the poor boy met his death. How—er—how should you say he dies?"

The Masked Lady replied tranquilly: "He does not die. He lives forever to proclaim to all mankind that the way of kings is an evil way."

It was now that Hubert de Burgh bestirred himself as if he could no longer bear to be alone with his thoughts. He cried out sharply—"Arthur! Arthur!"

The second door now opened and Prince Arthur appeared: a handsome boy, perhaps fourteen years of age, straight of limb and noble of countenance. He wore a velvet suit, including knee breeches and silk hose and gaiters, and a jacket with a flowing lace collar.

He regarded Hubert de Burgh with dull eyes which slowly began to brighten. "Oh, it's you?" he cried after a pause. And then, "If you could know how glad I am to see you!" And then, falteringly, "Hubert—when you were a boy, were you ever kept hidden away as if you meant ill to every one?"

And now he approached Hubert with a wistful air, and leaned against his knee, and placed his hand on his shoulder.

But the chamberlain flinched beneath the weight of that light hand. "There, there, Arthur!—take your hand away!" he said. And then, with an attempt to be severe, "We'll have none of that, you know!"

Prince Arthur pondered, and then his eyes brightened. "I'm glad you said that, Hubert," he declared. "If you feel that way toward me you can tell me why—why all the others feel so. Every face I look into seems either to pity or to hate me; and I'd so like people to be friendly. Tell me, why must I take my hand away?"

The stern man plucked at his beard thoughtfully; and suddenly he turned to the boy with a quality of stern candor which was a true prince's due. "Listen, boy," he said. "It is the fate of kings to tremble at many things: at the too great misery of their subjects, at their too great liberty; at the touch of those who claim to be friends, at the whisper of a foe's voice. They have taught themselves that they rule by divine right, yet they move by day and by night like any thief who carries booty beneath his cloak when he walks before those in authority, or like one who is wounded unto death who would hide his wound from a strong adversary. Your Uncle John fears you, Arthur, because his throne is yours by right—if there were such a thing as right to any throne. And he has willed that you must die. He has appointed me ... but there, I must to my task. No struggling, now—no resistance. It will be better so. The king's will be done."

He would have summoned his attendants then, but Prince Arthur stayed him with one more question. "And how would you take my life, dear Hubert?" he asked in a gentle voice.

But this the chamberlain would not tell him. Instead he stamped on the floor and the two attendants entered hurriedly, one bearing a hot iron and the other a cord with which to bind the prince's hands and feet. "These," said Hubert, "will make plain the manner of the deed."

But Arthur only clapped his hands in mirth. "It is your way of jesting, Hubert," he said, "to amuse me." But there was a catch in his voice as he continued, "It is your way of driving away the shadows which hang about me always. Dear Hubert, I know what a kind heart you have!"

But despite these brave words he turned pale and suddenly clapped his hands to his eyes to shut out the terrible vision he had beheld.

Hubert cried out huskily to the attendants, "Bind him—and be quick!"

With this the attendants seized the prince, one on either side. Yet they paused when they perceived that the prince wished to speak: a final word to the chamberlain. The boy had turned upon Hubert a calm glance. A strange stillness had come over him. He spoke in a low, intense voice—

"Do not permit them to bind me," he said. "It would be shameful for a prince to be bound. I know you were not speaking in jest, but please do not let them bind me, as if I were a slave. I shall think of you as my friend—as long as my hands are free. Come, Hubert ... do you recall how, when your head once ached, I put my handkerchief about it to comfort you? It was one that a princess did make for me. Remember how I have loved you—and do not let them bind me!"

His plea prevailed. "So—then they shall not!" cried Hubert. And to the attendants he exclaimed fiercely, "Begone! Did I not bid you be swift, that the very blood in my veins should not turn to water? Fellows—begone! It may be that my task will be easier if I work alone and he resist me."

The two attendants turned in terror before the wrath of the chamberlain and fled. And before Hubert had withdrawn his eyes from their retreating forms certain strange events came to pass.

The Masked Lady had remained, strangely tranquil, before the Book of Truth; but now she lifted her eyes, because the great windows with their leaded panes had been thrust open. Outside the open windows there were revealed the head and shoulders of the giant, Will o'Dreams.

The giant paused long enough to take in the scene before him, and then he disappeared in great agitation.

A moment later he had reappeared and had lifted Everychild to a level with the window sill.

CHAPTER XIX

HOW AN UNFORTUNATE PRINCE ESCAPED

The giant could be heard whispering to Everychild: "I cannot enter here. The things which are taking place in this room—they stagger me. But you may do so." Whereupon he placed Everychild on the window sill and withdrew with a shudder.

A light leap, and Everychild was in the room, advancing and taking in his surroundings with amazed eyes. But no one paid any attention to him. Hubert de Burgh stood near Prince Arthur, a smoking iron in his hand. The two attendants closed the door behind them with a crash. Then Arthur spoke again:

"I could not bear to have them looking, Hubert," he said. "It will be easier, just we two alone. I am ready now."

It was then that Hubert gripped Arthur by the shoulder; he brought the hot iron close to his face. And then again his resolution failed him. His hand trembled; he paused. Presently he was gazing away over the prince's head, almost as if he saw a vision, and his hand on the boy's shoulder slowly relaxed.

"A strange lad!—a strange lad!" he mused. And then looking wonderingly at Arthur he added, "The agony is gone from your eyes when you look at me now. And yet it is I who would destroy you—not those fellows who made you tremble so!"

The prince drew himself up with unconscious pride. "I would rather suffer at the hands of those I love than receive benefits from hirelings," he said.

But Hubert shook his head darkly. "Hirelings?" he repeated. "Ah, who is not a hireling, when a king may have his way? Who can call his honor his own, when a crown is counted a more sacred thing than a man's soul?" He paused in silence again and then added almost banteringly—yet with a note of earnestness, too—"Come, boy, the young have wary eyes and swift feet. Can you not flee and escape from the wrath and fear of your uncle the King?"

But Arthur shook his head. "I think when your work is done, dear Hubert," he said, "the fear of the king and his wrath will trouble me no more."

Hubert frowned darkly. "That is an old man's creed," he cried. "It is monstrous that a child should welcome death!"

He turned away from Arthur and fixed his blank eyes in the direction of Everychild. And presently he lifted his trembling hand to his brow, and there was the light of a terrible vision in his eyes. He began to speak like one in a dreadful dream—

"Methinks I see the face of Everychild!" he mused. "Methinks that always the face of Everychild shall gaze upon me with horror and contempt because I slew this gentle lad. Nay, by my faith, I will not!"

He thrust Arthur from him. "Go your way!" he cried. "Though there were a thousand King Johns, it shall also be said that there was one Hubert de Burgh. If heaven has set no bounds to duty, then I owe a duty to myself as well as to the king. And if a child must needs teach me that there are things more terrible than death, then let me learn a lesson from this child who has the soul of a prince, though he may never wield the scepter of a king. Go free, boy. King John may have a thousand murderers, but it shall also be said of him that he had for chamberlain one who was a man."

With the tread of a soldier, undaunted and unashamed, he left the room.

For a moment Arthur lifted his face with an expression of intense relief; but little by little his eyes darkened again and his head drooped.

"He has spared me—yet to what end?" he mused. "I have escaped for the moment, yet in a few days—on what day none may tell—a new jailor, a poisoned cup, a summons up a broken stairway in the dark, a ride on the river in a mist ... Ah, woe is me! How shall I really escape?"

He stood disconsolate a moment, and then it seemed he saw Everychild for the first time: Everychild, who came toward him, slowly yet with assurance.

"You shall come with me," said Everychild.

And the prince replied indulgently, "With you, Everychild? But whither are you going?"

"I fare forth to find the truth," said Everychild.

Arthur replied: "It seems you should be a prince if you would find it soon. I shall find the truth before you, Everychild."

"We shall find it together," declared Everychild.

"I was near finding it now," said Arthur; "and even yet I cannot think it is far away."

But Everychild had gone to the window, evidently in the hope of seeing the giant, Will o'Dreams; and while Arthur looked after him hopelessly, Mr. Literal took occasion to say to the Masked Lady—

"He is as beautiful as tradition has pictured him. Small wonder that his foolish mother was moved to speak of him so eloquently. Do you remember?—

"Grief fills the room up of my absent child,
Lies in his bed, walks up and down with me,
Puts on his pretty looks, repeats his words,
Remembers me of all his gracious parts,
Stuffs out his vacant garments with his form:
Then have I reason to be fond of grief."

Then the giant appeared at the window and there was a hurried conference between him and Everychild. Soon the latter turned confidently toward Arthur.

"Come, you shall go with me," said Everychild eagerly.

It seemed for an instant that the prince was really hopeful. Then again his dark mood returned—the mood of one who believes he is lost. Yet nevertheless he put forth his hand to Everychild and said, "Yes, I will go with you."

He approached the window with slow, majestic tread. Once he shrank back and lifted his hands to his eyes. Then he climbed resolutely to the window sill. He could be seen for an instant, and then he disappeared.

Seeing that he had vanished, Everychild hurried to the window, his face elated. "Splendid!" he cried. "Now he shall be my companion to the end of time!"

Then the giant could be seen at the window. He put forth his hands and lifted Everychild through the window.

A moment, and then Hubert de Burgh re-entered the room. He cast a swift, agitated glance about the room, and soon he noted the open window.

"The window!" he cried in a loud voice. "God save us all!"

He stood staring at the open window; and as he did so the Masked Lady hid her face in her arms upon the Book of Truth before her. She was softly weeping.

PART IV

ARGUMENT: EVERYCHILD'S FEET ARE DRAWN TO THE SPOT WHERE THE SLEEPING BEAUTY IN THE WOOD LIES. TIME PASSES.

CHAPTER XX

A SONG IN THE GARDEN

While Everychild and the giant had made their visit to the castle of the cruel king, their companions had remained in the old house at the foot of the hill, and great was their delight when the two who had been absent returned, bringing with them Prince Arthur, toward whom all the children felt immediately drawn.

It was quickly decided that the prince should be allowed to rest before they resumed their journey; and as they were very comfortable where they were, they agreed not to stir until the next day. They still had an abundance to eat; and besides, they had not yet explored the walled garden, very shady and inviting, which they could see from the kitchen windows.

In the afternoon, then, they all invaded the walled garden, where they found much to gladden their hearts. The juniper trees were quite perfect; and the flowers, though they had been so long neglected, seemed really to have been waiting for them. The different kinds of flowers each had a bed of their own; the larkspur and poppies and coxcomb and hollyhocks and columbines, and each seemed to lean forward and say, "Come and see us! Come and see us!" And so the children made the rounds of the garden, visiting each variety of flower.

At last they sat down on the stone benches which surrounded a fine grass-plot with an ancient sundial in the middle.

