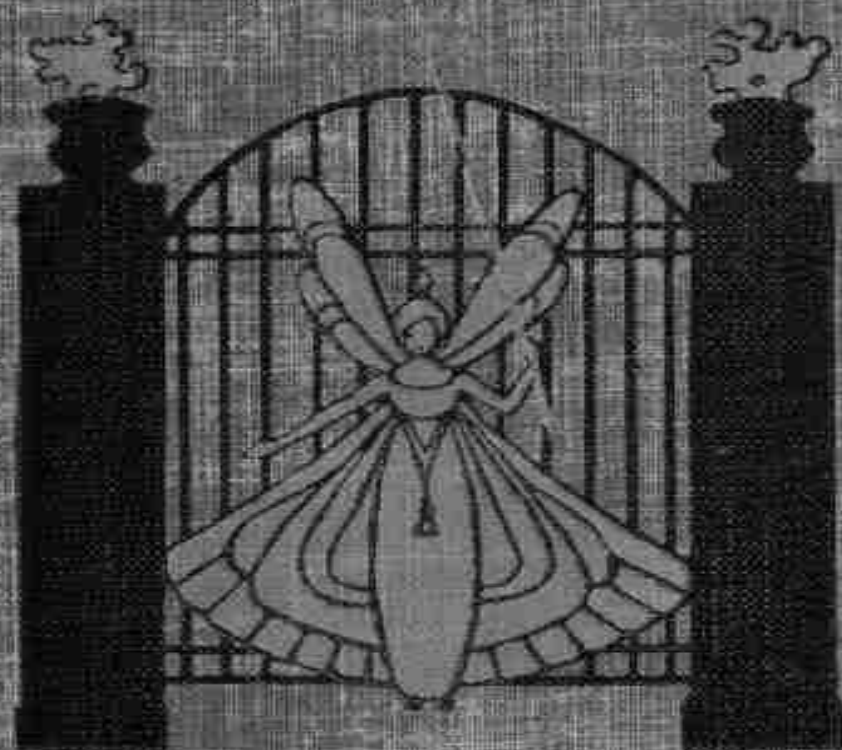


GIRLS IN BOOKLAND



HILDEGARDE
HAWTHORNE

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GIRLS IN BOOKLAND
HILDEGARDE HAWTHORNE

A DEMURE LITTLE
CROWD THEY WERE,
STANDING PRIMLY,
HAND IN HAND

GIRLS IN BOOKLAND

BY
HILDEGARDE HAWTHORNE

ILLUSTRATED BY
JOHN WOLCOTT ADAMS

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To
MY FOUR LITTLE NIECES
UNA, ROSAMOND,
SYLVIA AND JOAN

A WORD BEFORE THE STORY

Inside this world in which we live there is another world, a very wonderful world, that is ours for the taking. Many things in the world we live in every day are denied to us. Maybe for the reason that we cannot possibly learn how to make use of them all, even though we think we want them very much. Lots of us can never hunt lions in Africa or sail the high seas, or find gold, or herd cows on the wild prairies, or know a pirate, or run an engine, or become kings or queens or presidents or the wives of presidents, or anything great and famous like that. We have to let others do those things, and they again have to let us do the things we do. We can each only be our kind of boy or girl, man or woman.

But in the world inside this we can be and do anything, not only now and here, but back in dim ages when knights were bold and castles held prisoned princesses. We can know intimately all sorts of people, savages and noblemen, cowboys and bank-clerks, fairies and fisher folk, poor little children and rich little children, great captains and wicked robbers, lovely ladies and strange old women, poets and farmers. We can go on high adventure and find dreams come true. We can be hundreds of different persons, men and women and boys and girls, beasts and fishes, clouds and mountains. Once inside that world, anything is liable to happen to us.

This inside world is the world of books. There, on your bookshelf, inside the quiet-looking blue and brown and red and green volumes, all sorts of exciting things are going on, all sorts of people are busy over all sorts of affairs, talking and laughing, crying and playing, having marvellous escapes, doing wonderful deeds. If we could just step inside those books and join in the life going on so busily—lose ourselves in one book after another! Wouldn't it be thrilling?

Rose and Ruth were lucky in having the fairy to help them, to be sure.
But even without a fairy much may be done.

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GIRLS IN BOOKLAND

CHAPTER I

HOW IT BEGAN TO OPEN

Rose kneeled on the long window-seat and peered through the glass, occasionally rubbing away the mist that gathered so that she might the better watch the wild game the snow was playing. It was falling so thickly that the row of alfalfa haystacks resembled dim giants, advancing on the house stealthily but surely; the horse barn loomed darkly behind them and seemed enormous—a grim castle, or a dungeon. And how the snowflakes whirled and danced, never touching the ground, yet somehow turning it whiter and whiter. The prairie vanished in the whiteness, and even at a little distance the sky was all mixed up with it.

Every now and then Rose could hear a long, wild shriek that swept around the house and died away slowly. It was the wind, of course, but it certainly sounded like a cry for help, and Rose wondered if, after all, it might not be a princess in distress. One couldn't be quite sure, and Marmie had said that very morning that it was always the most unexpected thing that happened.