Many of the children were content to sit quietly and rest; but Little Bo-Peep and Little Boy Blue, being very young, and naturally rather playful, could not restrain themselves, and they took their places on the grass and began to play. They looked simply charming: Little Bo-Peep being dressed in a white frock with short sleeves having any number of flounces. She wore a Gainesborough hat of delicate materials, with cherry ribbons ending in tassels of the same color hanging down behind. She also wore red slippers having buckles set with rubies.

Little Boy Blue was arrayed in blue rompers, cunningly made of one piece, and very ample.

It seemed that they had long resided close to each other, and had often played together; and now, almost without any pre-arrangement at all, they began a game which consisted of singing and dancing.

They began a game which consisted of singing and dancing.

[Illustration: They began a game which consisted of singing and dancing.]

They stood facing each other on the grass, and Little Boy Blue began the following song:

"Oh, Little Bo-Peep, when the sun is shining
And the birds are up in the tree;
When there's never a cause for sad repining,
And we're happy as we can be;
When breezes blow through the vale and hollow,
And glade and garden and glen,
Oh, whom does your heart in its rapture follow,
And whom do you think of then?"

Little Bo-Peep listened, smiling, and with her head a little to one side, until the stanza was finished, and then she replied as follows:

"Oh, Little Boy Blue, when the skies are beaming
And my heart is happy and free,
When the green grass smiles, where it lies a-dreaming,
And the birds are up in the tree,
I lift my eyes to the arch above us,
So soft and tender and blue,
And I know that the earth and the sky both love us,
And I tenderly think of you,
Of you,
Of you, of you, of you!"

Then they both bowed graciously and began their dance. They advanced toward each other so that the palms of their right hands touched; and then they receded, moving obliquely; and then advanced again, touching the palms of their left hands. A moment later they had clasped both hands, holding them high, and were hopping about in a circle.

But it seemed that the song was not yet finished; and presently they were facing each other again, and Little Bo-Peep sang the following stanza:

"Oh, Little Boy Blue, when the star of even
Hangs low o'er the lonely hill,
When the night-wind sighs through the fields of heaven
And the world is lonely and still;
When you almost fear that the birds and flowers
Will never waken again,
And you lie and dream through the long night hours,
Oh, whom do you dream of then?"

No sooner had Little Bo-Peep completed her stanza than Little Boy Blue responded:

"Oh, Little Bo-Peep, from my friendly pillow
I gaze at the even star;
Then I sail away on a gentle billow,
Where dreaming and visions are.
And never a doubt nor a fear assails me
The whole of the long night through,
And the welcomest dream of all ne'er fails me,

For I constantly dream of you,
Of you,
Of you, of you, of you!"

They repeated their dance at the end, and then, blushing and stumbling, they made their way to one of the stone benches and sat down.

All the children applauded generously; but during the silence which followed, Grettel remarked:

"For my part, I like games that have kissing in them."

Cinderella merely gazed at her, in reply to this, with lifted chin and half-closed eyes.

Then Hansel observed: "If you'd leave it to me, I'd prefer sitting at a table where there'd be something left after you'd filled yourself as full as a drum."

Prince Arthur seemed to feel that Hansel and Grettel had struck a wrong note, and he said, "Upon my word, it seemed to me that the singing and dancing weren't half bad!"

"They were just perfect," declared Everychild.

"That's really what Arthur meant," interposed Will o'Dreams.

There was almost unanimous agreement then that the song and dance had been very well done, the strongest testimony of all being offered by the little black dog, who approached Little Boy Blue and asked, quite as plainly as if he had spoken, to have the entertainment prolonged.

But as the entire band hoped to be on their way early in the morning, it was agreed, after a time, that a good night's sleep was the best thing they could have; and as the sun had now set, they went into the house, and each chose a place in which to spend the night.

The clamor of voices soon sank to a sleepy murmur; and presently there was such silence that the house might indeed have been a haunted one, just as the village superstition held it to be.

There would have been nothing more worth recording in the adventures of that day but for the fact that Everychild, at the last moment, felt an irresistible desire to explore the attic of the old house. And this he undertook to do, after all his companions had, as he supposed, fallen asleep.

CHAPTER XXI

AN ENCOUNTER IN THE ATTIC

He moved stealthily about the upper story of the house, trying this door and that. He did not wish to disturb his companions, for he knew that a sound in the dark would startle them, especially after they had been told of the rumor that the house was haunted.

The first and second doors he tried opened into empty rooms. The third and fourth, into closets. But the fifth opened to a narrow staircase; and ascending this on tip-toe, he presently found himself in the attic.

It was a very solemn place. The eaves sloped down closely as if they were a sort of hood, meant to hide something evil. There was one window at the gable end: a broken window, with fragments of glass lying about it. The light of the moon penetrated the window, making the fragments of glass glisten, and forming a pale avenue across the dusty floor.

There were old chests here and there, all mysteriously closed—perhaps locked. There were old garments hanging in obscure places. They made you think of persons lurking there in the dark. Outside the broken window an owl in a dark tree hooted mournfully.

Everychild crossed the attic cautiously. Timbers creaked beneath his feet. The smell of old, abandoned things arose. And suddenly he stopped short and clinched his hands. Beyond a pale haze of moonbeams he saw some one sitting on one of the closed chests.

That form in the gloom was perfectly motionless; and for a time Everychild tried to convince himself that here was simply another delusion—that certain old articles of furniture or clothing had been so arranged as to suggest the form of a human being.

But no, this could scarcely be. Every outline of the figure was too real. And besides, the person on the chest now moved slightly.

Everychild forced himself to advance a step, to move to right and to left, that he might learn something of that person who sat there in mysterious silence. And suddenly he found himself smiling and relaxing.

It was Will o'Dreams who sat there!

The giant had seen him at last, and he called out pleasantly, "You here too, Everychild? Come and sit down. There's room for two here on this old chest."

"I didn't know you were here," said Everychild.

"It's the very sort of place I like to visit," was the reply. "If ever you miss me, you've only to hunt for an old attic near by, and there you'll find me."

"I wonder why?" asked Everychild.

"Ah, I scarcely know. But a great many lovely persons come up into old attics—mostly children, or else quite old men or women—and I think they like to find me at such times."

"And do you never frighten them?"

The giant laughed. "I've no doubt I do, sometimes. But mostly I am of real help to them. The old things that are left in attics seem somehow different if I'm about. Some day you'll understand what I mean. And the

sounds you hear in an attic, and the thoughts that come to you, seem pleasant in a way, as long as I'm near by."

Everychild realized immediately that this was true; for at that very moment the owl in the dark tree outside the broken window hooted—and the sound was not at all what it had been only a little while ago.

"It's fine to hear the owl make a noise like that, isn't it?" he asked of the giant.

"Is it?" replied Will o'Dreams with a kindly taunt in his voice. "Suppose you tell me why."

"I'm not sure I can. But you know it makes you think of so many wonderful and strange things."

"Of what?" persisted the giant.

Everychild pondered a little, and then it seemed that he saw a sort of vision. "It makes you think of dark forests," he said, "—the very middle of them. And it makes you think of old ruined castles, with nothing living about them any more but the ivy climbing up on the broken walls."

The giant's eyes were shining in the gloom. "And what else?" he asked softly.

"And then you think of the castles as they used to be, long ago. When there were bright lights in them, and knights and ladies, and music, and maybe a—what do you call them?—a harper to come in out of the storm to sit beside the fireplace and tell tales." He seemed unable to fill in the picture more completely, but Will o'Dreams began where he had left off:

"And do you know what is true, as long as you think of the knights and ladies? It means that they are still living. That's what thinking of things means—it means keeping them alive. Most persons die when their children are all dead: at the very latest, when their grandchildren die. But as long as you think of knights and ladies, and picture their ways, why, that keeps them alive. It means that they will never die. That is, as long as there are

owls to hoot." He added with a hidden smile, "And as long as I idle about in old attics."

"It is very strange," said Everychild, not clearly understanding.

"It just needs a little thinking about," declared the giant. "And it's not only in attics that I'm able to help. That old garden we played in to-day ... do you know what would happen, if certain persons came into it while I was there?"

As Everychild did not know, the giant continued: "They would see the columbine growing; and straightway they would think of a poor lady named Ophelia; and then they would think of Shakespeare; and then they would think of the river Avon; and then they would think of lovely English meadows, and then they would think of the sea—because the Avon finally reaches it, you know—and then they would think of ships, and then of Columbus, and then of America, and then of millions of new gardens where the columbine of England found new homes."

Everychild was trying to see the pictures as they passed; but he could not quite keep up. And after Will o'Dreams had finished he remained silent, going over it all in his mind.

But the giant interrupted him. "There," he said, "we ought not to stay up too late. You know we want to make an early start to-morrow."

Everychild's heart prompted him to say impulsively, "And you'll go on with us? You'll not get tired and leave us on the way?"

The giant pondered a moment, and then he replied: "No. My search will carry me as far as your search is to carry you."

"You haven't told me what it is you're searching for," said Everychild.

There was a long silence, and then the giant replied: "I scarcely liked to speak of it; yet if we are to be friends, perhaps I may do so. The truth is, I am seeking my mother."

Everychild felt a little thrilled. He recalled what Mr. Literal had said of the giant—how he had been driven away from home because of the evil he had done. He had refused to believe what Mr. Literal had said; yet what was the meaning of what the giant was now saying?

"I lost my mother long ago," the giant resumed. "I can't explain just how it was. But there were many who mistrusted me in my childhood and believed I wasn't up to any good. They said I was made up of lies. They drove me from their houses and closed their doors on me. And my mother and I got lost from each other. From that day to this I have had bad days when I've feared that all my enemies ever said about me was true. But it is only occasionally I have a bad day. You see, I remember my mother's ways so well that it seems almost as if she were with me, much of the time. But I know well that if I could find her, never to lose her again, I should never have another evil thought. And so it is that I constantly dream of finding her, and go about the world seeking her. And I never see a beautiful lady without stopping to ask myself in a whisper, 'Can it be she?'"

"Was she so beautiful, then?" asked Everychild.

"Ah, I cannot tell you how beautiful. So straight and tall and brave, yet with a great tenderness a little hidden from sight. Her lips curved a little, mournfully, as if she had been singing a sad song; yet there was an expression in her eyes—a soft, calm expression, which made everything seem right when you looked into them. There are even now moments when I feel ... I scarcely know how to explain it to you. It's as if she were near by, whispering, and I couldn't think just where to look for her."

"I'll help you to look for her," said Everychild heartily. And then together they quit the attic and went cautiously down the narrow staircase.

Only a few moments later they had taken their places among their companions and had fallen asleep.

CHAPTER XXII

THE END OF A HUNDRED YEARS

They all resumed their journey at sunrise, carrying with them a fair supply of food which the townspeople had brought; and by noon they had crossed the boundary into a different kingdom, where the cruelties of the wicked King John were wholly unknown, and where Prince Arthur became almost the gayest member of the band.

Late in the afternoon they came within sight of another castle; and as they were now journeying through a very lonely region, they decided that it would be a wise plan to apply at this place for accommodations for the night.