“And a snow-storm,” thought Rose, “isn't so unexpected as a princess.”

She turned her head and looked into the big pleasant room. The fireplace had a fine blaze in it, and lying on the Navajo blanket that covered the floor right before it, busily reading, was Rose's younger sister, Ruth.

“Oh, Ruth, stop reading and come and look out. It's getting blizzarder every minute.”

Ruth grunted, turned a page, and remarked:

“Wait just a bit, till I finish this chapter.”

Rose looked out once more, just in time to see a man ride round the corner of the barn and disappear into the flying snow.

“There goes Jim to round up the cows,” she exclaimed. “I guess the other boys have gone too. Probably we are going to have a sockdolager of a storm.”

“Marmie said you mustn’t say sockdolager,” chided Ruth, abandoning her book and joining Rose at the window. “Oh, I wish we could go riding too. But I guess we won’t any more now, till spring. Don’t you hate to think of winter coming, Rose? We can’t go out at all most of the time, or just round the inclosure, and that’s no fun, and we sha’n’t have anything to do, and we sha’n’t see a living soul for months. That’s what Marmie said. I wish we had some other little girls to play with. Books are nice, but they aren’t alive and real—O-o-o see how hard it’s snowing now! I can’t see the barn any more.”

The two little girls leaned close together, looking out at the storm that grew more furious as the moments passed. It shook the house, it blotted out the landscape, it even hid the haystack giants. It made them feel very small and lonely and far from everybody. The nearest ranch was five miles away. That didn’t seem much in summer, but now—why, no one would care to ride there now, and as for the two themselves, they knew they would not get far from home for months to come.

Presently it began to grow dark, and the sisters returned to the fire, curling up close together on the long seat with its thick cushions that stood in front of the hearth.

Rose was a good deal taller than her sister, though they were only a year apart. Her hair was thick and hung in two long red braids, a real golden red, and her eyes were golden too, with brown shadows. There were freckles on her nose, which turned up just a little. Rose was forever imagining and pretending, and wondering whether she might not be lucky enough to stumble on a fairy or a gnome, or find a charm or a wishing cup; and Ruth would listen to the wonderings, and follow her sister about, hoping that Rose really might have an adventure, and that she would be in it too.

Ruth was a slender, vivid, dark little thing, with hair that tumbled round her head in curls, and big, black eyes that opened wide when she sat listening to Rose’s make-believes. She liked to read better than anything, and even when they went off on long rides she would tuck in a book somewhere, and find a chance to read it while they stopped for a rest or to water the ponies or to chat with the Dillinghams, on the next ranch.

“Think of all the little girls there are in the world, hundreds and hundreds and millions, and we don’t know any of them,” continued Rose, lugubriously. “Wouldn’t it be grand if we had a magic carpet, and could sit on it and wish we were anywhere and be there in the shake of a cat’s hind leg.”

“What’s that?” asked Ruth.

“Oh, nothing. It’s just what Jim says when he means a little bit of a time.”

“Where would we go, Rose?”

“Perhaps to a big school, where lots and lots of girls were playing together. Or to a fairy island, where all the nicest boys and girls in the world lived, and went on picnics and had parties. Or maybe we’d go to a nice big house where there were two other girls as old as we are, and they were wishing, like us, that they had some little friends to play with—that would be nicest of all, I think.”

Ruth sighed deliciously, picturing the joy of it.

“I don’t suppose you can *possibly* find such a carpet,” she murmured.

“N-no—I suppose they are all in Persia or Arabia. Or perhaps they are all worn out by this time.”

The fire shot up a great plume of sparks as one of the logs fell apart, and then died down. The room was dark, for the storm had brought night on earlier than it should have come.

“Well,” said a small, clear voice right beside the girls, “I don’t know anything about wishing carpets; but I can’t see why you don’t go through the Magic Gate. If you go through that, you reach places quite as interesting as those you are talking about—and as for children! Why, it leads to thousands and thousands of them.”

Rose was too surprised to breathe, and Ruth’s eyes opened and opened.

“What’s the matter? Don’t you know a fairy when you see one?” went on the clear voice.

The girls looked all around.

“But—but we don’t see anything,” stammered Rose.

“What do you look like?” queried Ruth.

“Can’t see me? How extremely provoking. I’m sitting right here on the arm of the settee, and I look just like a fairy—what would you have me look like?” The voice sounded the least bit impatient.

Rose, who was nearest to it, started back a trifle. She wasn’t exactly frightened,—but it was a little—well, startling—to hear a fairy and then not be able to see it! Rose had never expected that sort of adventure.

“I—I can hear you,” she said, politely. “Perhaps if you got right in front of the fire we could see you.”

“The fire won’t help. Why, I have a shine of my own. Come now, look hard.”

Both girls looked hard at the sound of the voice. But they couldn’t see it a whit better than they could see the bang of a door or the creak of a board. They felt very sorry and embarrassed, for they could tell the fairy was trying her hardest to be seen.

“It’s too bad,” said Rose, at last. And Ruth echoed her sadly. “To think that there is really a fairy here with us, and we can’t see you!”

“It’s ridiculous,” remarked the voice, “but I suppose it can’t be helped. You’ll have to get along without seeing me, that’s all. Anyhow, you seem to be able to hear me, and that’s something. And there’s no knowing; you might be disappointed if you did see me, and that would hardly be pleasant.”

“Indeed we shouldn’t!” exclaimed both girls at once. “No one was ever disappointed in a fairy.”

“Tut-tut,” said the voice, and then gave a little laugh, so sweet and mellow that it made Rose and Ruth laugh too. “But come, how about that Magic Gate?”

“Where is it?” asked Ruth, who liked to get straight to essentials.

“You can find it easily enough with me,” returned the fairy. “It’s near enough—and it’s far enough. Would you really like to go through it?”

“Can we get back again? We couldn’t leave the ranch for too long,” answered Rose. “Marmie might miss us, and every evening we play games with Dad.”

“Oh, yes, you can get back. In fact, you can’t stay inside the Magic Gates beyond a certain length of time. There are rules that have to be kept, you

see.”

“Oh, Ruth, I’d like to go, wouldn’t you?” breathed Rose, excitedly.

“Yes,” replied Ruth, clutching her sister’s arm. “But where does it go, Fairy?”

“It will lead you to other little girls—little girls who only live inside the Magic Gates and can’t be reached any other way. All sorts of little girls, in all sorts of places and all sorts of times.”

“Will they like us to come?”

Again the fairy laughed her silver laugh, that sounded like drops of rain falling on the roof of an enchanted palace.

“They’ll be delighted, my dears. For they really don’t begin to live until some one finds the way to them through the gates. They are all remarkable little girls, too, in their different ways, and I know you’ll enjoy playing with them. So suppose we start. Since you can’t see me, each of you must take hold of one of my hands. Do you want to choose where to go first, or shall I choose for you?”

“You choose,” said the two girls, stretching out their hands. They could hear the fire snapping as they did so, and the wind in the chimney seemed to be calling to them. And they felt a slim, strong little hand clasp theirs, and the clear voice said:

“We might just as well begin in the Golden Age. Have you heard of Sappho, the Greek girl who wrote wonderful poems after she grew up? She was a very sweet and merry child, and I know you’ll enjoy playing with her. So shut your eyes, shut your eyes, shut ... your ... eyes....”

The fairy’s voice trailed away into silence as Rose and Ruth obeyed her. The two girls had a queer sensation, as though everything they knew was flying past them ... a sort of whirr ... then a kind of tiny shock, as if they had suddenly stopped falling, and then....

CHAPTER II

THE WINNER OF THE TORCH RACE

“Open your eyes,” cried that clear, laughing voice.

And Rose and Ruth obeyed, opening them very wide indeed. Opening their mouths too, just as one always does when so full of surprise that one cannot hold a bit more.

“I’ll bring you home in good time,” went on the fairy, just as though nothing in the least extraordinary had happened. “Just amuse yourselves as you like. Sappho will be along presently and I’m sure you’ll get on nicely together. And now I’ve other affairs to see to, so I’ll say good-bye for the present.”

“Good-bye,” returned the two girls, though when the fairy stopped talking it was hard to believe she was there to say anything to, because we are none of us used to answering a voice with nothing around it.

And still they stared, and the wonder in them grew bigger and bigger.

For instead of the living room at the ranch, with the fire snapping in the huge chimney, the familiar dimness of coming twilight, and the storm flapping at the windows like a great wild bird with wet wings, they saw a green slope where large trees stood about looking magnificent in summer leafage while birds chattered and piped in the branches. Far below them on a peninsula round which the bluest sea imaginable flung its broad arm lay a city of clustering, flat-roofed houses gathered about a splendid temple that appeared to be built entirely of snow-white pillars, row on row. A white road led through gardens and vineyards to this city, and out upon the shining waters boats of odd shapes with sails of scarlet, brown, buff or gaily striped canvas dipped at anchor or slipped lightly before the gentle breeze.

The warm air was full of the perfume of flowers, and from somewhere not far off came the sweet sound of a flute, played softly and dreamily.

“Jiminy Cripsey!” sighed Rose, forgetting that she’d promised not to.

Ruth bent down to pick a brilliant flower at her feet.

“It’s—it’s real, Rose,” she whispered. “Smell it. That fairy is a good one, isn’t she?”

“She’s the best I ever saw,” agreed Rose, who didn’t remember that she *hadn’t* seen her, nor any other either. “This *is* a transformation!” Then she gave a sudden little shriek. “Why, Ruth, look at yourself—and me too!”