Somewhat to their dismay, however, they discovered upon drawing nearer that the castle was surrounded by a forest so dense that not even the smallest member of the band could penetrate between the trunks and branches. Nor did there seem to be a road for them to take, the only thing resembling a road having been abandoned so long that it was quite overgrown.

It was here that Will o'Dreams found opportunity to render a most important service. Without the slightest spirit of boasting he stepped forward, saying, "Follow me!"

To the amazement of all, the trees parted so that a way was opened and the entire band now found it quite easy to follow in the footsteps of the giant.

Together they all began to climb the hill in the direction of the mysterious castle.

But while the children are wending their way up the hill, let us take leave of them for a time, that we may have a peep at one of the rooms of the castle.

The room has been described as "the finest room in a king's palace," and while this would seem a somewhat exaggerated statement, there were at least many evidences of elegance to be noted.

Rich tapestries hung about the walls. They presented certain stories from mythology in the form of pictures traced in golden threads. There were golden candlesticks, and even the chairs and tables were of gold.

At the far side of the room, which was very large, there appeared to be a sort of alcove before which a damask curtain was closely drawn.

Before this curtain sat a lady of honor. She seemed a very great person indeed, her dress being inferior only to that of a queen in richness and elegance. She had a double chin and a very large stomach, which in her day were considered quite suitable to a person in her position.

Somewhat out of keeping with the golden furniture and the rich tapestries was the great fireplace containing an almost commonplace crane and kettle, and bordered by irregular areas of smoked wood and stone, indicating that the ventilation of the room needed looking after in the worst way.

In addition to the lady of honor there were other persons in the room: a scullion, or cook, with rather comical features and a red nose, who sat before the fireplace; a line of guards in mailed armor who were stationed around the walls, finely erect, with spears held perpendicularly, their ends resting on the floor; and a herald, or messenger, standing just inside an inner door.

But—wonderful to relate—the lady of honor, the scullion, the guards in mail, and the herald, were all sound asleep! Moreover, they had all been sound asleep for precisely one hundred years.

I should add that two other individuals already known to us were in the room: the Masked Lady and Mr. Literal. The Masked Lady held in her hands a time-glass precisely like an hourglass in every respect, save that it was designed to measure the passage of a full century. The last grains of sand were just falling when she looked up, startled, because Mr. Literal had

broken the stillness by yawning. He was plainly bored, and he was looking about the room at the various sleepers as if he were thoroughly tired of them all.

After Mr. Literal had finished his yawn a truly unearthly silence reigned. There wasn't so much as the ticking of a clock or the falling of embers in the fireplace. Silence, a long, long silence.

Then a distant door opened and closed sharply. There was the muffled tramp of many feet. And then—what have we here? Everychild entered the room!

He was followed instantly by Cinderella, Hansel and Grettel, Will o'Dreams, Prince Arthur, Tom Hubbard, Little Bo-Peep, Little Boy Blue, the children of the Old Woman who lived in a shoe (who numbered some forty boys and girls all told), and last of all, the little black dog.

There was necessarily a good deal of bustle and noise while the members of the band were entering; but when Everychild had had time to look about him he was smitten with silence, and all his companions suddenly became as quiet as mice.

Then Everychild perceived the Masked Lady, and for once he was very glad to see her. He approached her eagerly, if somewhat timidly.

"What is this strange place?" he whispered.

And as the Masked Lady did not reply to him, he turned to Cinderella. "Am I—are we—dreaming?" he asked.

Cinderella reassured him promptly. "We are not dreaming," she said. "I have seen other places as beautiful. The ballroom where I danced—it might have been in this very castle. Yet how strange it is to find them all asleep!" And she gazed about the room with amused wonder.

"And the way the forest opened as we climbed the hill," added Everychild, "just as if we were expected. Did anything like it ever happen before?"

The Masked Lady remarked almost dreamily: "When Everychild seeks the place where the Sleeping Beauty lies, forests always open and the steepest paths are easy to climb."

Everychild caught at the name. "The Sleeping Beauty—I have heard of her," he said. And he added, "Is she here?"

The Masked Lady did not reply in words, but the obscure smile on her lips was very significant.

It was Cinderella who clasped her hands in sudden ecstasy and cried, "She must be here. A place so lovely—it couldn't have been meant for any one else!" She spoke with such elation that all the other children looked at her with beaming eyes.

Everychild asked in perplexity—"But if she be here ... ?"

"You haven't forgotten, have you?" asked Cinderella. "She was doomed to sleep a hundred years, until the prince came to waken her with a kiss."

"And is she still waiting?" asked Everychild.

"I haven't a doubt in the world that she is still waiting."

"She is always waiting," said the dreamy voice of the Masked Lady.

"But not—not here?" asked Everychild.

"There's never any telling where you'll find things," replied Cinderella. "We might look at least."

No one had observed that the Masked Lady had straightened up with a very dramatic gesture. *The sand in the glass she held had all fallen!*

No sooner had she spoken than Cinderella advanced to the alcove hidden by the damask curtain. The other children watched her intently. She barely touched the curtain—yet it was drawn aside. And everything within the alcove became visible.

There was a perfectly beautiful bed, all trimmed with gold and silver lace, so it is said. And on it reposed a slight, queen-like young lady, fully dressed, yet sound asleep. Her cheeks were delicately tinted, indicating perfect health. Her lips were slightly parted; her bosom rose and fell tranquilly. A naked little Cupid knelt on her pillow, his wings aloft, his eyes intently inspecting her closed eyelids.

Everychild seemed really to lose control of himself. He gazed, and then he advanced in a manner so determined that Cinderella drew back, leaving him alone with the sleeper, save for the Cupid on the pillow and the lady of honor asleep in her chair.

"It *is* the Sleeping Beauty!" exclaimed Everychild. Somehow or other he knew positively. He knelt down beside her and gazed at her reverently. Slowly and gently he reached for the hand nearest him. *He took it into his own; and then—he never could have told what put it into his head to do so!—he shyly kissed the beautiful hand.*

And the Sleeping Beauty? She sighed and opened her eyes. For an instant she gazed dreamily at the ceiling. Then she sat up, placing her feet on the floor. With wonder and delight she leaned a little forward, her eyes fixed on Everychild's.

And then she said, in a voice which would have set the birds to singing, if there had been any near by—

"Is it you, my prince? You have waited a long while!"

CHAPTER XXIII

THE AWAKENING

No sooner had the Sleeping Beauty spoken than a number of things began to happen.

The other sleepers in the room opened their eyes.

The lady of honor was the first to attract attention. She stirred and placed her fingers against her lips in a very elegant manner to suppress a yawn. Then she exclaimed very audibly: "Bless my soul—I must have dropped off for a moment!"

The sergeant of the guard was seen to open his eyes and glare very suspiciously at the spear-bearer nearest to him. He exclaimed, upon noting the stupid expression in the spear-bearer's eyes—"Ah-ha! I caught you asleep, did I?"

To which the spear-bearer replied nervously, "Not to say asleep, exactly, I just closed my eyes because a bit of smoke got into them."

The scullion by the fireplace opened his eyes and sat quite still for an instant, all his attention concentrated upon the others in the room, at whom, however, he was afraid to look. It was his aim to conceal from them the fact that he had been asleep.

The kettle on the crane in the fireplace began to sing cheerfully and an appetizing odor arose. Flames began to dance in the fireplace.

The lady of honor with affected testiness addressed the Sleeping Beauty. "It's high time you were stirring, I should say," was her comment. "It seems to me we are all becoming quite indolent!"

The Sleeping Beauty would not respond to her mood of bustling levity. She gazed wonderingly and patiently at the lady of honor; and then turning her attention to Everychild she said in a dreamy voice—

"I think I shall rise!"

She offered her hand to Everychild, and he assisted her to her feet. I am informed that "he took care not to tell her that she was dressed like her great-grandmother, and had a point band peeping over a high collar." My own belief is that perhaps he scarcely noticed this.

They moved forward, the Sleeping Beauty maintaining an air of dreaminess, while Everychild simply could not remove his eyes from her—she was so perfect!

All the others in the room were silent, gazing now at the Sleeping Beauty, and now at Everychild.

And just at that moment there were evidences of new life in the adjoining apartments. You could hear some one playing on a spinnet. A sentry on a distant wall called the hour. Lords and ladies could be heard laughing together. And then there was a great to-do; the king and queen, father and mother of the Sleeping Beauty, entered the room!

There was now a respectful silence for you! You could have heard a pin drop. Little train-bearers came behind the king and queen. Then came lords and ladies, and then the court chamberlain, and at last a few others whose functions I cannot even name.

The king was pleased to speak presently. "And so you have finished your nap, daughter?" he said.

The Sleeping Beauty stood before him with a radiant face. "And only observe who it was that awakened me!" she replied, inclining her head toward Everychild.

Said the king: "He is the guest whose coming was foretold, no doubt. Long ago it was written that one should awaken you and claim you as his bride."

There was general delight and amazement at this: so frankly manifested that the humblest of Everychild's companions lost all sense of caution. The smallest son of the Old Woman who lived in a shoe actually undertook to stand on his head, while the little black dog ran here and there barking with the utmost freedom.

In the general excitement Mr. Literal took occasion to remark to the Masked Lady: "But—dear me!—it's all fiction of the most extravagant character—the account of the Sleeping Beauty and the rest of it!"

But the Masked Lady smiled in her puzzling way and said: "When you would find the truth perfectly told, you will always find it in a story. It is only facts which lead us hopelessly astray."

However, the Sleeping Beauty was speaking again. She was replying to what her father had said. "That's very nice, I'm sure!" she said. And she turned to Everychild with a blissful smile.

It seemed the king did not mean that any time should be lost. He turned majestically to the sergeant of the guard. "Go," said he, "and bid the trumpeter summon all within hearing to assemble in the chapel." Then, to those who were assembled in the room, "The wedding shall take place without delay. Let us to the chapel."

The sergeant disappeared, and almost immediately there was the sound of a bugle blowing on the castle wall.

The king and queen went out, followed by their train-bearers, pages and others.

Everychild hesitated; but the Sleeping Beauty, with a reassuring nod, took his hand, and they followed.

There was a moment's confusion among Everychild's companions; but they speedily got themselves into line. Will o'Dreams led them; and there followed Hansel and Grettel, Little Bo-Peep and Little Boy Blue, Prince Arthur and Tom Hubbard, the children of the Old Woman who lived in a shoe, and last of all the little black dog.

Only Cinderella, with a certain strange quiet upon her, remained in her place, while the Masked Lady and Mr. Literal stood regarding her.

Words broke from her tremulously: "And so it is to be the Sleeping Beauty! I had hoped ... there was to be one who would find my crystal slipper and come for me ..."

She had scarcely uttered the words when the Masked Lady stepped forward and touched her face with gentle fingers and kissed her brow.