Dumbly Ruth turned her eyes on her sister and herself, or at least on her clothes. Instead of the blue serge dresses with sailor collars and silk ties, the stockings and slippers they had on when the fairy first spoke to them, Rose now wore a one-piece garment of very soft stuff of a pale, lovely yellow with a border of dull blue. This garment was caught on the right shoulder and passed under her left arm, leaving it bare. A girdle of blue was clasped about her waist, and on her bare feet were sandals with blue thongs binding them and crossed around her ankles. Her hair was knotted in the nape of her neck, and a blue fillet circled her head. Ruth wore exactly the same dress, except that it was white with a border, girdle and fillet of crimson.

Both girls began to laugh.

Each of them found they had a narrow bracelet of curious looking metal on one of their arms, and they fingered these joyfully.

“Isn’t this a dandy adventure, Ruth? How funny you look! But these are pretty dresses, just the same, aren’t they? How light and cool they are!” And tossing her arms into the air, Rose danced upon the grass.

“O—Eh!” called a laughing voice.

Rose and Ruth whirled round, and there, a little above them on the slope, stood a slender, long-legged girl of their own age, dressed as they were, though her gown was striped faint rose and blue, like the sky at sunrise.

In her hands she held a pair of long pipes that joined at the mouth-piece, and she stood, poised and erect, laughing, her eyes shining dark and vivid under the rippling waves of her golden hair, bound with silver bands.

Smiling back at her, the sisters stood close together, feeling a little shy but full of admiration.

“I was afraid you were going to be late,” said the stranger girl, coming swiftly toward them. “I’ve been waiting here a long while, blowing on my pipes, hoping that perhaps I could win some dryad out to play with me. But now you are here it doesn’t matter. Did you come very far?”

“We came so fast I don’t know ... is this place near Wyoming?” answered Rose, doubtfully.

“Wyoming? You must be barbarians! I never heard any one speak of that country, not even the sailors who have been to the end of the earth.”

“Who are you?” asked Ruth, who wasn’t quite sure just what a barbarian was, and so didn’t care to commit herself by either admitting or denying that she or her sister might be such a creature.

“I am Sappho.”

“Oh, yes, the fairy said you would come to play with us. How lovely! And do you live there in the town by the sea? For that is the sea, isn’t it? We never saw it, but our mother came from England when she was a little girl, and she has told us about it.”

“Surely it is the sea. Sometimes I long to go away on it, far beyond those cloudy mountains there in Asia; but in your land is there no sea? How strange a place! How can one live away from the sea—not I at least, I should die of loneliness.”

SAPPHO PASSED HER
WITHOUT A GLANCE

“We are lonely sometimes,” said Rose, “but not for the sea. We want other girls, for where we live there are only boys, and they live a long way off, on the next ranch. What is the name of your town?”

“That city is called Mitylene, and this is the island of Lesbos, the loveliest of all the Grecian islands.”

“Ruth, do you hear, this is Greece! Where Hector and Achilles lived, and Jason, and Ulysses ... Oh, Sappho, how wonderful! Shall we see them?”

Sappho laughed. “Why, they died long ago,” she answered. “They belonged to ancient times. To-day there are no heroes like them; yet the men of Greece are strong and brave still—there are none in the world like

unto them. But come, the games will soon begin, and we must be there. Are you to run in the torch race?"

"What's that?"

"That's the race the girls run. I shall be in—I mean to win it, and to hear the people cheer me, and to wear a crown of flowers...."

And laughing again, the girl set the double pipes to her lips and blew a sweet refrain that had a merry lilt to it, so merry that Rose and Ruth and Sappho too all began dancing in time to it, while their light, soft garments floated about them like wreaths of parti-coloured mist.

Then without more ado they set off down the long slope toward the road that should lead them to Mitylene, chattering as they went, and asking each other a hundred questions in as many seconds.

For never had Rose and Ruth imagined such scenes as they saw about them. As they left the trees they came out on a smooth meadow, where a shepherd lad clad in a goatskin all spotted brown and white sat on a rock, a short, stout crook in his hands, and sang cheerily to himself and the white flock that grazed nearby. His shock of dark hair surrounded his head in a tangle of curls, his eyes shown brightly at the girls, his legs and arms were as brown as they were bare.

"Greetings," he cried.

"Greeting," replied Sappho. "Are you coming to see the games?"

"Can I leave my sheep for the wolves to get?"

"They would not run faster than you should a wolf come," Sappho called back over her shoulder.

The boy returned to his singing, scorning to reply, but she laughed.

"Now he will sulk when I next meet him," she said to Rose. "Boys are amusing. I love to tease them, they who pretend to laugh at us girls because we are not so strong as they—some day I will show them what Sappho can do."

Passing through a vineyard the girls reached the road, down which a procession was winding its slow way. At the head were men dressed in long flowing robes, white or dull blue or soft brown. They carried branches in their hands. Then came six pipers, dressed much like the girls, in what Sappho called a chito. All wore sandals, and most had a band of colour or of

silver or gold round their heads. Behind the pipers, who were playing a slow marching air, came a snow-white heifer, with flowery garlands wreathed about her horns and over her smooth flanks. Boys in scarlet tunics led her by long ropes decorated with flowers. Behind these again came many lovely young women, wearing the chito and also the cloak-like outer robe that fell in many soft folds, one end being flung over the shoulder. These garments were bewilderingly varied in colour, some striped, some embroidered, some in strange patterns, but all were harmonious and beautiful. The people moved gaily and freely, and occasionally broke out into a chant.

“Where are they taking that white cow?” asked Ruth, gazing rapturously at the picture they made, with the golden sunlight falling on them, the garlands swinging, the flowers and costumes each brighter than the other.

“To the sacrifice,” replied Sappho.

“Do you mean they are going to kill her?”

“Do they not kill cows in your country?”

“Y-yes—but not all covered up with flowers—not a pet cow like that!”

“The cow given to the gods must be the best and prettiest and gentlest of all, or they would be angry.”

Rose, remembering the Greek stories she had read, suddenly realised that Sappho probably believed in all those wonderfully named personages she usually skipped, and feeling her ignorance, did not pursue the subject further.

A two-wheeled cart drawn by small oxen came up slowly as the girls stood watching the procession turn into the forest. An old man wrapped in a dark cloak walked beside it, leaning on a staff. As he neared them Sappho called out:

“Polemo!”

The old man glanced up, and his wrinkled face broke into a smile. Calling to his oxen, he hurried toward the girls, hobbling along fast enough with the help of his stout stick.

“Greeting, Sappho,” he said, “and to your friends greeting. What do you so far from the town, you who are to run to-day? Your mother early this morning bade me keep watch for you, saying you had gone to the hills at

daybreak. Will you climb into the ‘chariot?’” and he chuckled, designating the heavy cart with its four-spoked wheels, with a sweep of his staff.

“May we, Polemo? That will be great fun. These friends of mine have never been to our Lesbos before—it is but right they should enter Mitylene in state.”

“Climb in, all of you. You’ll keep your feet out of the dust, even though you won’t reach home much sooner for all these four beasts will do for you. But climb in, climb in,” and the old fellow laughed as the three youngsters clambered joyously aboard his lumbering vehicle, Ruth and Rose hugely amused and delighted to be travelling in a manner so unusual.

“What is this race you are to run, Sappho?” asked Rose, as they stood swaying in the cart, grasping one side firmly, and watching the oxen plant their heavy feet in the white dust, while they grunted protestingly in reply to the urgings of Polemo.

“This is the maiden’s day, and we younger ones are to run the torch race. All the city will be out to see us. I am afraid of only one among the girls, my cousin Chloë. She is a few months my elder, and a very Artemis for running. But you will bring me fortune.”

“I’m sure I hope so. How did you know we were coming to-day?”

Sappho hesitated.

“I—I don’t know exactly. I only know I was to go to the hill and fetch you. But your names I know not.”

The girls quickly told her. At that moment a chariot flew by them, drawn by three horses and driven by a tall young man in fluttering robes.

“Oh, look, Rose,” cried Ruth, her eyes shining. “Isn’t it just like the circus, only better.”

“He threw the discobolus farther than any last year,” said Sappho. “Is he not beautiful!” And she waved her hand at the disappearing driver.

They were close to the town now, and many people were travelling along the road in the same direction. There was much laughter and gaiety, young boys racing each other with shouts, groups of men conversing as they walked, riders with cloaks of rich colours. Asses loaded with huge packs trotted onward, urged by men in short, skirted garments that barely reached half down their bare thighs. Some wore no foot covering, some had sandals with long thongs that crossed back and forth over their legs up to the knees.

A few carried a cloak of skins or of bright cotton cloth. Many women and girls were in the constantly increasing throng, and these wore long flowing robes for the most part, sometimes hanging straight from the shoulders, sometimes girdled above the waist. It was a rainbow-hued crowd. Rose and Ruth had never seen so much colour, not even among the Indians of the Reservation.

Soon they were in the narrow street into which the road they had been travelling merged. One- and two-storied houses presented their blank walls to this street, with only an occasional window and the square or arched entrances to break the line. As they came to a corner Sappho jumped down, beckoning the two American girls to follow.

“Many thanks to you, Polemo,” she cried.

“Come,” and she sped along the street, closely pursued by Rose and Ruth, who had no mind to lose her. Reaching a doorway, she turned to await the two.

“This is my father’s house,” she said. “You will be welcome. Come in and we will have some bread and fruit before we go to the games.”

The three entered a square room bare of furnishing, and passing through, found themselves in a courtyard where flowers grew and the sun shone. Several rooms opened on this court, round which ran a sort of gallery, supported on pillars.

A woman dressed in robes like those they had seen worn by the women outdoors came to meet them across the court. She moved slowly, with great dignity, smiling as she approached.

“Who are these, Sappho?” she asked. “Are they come to the games?”

“I was sent to get them this morning,” replied Sappho. “I know not how, Mother. Something spoke to me, and I went. They come from far.”

“You are welcome,” said the lady, taking the two girls by the hand and leading them into a room beyond the court. Here, on a low table, a great loaf of bread, a jar of golden honey, an earthen pitcher of milk and a bowl half full of luscious figs stood waiting.