A happy transformation occurred in Cinderella's face. She stood gazing into vacancy a moment, her eyes shining. An instant later she dashed from the room, to be present at the wedding ceremony. Already, in the distance, the strains of the Lohengrin march could be heard.

The Masked Lady would have gone into the chapel then, but she was detained by Mr. Literal, who said irritably: "That march—you know it's really quite modern. Wagner, isn't it?"

The Masked Lady replied with a certain repression: "Beautiful things are never modern—yet always modern. They have existed always, from the dawn of time, waiting for the proper occasion for their use. Come, I must be present at the wedding of Everychild."

"Still," said Mr. Literal drily, "I should say there have been many weddings at which you were not present."

But she was not listening. She had gone; and he smilingly followed.

The sound of music gradually died away. There was a distant murmur of voices. Then again the music sounded, louder, with a quality of triumph in it. Louder and louder it sounded.

The bridal party returned! Flower girls ran before, scattering flowers. Everychild and the Sleeping Beauty appeared, followed by the king and queen.

A great throng entered the room: lords and ladies, the companions of Everychild, led now by Cinderella.

The bride and the bridegroom were surrounded. They were acclaimed in loud voices. They were lifted aloft. The little black dog barked madly.

Such a scene had never been witnessed before.

CHAPTER XXIV

TIME PASSES

The same room in the castle—the room where the pomp and ceremony had been.

But it was empty now. The flowers which had been scattered on the floor had been swept away. Silence reigned.

Presently two doors opened: one on the right, the other on the left. But though the doors opened, not a sound was to be heard, and for an instant no one appeared.

And then—some one was coming.

Father Time entered at one of the doors. He walked slowly and quietly across the room. He carried his scythe and sand-glass. He glanced neither to left nor right.

He went out at the other door!

PART V

**ARGUMENT: ON HIS WANDERINGS EVERYCHILD
BETHINKS HIM OF HIS PARENTS, AND DISCOVERS
THAT THOUGH HE HAS SEEMED TO LOSE
THEM, HE HAS NOT REALLY DONE SO.**

CHAPTER XXV

WILL O'DREAMS REPORTS A DISCOVERY

We have seen how time passed in the castle where Everychild and his companions had come to dwell. Now let us see what followed.

On a beautiful summer day Everychild and the Sleeping Beauty sat in the great room of the golden furniture and the fire place and the alcove. They occupied two little golden chairs near the middle of the room. They were rocking placidly and saying nothing to each other. Now they rocked backward and forward together, and again they rocked quite contrariwise.

And what have we here? Close to the Sleeping Beauty there was a tiny cradle, all of gold. And in it—well, you could see tresses of wonderful golden hair, and the most marvelous blue eyes which would open and shut, and a complexion which was simply perfect. Just now the eyes were closed.

At a little distance from them there was a spectacle most beautiful to behold. This was afforded by the Masked Lady and the task in which she was engaged. She stood near an immense open window, beside the most beautiful dove-cote ever seen. It was silver and green, topping a pillar of gold. It had several compartments, all containing pure white doves. These were engaged in bringing or carrying messages. At intervals doves entered the open window and perched on the Masked Lady's arms. These were placed in the cote and others were removed from the cote and carried to the window, from which they flew away and disappeared.

While the Masked Lady was engaged in this task it was to be noted that there was a very sad expression in her eyes. She was turning over certain things in her mind.

The truth is that Everychild had been married just a year, and she was thinking how it would be necessary before long for him to be conducted to the grim Mountain of Reality. She knew that this was a very terrible experience, or that it would seem so just at first; and that is why there was a sad expression in her eyes. She knew very well, however, that the matter could not be put off very much longer. Indeed, she had been able to detect an occasional shadow in Everychild's eyes which proved that he was already beginning to see the formidable Mountain of Reality in the distance. I should also explain that the messages she was sending and receiving with the aid of the white doves all had a bearing upon the plan she had in mind of taking Everychild, ere long, upon the most difficult journey he was ever to make.

Although silence reigned in the room, there was the murmur of children's voices in the distance, occasionally rising to a joyous shout. The children were clearly at play in some invisible court; and when their cries were particularly joyous, Everychild and the Sleeping Beauty glanced at each other and smiled indulgently.

At length the voices of the children became inaudible; and a moment later Cinderella entered the room. She stood an instant, her hands on her hips and an almost impatient expression in her eyes; and then she approached Everychild and the Sleeping Beauty.

Everychild glanced up at her with a slightly patronizing smile. "Well, Cinderella?" he asked.

She put her hair back rather energetically and exclaimed—"Oh, I'm bored. That's the honest truth. Those games out there—they *do* get so tiresome. And Grettel is such a simpleton, really. She keeps saying 'Think of something else for us to play, Cinderella—think of something else.' She never thinks of anything herself. Neither does Hansel, nor any of them."

She sighed and glanced back the way she had come, and it was to be noted that the sound of playing had not been resumed.

It was the Sleeping Beauty who replied. "Never mind, Cinderella," she said. "You know I realize quite well what it is to be bored." She had spoken

gently; and now she smiled with a certain playfulness. "The prince with the missing slipper will find you soon enough. You've only to be patient, and the day will come when you'll seldom be bored any more."

"I don't know, I'm sure," said Cinderella; and with perfect candor she added, "Aren't *you* bored? You look it: sitting there as if you hadn't a single thought in your head."

The Sleeping Beauty laughed. "You dear, foolish thing!" she replied. "Bored? The idea! I'm perfectly happy. Of course, there are times ..." She broke off and meditated, and actually sighed. "Come, we'll go and look at the goldfish," she added briskly.

They went away together, taking cradle and all. All of a sudden they seemed as energetic as sparrows. They seemed for the moment really indifferent to Everychild, who remained in his chair alone.

When they had gone he leaned forward in an elegant yet somewhat dejected attitude, his hands clasped between his knees. Then he arose, shrugging his shoulders as if a burden were clinging to them, and turned toward the Masked Lady.

"What are you doing?" he asked wonderingly.

She set free a fine dove, which immediately disappeared through the window.

"I am getting ready for a very important journey," she said.

He watched her intently. Presently he said, in a strange, abashed tone, "You seem a very nice, kind lady, after all!"

She did not reply to this, because a dove came in at that instant and she busied herself placing it in its compartment in the cote.

He continued to regard her, though he was now studying her face, rather than taking note of her work with the doves. "Sometimes," he continued

falteringly, "I have a wish to speak to you—I mean, to tell you of things which I cannot speak of to others."

"I have tried always, Everychild, to be close to you," she said.

For an instant it seemed to him that it would not be difficult at all to speak to her of what was in his heart. And he said, "You know I—I am not very happy."

She replied to this with gentle mockery. "Not happy?" she said; "and yet there are many to play with you, and none to turn away from you with coldness and indifference—any more."

He became strangely still. What did she mean by that? He had never told her about his childhood; he had never mentioned his parents to her. Whom could she be, that she should know so many things without having to be told? Or was she speaking only of the present, without reference to the past?

"My playmates are all friendly," he said; "but you know I have come far from home ..."

When he faltered she added, "But have you found what you started out to find?"

He was a little embarrassed. "What I started out to find?" he echoed. "I don't seem to remember——"

"You know you started out to find the truth," she said.

He nodded. "So I did," he declared. "But so many things have happened, especially since I found the Sleeping Beauty, and it's been so nice, most of the time ..."

"Still, you shouldn't give up, you know," she said. "Maybe that's the reason why you're not quite happy—because you haven't found the truth."

He sighed heavily. She hadn't comforted him, after all. And somehow he could not tell her that what ailed him was that he was heartsick to see his

parents again. He remembered the pretty sitting room at home, and the way his father and mother used to look; and it seemed to him that if he could go back they would perhaps be happy to see him. But he could not speak of all this to the Masked Lady.

He was greatly amazed when she said in a low tone: "It would be the same thing over again if you didn't find the truth before you went back."

It was quite as if he had spoken his thoughts to her aloud!

He drew away from her uneasily; but even as he did so she received another dove which fluttered in at the window. And as she read the message it had brought she said musingly—almost as if she were reading the message, and not speaking to him at all—"*Everychild shall find his parents again!*"

He felt that he almost loved her when he heard those words—almost, yet not quite. His heart beat more lightly. He wondered where all the children had gone. He listened for their voices.

It was then that an outer door opened hurriedly and the giant, Will o'Dreams, entered the room. Perceiving Everychild, he stood an instant with clinched hands and uplifted face; and then he cried out in a loud voice:

"Everychild!"

And Everychild replied, with a little of that kindly condescension which a married man feels toward a youth, "Well, my boy?"

The giant cried out with elation, "Everychild, I have found her house!"

"You have found her house?" echoed Everychild in perplexity.

"My mother's house! I have seen it again! These many days, while you have been happy here, I have made countless journeys far and near. I made a final search. I could not give her up. And now I have found her house—the house where I dwelt when I was a child!"

This was good news, indeed. Everychild knew how the heart of the giant had yearned for his mother. He smiled delightedly. "Ah, and so you have seen her at last!" he cried.

"I have not seen her—no," confessed the giant. "They would not allow me to enter—they who surround her. I was but one, and they were many; and they are cruel and relentless. But now that I have found the place which shelters her I shall not give up until I stand face to face with her again. Dear Everychild ..."

"Well?" said Everychild, seeing that his friend found it very hard to continue.

"I have come now to tell you we must part. I could not remain away, remembering that I had not bade you farewell. But now I go to watch for her until she emerges from her door, or until her followers slumber ... Oh, the obstacles shall be as nothing. Only rejoice with me that I am to meet her again at last!"

But Everychild's heart became heavy. "And we must part?" he asked in a low voice. "Please do not say so! We, who have become like brothers ... is there no other way?"

"There is no other way," replied the giant. "Do not doubt that I too shall grieve because of our parting; but after searching for her in vain all these years ..."

But Everychild, after a moment's reflection, cried out resolutely, "There is another way. I shall go with you! And after you have found her, who knows——"

The giant was now happy indeed. "You will go with me?" he cried; "you will leave all that makes you happy here and go with me into possible perils? Then make haste—oh, make haste, that we may be on our way."

And speaking thus the giant rushed eagerly from the room.

For a moment Everychild stood lost in thought. It was the Masked Lady who aroused him. "It will be but a short journey," she said; and it seemed to Everychild that she spoke sadly. "Go with him, and be sure you shall make a speedy return."

He would have gone, then. Already he was putting great energy into his feet, that he might overtake the giant. But the Masked Lady detained him.

"A word," she said. "Be patient with him, and comfort him, whatever may befall. And Everychild—take this with you."

As she spoke she produced quite magically the slim, shining sword she had lent him once before. "Carry this," she said. "When it is drawn a certain door which would otherwise remain shut will open wide. And be of good cheer."

He took the sword mutely, wonderingly. How should it cause a door to open? he mused.