“Sit and eat,” she said. “But for you, Sappho, be sparing, if you are to run.”

“I will take no more than one piece of bread and a swallow of milk,” said the girl. “But you two must be hungry, having come so far.” She filled two

cups with the milk, and her mother cut a large piece of bread for the visitors, who were too shy as yet to say anything more than a murmured thank you. But with the taste of the good food their tongues were soon loosened, and all three chattered together and to the quiet, smiling woman, who kept filling their cups and offering more bread and honey.

And then it was time to go to the games. In came a tall, bearded, grave-looking man who turned out to be Sappho's father. He seemed to take Rose and Ruth for granted, and bade them all come with him.

Out in the street every one was pressing in one direction. Another man joined their group whom Sappho spoke to as Uncle, and then the two men walked ahead, leaving the girls and the woman to follow. They passed a beautiful building in a large square, evidently the market place.

"Is not that a fine temple?" asked Sappho. "It was finished only last year, and the town feasted for days to celebrate. Are not the pillars beautiful, and that row of statues?"

Rose and her sister could only stare in appreciation. Never had they dreamed of any building so exquisite, with its rosy-tinted marble, its graceful pillars, one behind another, row on row.

"It looks like that old book of mamma's with the pictures of the World's Fair," said Ruth, breathlessly.

And now the crowd began filing into the large stadium, and settling down into the seats that rose tier on tier under the open blue sky. Their own party found places where a good view was to be had, inside a railed off portion where the relatives and friends of the competitors only were allowed to sit. Once seated, the girls looked about them at the gay, inspiring scene.

Colour everywhere. Gay banners and streamers, bright cloths flung over the railings, laughter, talk, movement. Down in the arena people moved too, sprinkling the dust with a little water, removing scraps of torn decorations, smoothing slight inequalities. Friends hailed each other from various parts of the big place, groups clustered, chatting.

"I must go now," said Sappho, and her eyes snapped with excitement, looking dark as deep water at night. "We are the first. Soon now my name will be on the lips of all these people, they will be shouting for me, will be throwing flowers upon me...." She stopped, clasping her hands over her young bosom, and throwing her head back to gaze into the sky. "Sometimes

I feel that the world itself will call my name aloud, not now alone, but on and on till time is old.”

The sudden colour flooded her face, and she smiled a flashing glance at her friends, who were looking at her with an excitement almost equalling her own.

“Wish me good fortune,” she begged.

“We do, we do. You will win, I know it....”

She gave them each a quick embrace, bent before her mother, and followed her father toward a little doorway beyond the tier of seats. Before entering this, she turned and waved to the girls, who were still standing watching her.

“Isn’t she simply a Jim-Dandy?” the irrepressible Rose wanted to know.

“Sit down now,” said the gentle voice of Sappho’s mother, as she settled herself on her own broad bench, over which a scarlet cloth was laid. “In a moment you will see all the girls who are to run come out through that little door almost opposite—see, there they come.”

And as she spoke a bevy of young things, all of them in a short white one-piece slip that left the arms and legs bare, came pouring out into the arena. Each of them carried a torch in her hand, whose flame bent and fluttered in the breeze.

Straining their eyes to look, the girls distinguished Sappho among the others. She had bound her hair with a broad scarlet ribbon and stood very light and proud, looking fit and ready even at this distance.

Men in brilliant cloaks were moving among the girls, assigning them their places. Presently they drew back, leaving a line of eager young figures, tense and tremulous with excitement. Suddenly, at a signal the girls did not see, they were off.

What a race it was, under that blue and throbbing sky, with the varicoloured throng waving streamers of blue and gold and crimson, and shouting encouragements. Slender and vivid as the blown-back flames of their torches, the white young runners, dashing this way and that to save their torches from attack, or to attack in their turn. The fire fluttered at the ends of the sticks with a life of its own. Now one girl and then another would forge ahead for a yard or two, but some other racer would reach her, and beat at the flame, lowered by the speed of her movement.

Before long, several torches were extinguished. The shout of the populace was one long roar by this time, and Rose and Ruth did their share in making a noise. Ruth, not given to demonstrations, was hopping up and down like a mechanical toy, waving both arms over her head, and calling out, "Oh, Sappho, Sappho, Sappho, HURRY!" While Rose stood hugging herself, yelling madly, "Go it, go it, you've GOT to win!"

A half dozen of the twenty or more runners were left by this time. The others, dropping their dead torches, walked slowly back to the starting point. A tall dark girl and Sappho ran together near the middle of the bunch, three girls leading them by a few paces. Very soon, however, Sappho, with a sudden burst of speed, passed these three and ran freely out into the lead. Rose and Ruth gave one cry of frantic joy. But at the instant the dark girl, springing forward, reached Sappho's side, and made a vicious strike at her torch. She missed it, but with a quick movement swung the flame of her own torch under Sappho's upraised arm, so that the red fire licked upward toward the wrist.