When he had reached the outer door he turned to look again upon the Masked Lady. She was smiling a little oddly—almost sadly, he thought. She was holding forth her hands toward the open window. She was not paying heed to him now. White doves were entering at the window and alighting on her hands.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE HIDDEN TEMPLE

Everychild paused in the court long enough to explain to the Sleeping Beauty and his friends that he was setting forth on an important mission with Will o'Dreams; and then the two companions set forth from the castle and began the descent of the road which led down into the valley.

Soon they came upon the road which they had formerly traveled—the Road of Troubled Children. And before the day was spent they had covered a great distance, since the giant, in his impetuous mood, set a very fast gait.

Toward sundown they turned a little away from the road and entered a forest of a nature so confusing and forbidding that Everychild paused in dismay. But the giant kept straight on, saying he was very sure of the way, and after a moment's halt, Everychild followed him.

In the very heart of the forest they paused, and Everychild's eyes opened wide with wonder: for before them was an amazing sight.

On a fair plateau a temple of white marble stood forth brightly in the light of the setting sun. It was the most perfect temple ever seen. It had a broad flight of steps, at the top of which there were pillars which almost resembled glass, so great was their purity. In the midst of the pillars there was a broad door set with precious gems. Here and there were alabaster urns.

No one was stirring about the temple. The door was closed. But at a little distance, on a perfectly kept lawn, there were numerous square blocks of marble, and on these certain extraordinary-appearing persons were seated.

We may as well know at once that the temple was the Temple of Truth; and the persons who sat on the blocks of marble, or pedestals, were known as Truth's devotees. The names of the devotees were graven on the pedestals, and a few of those which Everychild could see were Mr. Benevolent Institution, Dr. Orthodox Doctrine, Mrs. Justitia, Mr. Inflexible Creed, Mr. Professional Politician and Mr. Policeman. And of course there were many others.

They were all dressed presentably enough, save that Mrs. Justitia's robes were clearly of very cheap material, and the bandage about her eyes had slipped down so that one eye could be seen peeping out sharply; while Mr. Policeman had a really unsightly red nose, which made his blue uniform seem rather absurd.

The devotees of Truth sat staring straight before them. They seemed sleepy, and they continually nodded their heads like mandarins. Mr. Policeman was the only member of the group who did not nod continually. He was fast asleep! He stirred occasionally when a fly circled about his nose. On these occasions he waved his hand smartly before his face.

The oddest-appearing member of the group was, perhaps, Mr. Professional Politician. He wore a tiny mask with a smile like a cherub's painted on it. He kept touching the mask, as though he feared it might fall off; and when he did so it could be seen that he had an enormous, coarse hand which did not match the false face at all.

Just the same, the temple was very beautiful; and Everychild and the giant stood gazing at it with reverence.

The giant was the first to speak. "This is the place," he said. "And beyond that door, inside the temple, is where my mother is hidden."

Everychild nodded. Presently he thought to ask: "And all those—those ..." He really could not think how to refer to those persons on the pedestals.

But the giant understood. "We needn't pay any attention to them just now," he said. "They'll neither see nor hear us as long as we just stand here. It's only when we try to get into the temple that they become really terrible."

"And what do they do then?" asked Everychild.

"Various dreadful things. Mr. Benevolent Institution would lock us up where we'd see the sky only now and then and where we'd have to wear uniforms, and all act alike and eat alike, and go to sleep and wake up together."

Everychild shuddered and moved closer to his companion. "Don't speak so loud, please," he said. "And what about the others?"

"Mr. Orthodox Doctrine is one of those fellows ... well, he used to burn you, you know; but now he freezes you."

"And the others?"

"It's not easy to explain. The lady—Mrs. Justitia—has a habit ... I hate to say it, but she's forever asking you how much money you've got, and whether you've got any influential friends (if you could only know what she means by that!)—questions of that sort, which a nice person wouldn't ask you."

"It's all very strange," whispered Everychild. "And the one with the red nose?" he asked finally.

"Mr. Policeman. He isn't really as bad as the rest of them. All he does is hit you over the head with a club and turn you over to the lady—to her with the bandage that's always slipping off."

There was a silence, and then Everychild remarked: "Still, it's not plain why they're all sitting around here where your—your mother ..."

"It's just a pose," said the giant. "What I can't understand is why my mother doesn't denounce them all. They do no end of harm. And it was they who drove me away from her long ago. They said I was a dangerous character, and they all conspired to ruin me. They gave me a bad name, so that everybody was willing to give me a kick in passing—all save a few gentle hermits and shepherds and persons like that. And now—now I truly fear they've got my mother locked up in her temple, so that she's helpless. That's what we've got to do: we've got to get her out. Even if we have to break down the doors. Though of course they'll all try to destroy us if they know what we're about."

For the moment Everychild forgot the sword he carried—which the Masked Lady had given him—and forgot also what the Masked Lady had said to him about a door which would not open save in the presence of that sword. He said nervously, "Hadn't we better go away and come back some other time?"

But his companion replied resolutely, "I shall not go away. I shall wait until they are all asleep—or perhaps until she opens the door and appears."

One more question entered Everychild's mind. "But if they all hate you so," he said, "why do they all sit there now as if they did not care?"

"I doubt if they recognize me," explained the giant. "It's been so long since they saw me. They probably think we're mere idle travelers. You know there are many such; and few of them really try to enter the temple."

And so they stood and waited, and the devotees continued to nod like mandarins. It seemed indeed that they would never go to sleep. And it came to pass at last that the giant could no longer restrain himself. To be within reach of his lost mother, and not to be able to speak to her—it was too much!

He began to advance silently, leaving Everychild where he stood. He proceeded, step by step, in the direction of the temple. And it began to seem that he might reach the temple door without being seen.

Indeed, he actually did so. He laid his hand on the door of the temple. The door would not open! But instead, something quite dreadful happened.

In the back row of devotees sat one whom the giant had not yet seen. It was Mr. Literal, seated on a pedestal marked with his name.

This person started up with a scream of fury. He had recognized the giant.

"Up!" he cried to his fellow-devotees. "The evil son has returned. Up, all of you, and defend the temple!"

The others were all thoroughly aroused. They turned their eyes toward the temple and perceived the giant standing at the very door!

They sprang toward him with great fury. They quickly surrounded him. It seemed that he must really perish before their wrath. And then—then what happened?

Everychild could not stand idle and see his friend perish. He bethought him of the sword the Masked Lady had given him. He drew the sword quickly and with a loud cry he dashed toward the temple steps.

He gained the side of the giant; and then—what is this? *The devotees all turned to cowering wretches!* They put forth their elbows to ward off imaginary blows. They slunk back like base cowards.

They had seen the sword in Everychild's hand, and they had recognized it!

Moreover, before the gleam of that sword the temple door swung open.

The giant dashed into the temple to greet his mother. He became for an instant invisible. The devotees were now slinking back to a safe distance. Everychild, without ever lowering his sword, smote them all with his glance of scorn.

And then the giant reappeared. But oh, what a change had taken place in him! He held his hands aloft in an agony of despair. He staggered down the temple steps, followed by the wondering Everychild.

"What is it?" asked Everychild in distress. "What ails you?"

They were drawing away from the temple now, and the devotees were thronging back to the open door. They surrounded it, closing it with frenzied hands.

The giant drew apart, giving no explanation to Everychild just at first. But standing alone and heart-broken he lifted his hands high.

"*She is gone!*" he cried in a hoarse, agonized whisper.

The devotees lifted their voices in a triumphant chorus—

"She is within!"

But the giant, his hands hanging limp now, and his eyes staring into vacancy, repeated in the same hoarse voice:

"She is gone!"

CHAPTER XXVII

HOW EVIL DAYS CAME UPON THE CASTLE

As they left the temple behind them, on their return journey, Everychild could not help thinking that it was a very good thing to have found that the giant's mother was not in the temple. To his way of looking at it, this argued that she had escaped from the terrible creatures who surrounded the temple. And if so, why should they not hope to find her elsewhere?

But when at length he suggested this to his companion, the giant only replied, scarcely above a whisper, "I fear she has been slain."

And so Everychild walked by the giant's side, glancing at him anxiously from time to time, and seeing despair written so plainly on his countenance that he did not venture to utter another word.

When they approached the great entrance to the castle there was hurried running to and fro on the ramparts, about the doors and windows, and in the halls. Eager eyes looked down from the watch-tower. But soon all eagerness changed to alarm. They could all see that the giant had been smitten dreadfully: that the proud yet kindly head had been brought low.

Silence reigned in the great reception hall when the giant entered. His friends all waited for him to speak, to relate the tale of his adventure. Many eyes rested upon him curiously, yet pityingly. And when Everychild, following the giant into the hall, placed a warning finger on his lip, the wonder grew and deepened to consternation.

For an instant the giant stood among them, his trembling hands clasping his head. He saw none of his friends. Then he suddenly tottered. He would have fallen had not certain of the king's courtiers sprang to his aid. They

helped him to a chair; and there he sat with lowered eyes like one who would never lift his head again.

The physician was sent for in haste. He came and looked down upon the giant. He questioned him, but received no reply.

Then he looked upon those who surrounded him and touched his own forehead significantly. "The malady is here," he said. "This is no case for herbs and cordials."

They put the giant to bed and sent for the greatest physicians in the kingdom, including those who were skilled in ministering to the afflictions of the mind. There were muttered conferences and all the pomp which even the most cunning doctors knew how to exercise. Later there were bickerings and words of scorn and hatred among the healers. But it seemed they could not agree upon a remedy. One suggested this, the other urged that; but the giant remained indifferent to it all—unconscious of it all. And his condition was not bettered in the least. On the contrary, he sank deeper and deeper into the despondent mood which held him.

The others discussed his strange affliction. It seemed that many of them had known of the giant's great longing to find his mother again. For days and days he had been quitting the castle early in the morning and going upon far and dangerous journeys in the hope of finding her. He had seemed quite confident of finding her. No wonder that he should be smitten hard, now that he had been obliged to abandon his search.

At last a new, alarming report spread through the castle: the giant was no longer remaining silent, but was addressing all who came within hearing of him. But he was speaking only evil and false words. He was depicting the whole world as a place of shame and cruelties. He was painting everything black.

Everychild listened to him speaking in this strain on one occasion, and the effect upon him was unbelievable. Everything seemed different to him. The golden furniture in the finest room in the castle no longer seemed to be of gold. It was merely painted yellow, he thought. Even the Sleeping Beauty seemed changed in his eyes. Her face did not seem so perfect, after all!

There were moments when she seemed even commonplace, not to say dreadfully old-fashioned. He fought against this state of mind, but all in vain.

Seeing how things were going, the physicians urged that the giant's friends be prevented from seeing him any more. They were even for removing him to the castle dungeons and confining him. But so great was the outcry against this extreme measure that it was not carried out.

Nevertheless, as one day after another passed, it was plain that something must be done. The giant's voice could be heard far and near, uttering evil words and pretending that things were quite unlike what they really were. And all this had an effect upon all his former companions.

Cinderella was heard to say with a fearful sigh: "I am sure the prince of the crystal slipper will never find me. It is absurd to suppose so!"

Hansel was heard to say, "Oh, yes, I get enough to eat now: but who knows how soon I shall be required to go without eating?"

Grettel said, "It's all very well, but no one can tell me we'll come to any good in this place surrounded by a forest in which there may be all kinds of monsters!"

Tom Hubbard maintained that his little black dog had never had so many fleas since the day he was born, and that it was all the fault of the old castle.

Little Bo-Peep and Little Boy Blue were seen to weep together and to confide in each other the fear that they would some day have to return to the folds to find that the wolves had become much larger and more ferocious than they had even been before.

Even the gentle Prince Arthur became moody and remarked to Everychild on one occasion, "There's always a good deal of visiting among kings, and we may expect some one to see me here sooner or later and carry word to King John. And then there will be no further liberty for me."

For the time being everybody forgot all about the Masked Lady, who sat alone much of the time, and regarded this person or that with steadfast eyes through her mask.

To speak quite plainly, the Masked Lady had been putting off to the last possible moment a step from which she could not help but shrink.

The time had come for Everychild to take that dread journey to the Mountain of Reality. She had given him as many days of grace as she could possibly permit. And at last she said solemnly:

"It shall be to-morrow."

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE MOUNTAIN OF REALITY

The next day the giant, standing out on the rampart where every one could see and hear him, was shouting—"The world is full of evil! The world is full of evil!" And his friends thought sadly of that day, now only a little while ago, when it had been his wont to say that the world was full of good—that, indeed, everything was good if you looked at it in the right way. But suddenly he stopped shouting and lifted his head.

It was the first time he had been seen to lift his head in a number of days, and it seemed very good to see him do this. He seemed to be listening intently, and also with a certain faint, dawning hope.

At the very same time Everychild lifted his head also and listened, but as he did so he clasped his hands with dread.

And also Prince Arthur and Cinderella and Hansel and Grettel and the other children lifted their heads and listened.

They had all heard some one playing on a pipe; and the sound, though distant, was very mysterious. It drifted up from the forest road. The notes continued to be heard, one by one, in the same strange, fascinating way.

It was the giant who first began to move in the direction of the sound of the pipe. He did this at first as though reluctantly; but as he continued on his way he began to walk more alertly, and presently he seemed very eager.

And then Everychild found it impossible to withstand that sound and he too moved away in the direction from which the notes of the pipe came. And the Sleeping Beauty, with a dreamy smile on her lips, walked with him; and Cinderella followed a few steps behind. And then the others, one by one, fell into line: Hansel and Grettel, the sons and daughters of the Old Woman who lived in the shoe, Prince Arthur, Little Bo-Peep, Little Boy Blue, and last of all, Tom Hubbard and the little black dog.

They all marched down the mountain road, away from the castle; and presently they began to catch glimpses of a figure in the distance, moving on before them elusively, and leaving behind a trail of enchanting notes.

They turned into the Road of Troubled Children, and far away they marched. Far away they marched, but the figure on ahead still eluded them—save that they heard the notes of the pipe clearer and more sweet and strange.

But at last the figure that led the way could be seen more clearly, and Everychild murmured to himself; "It is the Pied Piper!" And when this thought had occurred to him he could scarcely repress his excitement.

The figure in the road before them had now halted, though the dulcet notes went on and on. It was a truly fascinating person, to say the least—with a quaint costume, including a funny cap. But presently Everychild, coming closer to the piper, drew in his breath shortly.

The player on the pipes was the Masked Lady! She might have been thought to be dreaming as she lifted and lowered her beautiful fingers where the openings in the pipe were and went on playing. Occasionally she glanced back to make sure that the children were all there.

And then something very strange occurred. The ranks of children were augmented by other children. Along the road they came dreamily and took their places in the procession. They were Little Red Riding-Hood and the Babes in the Wood (the latter brushing withered leaves from their garments) and other children whose stories are known to be sad ones. And there was Aladdin again!—carrying his lamp, and smiling a little mischievously.

Then the Masked Lady, in the guise of the Pied Piper, resumed her march, facing straight ahead, and moving with grace and majesty. And the entire procession began to move.

The children scarcely gave a thought to where they were going. Nor did they give a thought to going back. They were moved by a power which they did not understand to keep step with the music of the pipe.

On and on they marched—on and on. They passed through silent forests and across beautiful plains, up gentle hills and through sheltered fells. And the melody of the piper became so strongly accented that they could not help keeping step, even if they had wished not to do so.

At last, however, they came to where there was a great dark mountain ahead; and Everychild thought to himself, "Now we shall have to turn back, since it would be too much for us to ascend that high mountain."

But the Masked Lady continued to march straight toward that dark mountain—which was, as she well knew, the fearful Mountain of Reality.

The other children all beheld the mountain and they looked at one another with questioning eyes, as if each were asking the other, "Do you not consider it a terrible mountain?" Still, they never ceased to keep step with the music.

They could see the mountain clearly now. It was cold and bleak and rose into the mists of the sky. There were great chasms in its sides, and precipitous heights and walls which it would have seemed impossible to scale. It seemed of a frightful hardness, too.

Most terrible of all, wild hunters were to be seen all the way up to the summit, and terrible beasts; and also one could catch a glimpse of solitary individuals who were climbing to the highest visible points, and some of these were falling back and hurting themselves terribly.

"We cannot advance another step," thought Everychild; for now they were indeed at the very base of the mountain.

And then a miracle occurred, just when it seemed that the Masked Lady would be compelled to turn back.

The mountain opened! There was a cavity as large as an immense archway. Through this the Masked Lady advanced; and then the entire band of children marched straight into the heart of the mountain.

Everychild, looking back, perceived that the mountain had closed again after the last child had entered, so that they were now all prisoners!

That was indeed a dreadful moment; for the heart of the Mountain of Reality was a great gloomy cavern in which everything seemed quite terrible. Nor would there have seemed any way of escaping from the place. The light was but dim, so that objects were only obscurely revealed. But it could be seen that the top of the cavern was very high, while the walls were steep and formidable.

A weird sound arose. The high walls echoed it, the dark ceiling flung it back. It went trembling into far places and returned, shattered yet with its weird quality unabated.

It was the children weeping!

It seemed their hearts would break, because of the dreary place into which they had been brought. And during this time the Masked Lady only stood and looked upon the children silently.

Everychild could scarcely believe his own eyes, and he began a more careful examination of the cavern.

He came upon water in half-hidden pools. "But," he reflected, "we could not drink of this water if we were thirsty. It is quite black."

He examined the paths which led from one place to another. "We could not walk in these paths," he mused, "because they are too rough."

He examined the natural stairways which led to the upper chambers of the cavern. "But we could not climb those stairways," he decided, "since they are too steep."

He came upon beds which had been spread for himself and his companions. "We could not sleep in these," was his conclusion, "because they are too hard."

And as he continued his examination he became aware that he was standing close to Will o'Dreams; and something in his friend's manner caused him to pause and observe him more closely.

Because of the fulness of his heart he put forth a hand and touched his friend's arm. The arm trembled. And then the sad truth became known. The scenes he had been called upon to witness here in the cavern had been too much for Will o'Dreams. He had been stricken with blindness!

It did not seem strange to Everychild that he should wish to run immediately and tell the Masked Lady of what had befallen the giant. Surely he must have felt a certain confidence in her, after all!

But when she had been informed of the giant's plight she only said, "Let us be patient."

And then she began to speak to all the children, calling their attention to this matter or that. "Do not be afraid to drink of the water," she said. "It seems black. That is only because it is deep."

And drinking of the water, they found it to be sweet and refreshing.

"Do not hold back from wandering in the paths," she added. "Your feet will take them easily."

And wandering in the paths they found that they were not so rough as they had imagined them.

"Do not falter if you wish to climb the stairways," she continued. "Only try them."

And they tried them, and found that their limbs responded joyously to the effort they were putting forth.

"Do not shrink from sleeping in the beds which have been provided," she said at last. "They may surprise you."

And lying down in the beds which had seemed so uninviting, the children were wooed to slumber. They were really comfortable beds, after all!

Strangest of all was the fact that Will o'Dreams went about with the other children, guided by the sound of their voices, and by an occasional touch of Everychild's hand; and one after another he tested the pool and the paths and the stairs and the beds.

"Ah, how good it is to have them!" he said at last with a great sigh; and soon after he had sunk into deep and refreshing slumber.

Nor were the others long in following his example. They had traveled far; and it seemed good to rest now, especially as they believed they might look forward to happy and wonderful experiences on the morrow.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE MASKED LADY'S SECRET

Toward morning Everychild had a dream. In his dream his mother came and stood near him, and looked at him wonderingly and sadly. And then—

in the dream—his father could be seen, standing apart and slowly shaking his head.

It seemed that there was a cry of joy in his throat, and that he ran to embrace his mother. He felt that he should weep for joy when he flung his arms about her neck and felt her face touching his.

But then he awoke, and his parents were not there: but only the great chamber in the heart of the mountain, and all the other children rising from their beds, eager to begin a new day.

He could not rid his mind of the vivid dream, nor his heart of the strange softness it had brought. And as soon as he could do so he sought the Masked Lady, his intention being to inquire of her what his dream had meant.

She stood waiting for him, as it seemed, and he approached her with increasing eagerness. And now he perceived that she was no longer wearing the dress of a piper, but had on the soft white dress in which he had first beheld her, and wore a jewel in her hair.

He had the strange thought that she might be really beautiful if only she would remove the mask which gave her face that distant expression and almost hid her eyes. And he remembered, all of a sudden, how he had often been helped by her, and how she had always been near, as if she wished to help him even more, and how she had comforted him that night when he had seen a star fall by assuring him that he was *a little bit of God*.

He began speaking to her with a new feeling of constraint. "I dreamed of seeing my mother and father last night," he said.

She smiled faintly. "I know," she replied. "All the other children had the same dream. That is what all children dream of here in this chamber."

He opened his eyes very wide. How could she know what all the other children had dreamed, since it did not appear that they had told her of their dreams? But he continued: "They seemed a little sad," he said. "My mother's eyes were troubled, and my father shook his head."

"Yes, Everychild?"

"And I wondered if I might not see them again, really. It would be good to see them again; and you know I have come so far ..."

The Masked Lady replied: "Nothing delights me so much as to have children and their parents find each other. That is my highest dream—to bring together the parents and children who have lost each other."

"And shall I find them?"

"I think you are on the way even now to find them—perhaps sooner than you dare to hope."

"If I could find them now," continued Everychild, "I think I could willingly give up my search for—for the truth. It seemed a wonderful thing to seek for when I began, but I am not anxious to do so any more."

There was a new note in her voice as she replied, "Truth is very close to those who still seek, but who have ceased to be anxious."