With a scream Sappho dropped her torch. Only a few of the concourse had seen the trick, and from these came a shout of protest. Without a sound the dark girl sprang wildly onward. But Sappho stooped, lifted her torch and waved it. It still flamed. Then, with a sort of fury, she began running.

Like blown thistledown she sped after her opponent. Her feet scarcely touched the ground, her slight garment clung to her, showing the lithe slimness of her girlish form. On, on she went. Never had girl run so fast, so finely, in all the history of the race. The great crowd rose to her, and a mighty tumult broke out. She caught up with the dark girl, who faltered slightly, hearing that shout in which cries of rage mingled, calling her own name, Chloë, with shouts of shame, shame. Sappho passed her without a glance, and the next instant sank into the arms of her father, waiting beyond the finish line.

Then indeed the crowd went wild. Her father led her out by the hand before the officials, seated splendidly in a group at the head of the arena. Panting, trembling, her face pale, she stood, lifting her eyes to those bent toward her, while the vast circle poured out a mighty roar of "Sappho, Sappho, hail to young Sappho!" Flowers rained down on her, and then, amid a sudden silence, one of the judges stepped down and laid a wreath on her tossed hair.

When she came back to her young friends the colour had returned to her cheeks. Her mother laid her hands on her head:

“Sappho, my daughter, I no longer regret that I did not bear a son,” she whispered. “And your arm, poor child?”

“Nothing,” answered Sappho, lifting it to show the scarlet scar of the heat. “What is pain that it should matter, if only one triumphs!”

Ruth and Rose clasped her hands in theirs, and gasped out their joy and excitement as best they might.

“You are the wonderfulest, the loveliest ...” they asserted.

Sappho smiled:

“No, I’m not,” she said. “But I’m the happiest ...”

“Come, my dears,” said a brisk, decided voice, while slender hands caught Rose’s right and Ruth’s left. “Time to be getting home ...”

The arena grew dim, the shouting died, Sappho wavered and vanished. The two girls shut their eyes instinctively. Once more came that sudden sense of falling....

“Why, look, there are the torches,” cried Ruth, clutching at her sister.

But it was the flickering flame of the fire in the living room, for there were Rose and Ruth, sitting on the big settee among the pillows, while the log fell apart with a crash and an up-burst of flame.

“Why, we’re home again,” said Rose, slowly. “And the fairy, is she here?”

But if she were she did not answer, and since she couldn’t be seen, there was nothing to be done but to suppose she had gone.

CHAPTER III

AN ADVENTURE WITH LITTLE WOMEN

Winter was really hard and fast here with Rose and Ruth, and they were settled doing all the winter things. Each morning there was school of course, school right at home, for not even the smallest school house broke the long line of the prairie within many miles of the Ranch. And there was plenty of outdoor play and excitement, too.

Somehow the two little girls never remembered a single thing about their wonderful adventure with Sappho and the fairy except when they were alone. Just as soon as Marmie or any one else came near, every bit of the memory of it floated out of their heads. But they would talk of it to each other eagerly. And one afternoon, as they sat together on the big settee, Rose suddenly wondered whether the fairy were not coming to visit them again some fine time.

“Golly, I do wish she’d come again, Ruth! There must be lots of other places to go to through the Magic Gate, and lots of other little girls to play with. Do you think she’s forgotten all about us?”

Ruth had just opened her mouth to reply when she had to open it even wider with surprise, for who should speak up but the fairy herself, in that darling voice of hers, like the chiming of tiny crystal bells:

“Forgotten you? Nonsense. The memory of a fairy is the strongest thing you can meet in a whole year of un-re-mit-ted seeking. But I’m very busy to-day, and we must hurry right off—what do you say to paying Little Women a visit?”

“What! Meg and Beth and Amy and ... and JO?”

The fairy laughed at the sound of the way they said it, both together, and both almost speechless with delight. Next instant Rose and Ruth both felt

her take one of their hands, and shut their eyes just as she told them too, her voice dying softly away like a breeze in a quaking aspen.

Then came again the rushing feeling, the sensation of a little fall, a slight shock, and suddenly both girls found themselves running, clutching tightly to strong hands quite as big as their own ... not fairy's hands. There was a joyous peal of laughter, and an eager voice cried:

"That *was* good. How you can run! Just as fast as I do, and Meg is always calling me a Tomboy...."

They opened their eyes, and found themselves grasping each a hand of a girl no older than themselves, a brown-skinned, clear-eyed girl, with a roguish light playing over her face, flushed with the exercise. Her dark chestnut hair hung in two braids from under a funny little round hat, and her skirts, full and voluminous to a remarkable degree, reached almost to her ankles. They were of some grey woollen goods, trimmed with scarlet braid in quite an intricate design. A little black jacket with sleeves wide at the bottom and a cunning turndown collar was also trimmed with braid, black this time. Altogether, the two girls thought they had never seen a quainter, more fascinating costume.

"It's Jo," exclaimed Rose, and threw her arms round their new friend's neck with a shout of joy.

Jo wriggled away, looking embarrassed.