He did not know why the words should have thrilled him so. If he could find the truth, after all, and still have his parents again! He permitted his eyes to rest on the Masked Lady's rather forbidding face. And then he began impulsively—"Dear lady!..."

"Yes, Everychild?" she returned gently.

He sought eagerly for the right words. "I did not know it myself for a long time," he said, "But I think I know now ..."

"I am waiting, Everychild!"

His voice almost failed him. "There was such a long time that I thought I feared you a little," he continued, "—when it seemed better to stand quite apart from you and look at you from a distance. But you've been so good a friend that now at last ..."

"At last, Everychild?"

He timidly sought her hand; and having found it he stood with downcast eyes. "At last I know I—I love you!"

Still standing with downcast eyes he could not know how radiantly she appeared before him. He could not see how the mask fell from her face at last. The Masked Lady no more, but Truth herself in all her glory!

She cried out triumphantly, "Lift up your eyes, Everychild, and look at me!"

He lifted his eyes slowly, gaining courage little by little. And when he looked upon her an expression of amazement and swiftly dawning delight was in his eyes.

"You are—oh, it is you!" he cried, fearing even yet to name her.

"It is I," she said.

And he was not fearful of her now. Truth at last—and yet she was one who had been near him a long time and had often aided him.

"But you are beautiful!" he cried at last in wonder and delight.

"I am always beautiful to those who love me," she said.

"But oh, dear lady," he cried, "could you not have helped me to know you in the beginning?"

"Ah," she replied, "each soul must find me for itself."

Then she put her arm about him and comforted him for long days and nights of wandering.

They were interrupted soon by the other children who came forward eagerly. They too had come to tell their dream; and Everychild watched joyously while Truth—to him the Masked Lady no more—reassured them by saying that even now they were on their way to find their parents. And the children gathered together in groups and agreed that they all wished very much to see their parents again.

And then Everychild listened attentively while Truth declared to the assembled band: "If you would really find your parents again, and be happy with them, you must promise one thing only: that you will love them better than you love yourselves."

And all the children, having forgotten many of the hardships they had undergone at home, replied almost in one voice—

"We promise!"

Then after they had remained silent a little while, wondering how they were to find their parents, from whom they had wandered so far, they began to inquire how so difficult a thing could be brought about; and they were informed that it was true that one great obstacle still lay in the way of their return to their parents, but that perhaps it would be possible to remove that obstacle.

They drew apart, whispering among themselves and looking beamingly into one another's faces.

They were startled suddenly by a great voice, crying out in anguish—

"Lady—dear lady!"

It was the giant, who had remained apart a little because of his blindness. He was now approaching Truth, his hands outstretched.

"I am here," she said. And he came and knelt by her side.

CHAPTER XXX

WILL O'DREAMS MAKES A DISCOVERY

For a moment the giant remained silent, his heart so torn by doubt and fear that he could not speak. But at length he said: "I have heard how you would restore the children to their parents ..."

"I hope to do so," replied Truth.

He cried out in sorrow, "Yet none may restore me to my mother, whom I have lost."

"Be not so sure of that!" she said.

Whereupon hope was kindled in his heart. He pondered, feeling that he was in the presence of one who was very wise and kind. And then he said:

"And I have heard Everychild say that you are beautiful."

She did not reply to this. She waited for him to continue.

"You will forgive me for speaking what is in my heart," he said at length, "But my own mother, from whom I was driven by cruel, stupid persons long ago, was very beautiful. And I have always dreamed that some day I should encounter a beautiful lady and that she should prove to be the mother I lost."

She replied to him in a low voice: "And by what sign or token should you recognize her, if you were to encounter her again after all these years?"

"Alas, what hope is there for me, now that I am blind? While I could yet see I hoped to know her by her calm glance, by the serenity that never was

troubled by any evil chance ... I cannot say; but I never would believe that I should not be helped to recognize her."

She meditated a little. And presently she said, as she leaned closer to him, "And did you never give her anything—a token, perhaps—that she might have treasured and kept, by which you might recognize her?"

"I give *her* anything?" he exclaimed incredulously. "It was she who gave, not I. What was there I could have given her? And yet ... I remember once when I was a child I brought her a pretty trifle, and her eyes grew bright and she drew me to her and laid her cheek against my hair. And there were other things—but they were only trifles, after all."

"Trifles?" she echoed passionately, "trifles?"

He began, "There was——" And then he broke off. "I am ashamed to say," he said. "It was nothing."

She reflected earnestly. And at length she said, with new eagerness in her voice, "But if you ever find your mother, and fail to know her, and she shall tell you what those trifles were—you shall know that it is she. Is it not so?"

"It is true," he said.

A rapturous smile began to illumine her face. "Trifles, dear child!" she cried. "Should you call them trifles?—One was the first song ever sung; and one was the first tale ever told——"

She paused, because he had clasped his hands together in ecstasy and seemed almost to cease to breathe.

"And one," she continued, "was the first picture; and one——" Her voice became all but inaudible, "—one was the first prayer."

His voice arose in a great shout of triumph. "You are she!" he cried "You are indeed she!"

And he reached forth and clasped her in his arms. At last they were united again.

CHAPTER XXXI

HOW ALADDIN MADE A WISH

And now the time had come for Truth to determine whether, indeed, the children might be reunited with their parents—for there yet remained the need of exacting a pledge from the parents themselves.

But the parents were far away and in many places, and it must needs be a difficult task to consult them all to learn if they were ready to enter upon a just and binding covenant.

Everychild drew near, after Truth and the giant had been reunited, in the hope of being able to help in the next great step which lay before them. However, there was something else to be attended to first: There was the pleasant duty of congratulating the giant, not only upon being reunited with his mother, but also upon having regained his sight. For it was now apparent that a great happiness, following after a period of dark distress, had enabled Will o'Dreams to see again perfectly!

After this unexpected consummation had been gratefully discussed, there was much to say about the great reunion which they all had at heart.

Everychild was of the opinion that it might prove all but impossible to retrace their steps over the way they had come. And the other children, one after another, agreed that it was too much to hope that they might find their way back over the devious paths by which they had come.

It was then that they were all aware that one of their number had remained apart and was now regarding them almost piteously.

It was Aladdin!—Aladdin, holding his accursed lamp to his bosom, and gazing at them with beseeching eyes.

Everychild called to him to join them; and as Aladdin came up he said, "And so, Aladdin, you still have your lamp. And that means, of course, that you have not yet wished for *the best thing of all*."

"Alas, no," replied Aladdin.

Everychild continued: "We are anxious to find our parents again, but we were thinking how difficult this would be, because they are in many places, and far away."

"Nothing could be simpler," declared Aladdin; and he held forth his lamp and regarded it with a grim smile.

Everychild leaned forward with great eagerness. "Tell me what you would do," he said.

"I would make a wish," said Aladdin, "that here and now, all the troubled children and their parents might be forever united."

The children were all nearly spellbound. Could such a strange wish be made successfully? They marveled, yet they were scarcely incredulous. They came in an awed silence and formed an audience before Aladdin, even the little black dog coming and sitting up before a group of children where he could see everything that took place.

There was a solemn silence at last. Everychild's eyes were filled with a kind of fearful rapture. But Aladdin's confidence was unshaken. He smiled a little mockingly, as if he were greatly enjoying the solemn situation.

The great test began. Aladdin rubbed his lamp before the eyes of all, so that they could see precisely what took place.

There was one brief interruption when Hansel's voice could be heard in an impatient whisper bidding Grettel refrain from moving her head so that he could not see. But silence was immediately restored.

Again Aladdin rubbed his lamp, and smiled upon his audience almost tauntingly.

A third time he rubbed his lamp, this time with a stern, expectant expression in his eyes.

There was a rumbling sound; it seemed to grow almost dark. And then a genie appeared. The genie made a low salaam and awaited instructions.

Said Aladdin, "I wish that here and now all the troubled children and their parents may be forever united. Conduct us to the Hall of Parents, and assemble the mothers and fathers!"

The genie disappeared.

An instant later—wonder of wonders! There were echoing noises at one end of the great chamber. What had seemed to be a wall of stone proved to consist of scores of great gates, standing tier upon tier. And the gates began to open and fold back. One after another they opened and folded back, revealing an immense, brilliantly-lighted space of incomparable grandeur.

It was the Hall of Parents!

CHAPTER XXXII

THE HALL OF PARENTS

The children arose and stood in their places breathlessly when that scene was revealed to them. Never had they seen such bright lights, so high a ceiling, so many splendid decorations.

There was not a single parent in sight, it is true; but this did not disturb their joy, since it was plain that any number of parents might be near by, waiting for a wand to be waved, or a wish to be made.

On the far side of the Hall there was a great semicircle of painted curtains, like those in a theater, with only narrow spaces between them. On

these curtains were painted scenes and figures of men and women. Above each curtain a pennon was flying.

From some invisible place strains of music floated, and the music was of the kind which does not make the heart either heavy or light, but simply tender.

The children began to advance into the Hall of Parents, gazing with wondering eyes at the painted curtains, which held for them a strange fascination. As they drew nearer they perceived that in the middle of the semi-circle of curtains there was an opening, with soft draperies before it, as if it were here that the parents would presently enter.

Then the pictures on the curtains began to become clear, and there were cries of joy and amazement from the children. One picture showed the mother and father of Everychild. The mother sat at a table, her face buried on her arms. The father stood helplessly beside her, his hand on her shoulder.

Another picture showed the wicked King John of England sitting gloomily on his throne.

Another showed the mother and sisters of Cinderella seated before a fireplace, silent and forlorn. Near them, and gazing at them challengingly, was the figure of a gallant young man with a crystal slipper of great delicacy in his hand.

Another showed the parents of Hansel and Grettel, the father clasping a loaf of bread to him and gazing abstractedly before him.

Another showed Old Mother Hubbard standing before a cupboard and looking into it intently.

Another showed the unique residence of the Old Woman who lived in a shoe, with the Old Woman herself standing dejectedly near the gaping opening in the toe.

Others showed certain not easily recognizable ladies and gentlemen: perhaps the parents of Little Bo-Peep and Little Boy Blue and others.

And high above all these homely pictures, which were exaggerated just enough to be really fascinating—like the pictures at the side-show of the circus—fluttered the soft pennons.

The curtains themselves wavered deliciously, so that you could guess something was going on behind them. The music which made your heart tender never ceased to flow from its invisible place.

Closer and closer the children pressed, still scarcely daring to breathe, and feeling certain that their parents would not be much longer withheld from them. They were becoming more and more eager. Even the little black dog manifested the greatest excitement.

And at last Truth stepped forward purposefully and took her place just in advance of the band of children. She had never seemed more impressive. Her white dress gleamed in the bright light, and the gem in her hair was of every color one could imagine.

She began to speak.

"I very seldom make a speech," she said. "Scarcely once in a hundred years do I make a speech in public. But if you will bear with words for once, instead of deeds—upon my assurance that deeds shall immediately follow—I have this to say to you:

"It is a very great thing when children find their parents again after losing them; but the last good of all, and perhaps the greatest, is when parents find their children whom they have lost.

"You who have assembled here have found your parents at last. This I know, not because you have come here into their presence—for you must know they are behind yonder painted curtains, which we shall presently lift—but because you have learned to know the need of them, and because you have come in very truth to love them.

"We shall see now if your parents have found you."

The children caught at that saying, which seemed wholly obscure to them, and wondered what meaning could lie behind it. But in the meantime Truth had turned toward the curtains. She gazed at them one after another in an intense manner, and finally she stepped close to the one whereon the likeness of the Old Woman who lived in a shoe was painted.

In a commanding voice she cried out, "Old Woman who lived in a shoe, appear!"

The curtain moved; it was thrust forward a little at one side, and the Old Woman who lived in a shoe stepped out!

To her Truth spoke calmly yet with a certain majesty. "I have come," said she, "to restore your children to you, to be yours forever—but on one condition."

The Old Woman lifted her sad eyes and gazed in amazement at Truth. "To think," she blurted out, "that they should have run up against the like of you! How may I have them again to keep? Speak—there's a good soul!"

The reply came in a ringing tone: "You must promise to love your children better than you love yourself."

"I do—oh, I do!" cried the Old Woman, the tears starting to her eyes.

What happened then? At a sign from Truth the children went spinning toward the Old Woman. She drew the curtain out a little so that they could slip into the hidden space behind it. One after another they eagerly disappeared, and then she followed them.

When they had all disappeared, Truth moved along to the next curtain, on which a portrait of Old Mother Hubbard was painted. She called out commandingly, "Old Mother Hubbard, appear!"

As in the former case, the curtain was pushed out at one side, and you could tell that some one was coming. Old Mother Hubbard appeared!

To her Truth said: "Your greatest unkindness to your son was your unkindness to his dog. If you would have your son again, you must promise to love him better than you love yourself—and I advise you first of all to think kindly of the dog that was his friend."

She had scarcely finished speaking when Old Mother Hubbard cried out in broken tones:

"Give me his dog!"

The little black dog bounded joyously toward her, followed by her son Tom. They were shown into the place behind the curtain. Old Mother Hubbard following them with the greatest haste.

They could be seen no more.

But Truth was already speaking again in clear tones: "Father and mother of Hansel and Grettel, appear!"

And the father and mother of Hansel and Grettel appeared from behind their curtain, and stood hand in hand, with downcast eyes.

Said Truth to them: "The father and mother who would not share their last loaf of bread with their children—nay, who would not deny themselves that their children need not go supperless to bed—deserve not the love of children. They love themselves overmuch. But if at last in your hearts——"

The mother of Hansel and Grettel could not wait for the end of the sentence. She turned stormily to her husband. "It was you who persuaded me to do it—to lose the poor little things," said she.

The father retorted promptly, "It was that you, good wife, might not starve that I consented to lose the children in the wood!"

But Truth interposed: "It is not a time now to fix the blame, but to make amends. Come, mother and father of Hansel and Grettel: can you promise that hereafter you will love your children better than you love yourselves?"

It was the father who replied, speaking in earnest tones: "Gladly shall we deny ourselves hereafter, if need be, that our children may have bread; and in all other ways we shall strive to show them that we love them better than we love ourselves." To which the wife nodded once for each word.

Whereupon Hansel and Grettel ran swiftly to their parents, who made a way for them to pass behind the curtain, and they all disappeared.

And now Truth was crying out, "Mother of Cinderella, appear!"

Not only Cinderella's mother, but her sisters too (their curiosity aroused to the topmost pitch) appeared before their curtain.

Said Truth, addressing the mother: "She whom the crystal slipper fits—and well do you know her name—will return to you, forgiving and forgetting all, if you will promise to love her better than you love yourself."

"Ah," replied Cinderella's mother, "I've done that this long while, I think—but how was I to let her know? Let her come to me this instant and she shall never have cause to complain again!"

Then Cinderella approached her mother and received a kiss; and then her mother led her solicitously into the space behind the curtain, the two sisters following with awe-stricken faces.

For the first time now Truth faltered as if she had no heart for the next task she had to perform. She was standing before the curtain on which the likeness of the cruel King John was painted. And at last she cried out:

"John, King of England, appear!"

There was a pause—and then an echo of sound. The curtain trembled; it was pressed forward at one side. Slowly and with awful majesty King John appeared. His crown was on his head, his kingly robe of ermine fell from his shoulders, there was a kingly staff in his hand. His eyes were like a storm-cloud, his brow like thunder.

It was now that Truth spoke more impressively than she had done before, saying,—

"And you—it is true that you were not Prince Arthur's father, but only his guardian. And yet it may be you would atone for your crimes against the poor fatherless prince. Come, Sire—this boy who knew no father save you: if I give him back into your keeping can you promise to love him better than you love yourself?"

The king frowned more darkly. "Better than I love myself!" he said incredulously. "Can a king love any one better than he loves himself?"

Truth continued: "I cannot read the heart of kings. It is for you, Sire, to speak. I know not what a king's highest vision may be; but I know no man should have power over another, save it be the power of self-sacrificing love. I await your answer—and the prince waits."

But the king repeated, musingly and darkly—"Can a king love any one better than he loves himself?"

There was a moment of suspense; and then Truth would have moved on; but at the last instant the king cried out, "Stay a moment—I command you!" Twice he tried to speak; and then he said: "That little prince, so helpless and beautiful! You need not think that I have not repented me of my sins toward him. In the dark nights the winds have brought me back the echo of his sighs; and by day I have seen in every ray of sunlight the gleam of his hair, and in the blue sky the beaming eyes of him. Perhaps if I might try again, though he stood in my way ... if you would send him hither ..."

But he had not promised, and though Prince Arthur waited, ready to go to him, Truth did not give the signal.

The king was frowning mightily and saying to himself, "Can a king love any one better than he loves himself? Nay, that could not be!"

In a nervous, slinking manner, he drew back behind his curtain.

Prince Arthur drew his cloak about him more closely, as if he were cold. Then with an air almost spectral, yet very sad, he drew further and further away, always keeping his eyes upon the picture of the king.

He came to the folded hangings which opened no one knew whither. He parted them and passed out. While his hand still clung to the hangings there came a flash of lightning which revealed the chaos of nothingness without. Thunder rumbled. Then the hangings fell back into place and the prince was seen no more.

So it went on until all the children had been restored to their parents—all save Everychild. And now Truth paused before the curtain whereon the likeness of Everychild's parents was painted.

"Parents of Everychild, appear!" she cried.

They came, subdued, saddened, hand in hand. And Truth addressed them.

"Parents of Everychild," she said, "I need not tell you now why Everychild is lost to those who should be nearest to him. You have learned that coldness and neglect toward those who have a right to look to you for love and good will is the one sin for which punishment is most inevitable. But so long as the world stands Everychild shall not forget his father and mother; and at last he comes to take you into his heart to cherish you for ever and ever. Will you—but ah, I need not ask! I know that at last the parents of Everychild, tried by suffering and time, love him better—oh, far better—than they love themselves."

To which the parents of Everychild cried out, "We do—we do, indeed!"

Then Everychild gave his hand to the Sleeping Beauty, who seemed a bit overawed by all that was transpiring, and led her toward his parents. They stood with outstretched hands. And immediately they passed with the utmost happiness behind their curtain.

They had all disappeared now—yet no, Aladdin and Will o'Dreams remained.

Aladdin had been sitting apart, watching everything that took place. He had kept quite out of the way. Now he arose leisurely and moved toward those hangings through which Prince Arthur had disappeared. He meant to join Prince Arthur!

But just before he disappeared he turned about. A blissful smile was on his lips. He held his hands high.

His lamp was gone!

He passed from sight. He could be heard singing dreamily, "Tla-la-la ... tla-la-la ..." His voice died away.

Now Truth remained all alone save that her son, Will o'Dreams, remained gazing at her happily.

But suddenly she perceived an intruder near her. For the last time, Mr. Literal was there beside her. He was smiling smugly and tetering back and forth on his feet. "You seem very well satisfied with yourself," he said with a sneer.

She only turned toward him serenely.

"Yet all the same," continued Mr. Literal, "the story is full of meaningless things and inconsistencies."

"Do you think so?" she returned.

"Of course. Take those unhappy pictures of childhood, for example. You don't mean to argue really that Everychild is treated unkindly?"

She replied thoughtfully, "I fear that Everychild is sometimes treated unkindly."

He seemed to weigh this point and to remain unconvinced. He moved more confidently to the next point. "At least," he said, "you'll scarcely contend that Everychild marries the Sleeping Beauty?"

She replied with assurance: "Everychild marries a Sleeping Beauty. To him she is beautiful, and she is asleep until he comes."

Mr. Literal lost patience. "Very well," he said, "but you know it's true that Imagination—I believe he calls himself Will o'Dreams—is not a giant as he's been represented here."

She replied calmly, "The greatest giant of all: the forerunner of every dream, of every deed!"

But Mr. Literal had reserved his most crushing argument for the last. "Well," said he, "it is certainly not true that Everychild has a little dog for a companion!"

And now for an instant Truth seemed really confused. But after faltering a moment she overcame her confusion. She smiled and beamed with real good will. "Perhaps not," said she, "but ah, Everychild *should* have!"

But Mr. Literal was not to be conciliated. "And as for your not having a mask on any more, as Everychild would have it, that's nonsense. It's there, just the same as ever."

"To you—yes, I know," she replied.

"To every one!" he exclaimed irritably. "I'll leave it to the world."

"Let us see," she said; and she turned to her son, Will o'Dreams, with a significant smile.

It seemed that he understood; for he faced the painted curtains with sudden purposefulness. He held his arms aloft—and all the curtains began to ascend. The result was almost bewildering.

In one place was the great shoe, just as we have seen it before, and all about it were the Old Woman's sons and daughters, seemingly the happiest children in the world. Their mother was smiling contentedly.

In another place there was the interior of Old Mother Hubbard's cottage, with the little black dog just receiving a fine morsel, and with Tom and his

mother looking on with great joy.

In another there was a mean cottage interior—the home of Hansel and Grettel—with the parents holding their son and daughter close to them.

In another was the dreadful King John, pondering moodily on his throne.

In another there was the kitchen of Cinderella's house, with Cinderella holding her skirt back and looking in ecstasy at two perfect crystal slippers on her feet, while her mother and sisters *and a perfectly fascinating prince* looked on with rapture.

In another there was Everychild, being held close to his mother's side, while the father stood apart, his hands in his trousers pockets and a complacent smile on his lips. There was the lamp shade with the red beads, and the clock like a state capitol, and everything.

As the curtains went up the persons in the various groups looked out upon Truth, who asked in a perfectly assured tone:

"Good people, tell me: am I wearing a mask?"

Let me close my tale by leaving the answer to you, dear reader.

What is your decision?

Does she wear a mask?

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK EVERYCHILD ***

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