"Mustn't kiss," she muttered. "Amy and Beth won't mind, though," she added quickly. "Come on in, they are all waiting for us."

The girls found that they were standing on a sidewalk opposite a little garden gate that opened on a straight path leading to a pretty, gabled wooden cottage snuggled under big trees. As Jo spoke she swung wide the gate, and the three hurried up to the porch. As they set foot on the top step the door opened, and Jo's three sisters appeared, beckoning.

"Come on—hurry. Isn't it cold, though!"

Rose and Ruth felt as though it were not the first time by many that they had passed through the hospitable door and scampered down the chilly hallway into the big, comfortable room with its coal fire blazing red-faced at one end, its prints and photographs on the walls, its easy chairs and sofa, its winter roses and geraniums in the windows. They felt, indeed, very much at home, and completely forgot how it happened that they were there

at all. Evidently they were expected, for Meg asked what had made them so late.

“We ran, anyway,” Jo told her. “Rose could beat me, I believe. Don’t you wish we were boys, Rose, and could run real races?”

“Take off your wraps,” said Amy. “Oh, Ruth, you’ve a new dress!”

It was undoubtedly quite new. Ruth looked down at herself with astonishment and delight. Amy was helping her off with a long cloak of heavy blue cloth, and under that Ruth saw her full skirts spreading out deliciously—pale grey with pale blue bows of ribbon looping up the overskirt. Her waist was grey, with more blue bows and ribbon braiding, and she had on the loveliest white batiste undersleeves that buttoned close to her wrists. It was too fascinating.

She whirled about, while her skirts bobbed and swung, and there was Rose in a dress just as quaint and pretty and absurd, only it was decorated with pink bows and braiding.

“They are both new,” she cried. “Oh, what fun it is!”

“I like pretty clothes, don’t you?” said Amy, folding away Ruth’s cloak nicely. “Jo doesn’t care—says clothes are a nuisance, and if she had only been a boy she’d never have had to think of them at all.”

THEY FINALLY REACHED THE COTTAGE

“It does seem a pity Jo wasn’t born a boy,” Beth remarked, “since we haven’t one in the family, and she wants to be one so badly.”

“It’s one of the ‘indescribable’ things that happen,” Amy finished, and then looked troubled as the rest shouted with laughter.

“Never mind,” gurgled Rose, “it wouldn’t be Amy unless she made those perfectly scrumptious mistakes.”

“Well, girls, Hannah’s got a little lunch ready for us, and if we are to get to the river in time we must start soon,” Meg admonished them.

“To the river?” Rose and Ruth both wanted to know.

“Yes—the skating party, you know. There are to be big bonfires and lots of fun, and the ice is perfect.”

Just then Hannah opened the door.

“It’s time ye was eatin’, children,” she told them.

It was a jolly little lunch, where every one talked together. Mrs. Marsh was at a neighbour’s helping in the care of a new baby, and Mr. Marsh had gone to Boston on some business connected with the great slave question.

“You know, people say we may go to war over this business of keeping slaves,” Meg said, with sudden gravity. “But that seems too horrible.”

“If I were a man I’d like to go to war,” Jo announced, with flashing eyes.

Rose and Ruth were conscious of a hazy recollection. Surely there had been—but they couldn’t feel certain.

“Well, thank heaven, you can’t, Jo,” sighed Meg, “but I’m awfully afraid that father will. As chaplain of his regiment, you know.”

A frightened hush spread over the little crowd of girls, and then Beth, in her soft voice, spoke the right word:

“We’ll be sorry—but a glorious kind of sorry,” she said. “Father does what is right, and makes us all love it.”

“So he does,” smiled Meg, “and you are a sweet child, Beth.”

And then they were all laughing again, and war seemed far away, while good things to eat were very close at hand. Hannah had made corn bread, such cornbread, and there was a wonderful sort of apple pudding-pie that Amy hailed joyously as “pandowdy” and which Rose and Ruth found delectable.

And then it was time to hurry into one’s outdoor clothes again, and make for the river, where the whole village was to skate that afternoon.

Meg decided to take Amy and Beth with her by way of the highroad, but Jo asked the two guests if they wouldn’t like to go through the woods with her.

“It’s such fun breaking through the drifts, and I see you’ve your arctics. They have tramped a kind of path, so it won’t be too hard for us, and the woods must look splendid.”

So it was agreed that the strangers should go that way, to see the woods, and have the excitement of a real tramp through the snow, while Meg saw the two little girls safe. They would meet at the river.

What fun it was! Rose and Ruth could not believe that they were really following Jo off the road and up a path under pines all powdered with snow, yet that's just what they did. How fine and bracing the air was, and how pink the three pairs of cheeks! They went along, chattering madly, and presently Jo confided that she was writing a story.

"It's most thrilling," she said, "all about two lovers in a high tower, and a terrible old uncle who isn't really their uncle but an impostor. And in the end he's found dead with his hand on the knob of the secret door where all the money is hidden——"

The two girls listened, gasping. What a gorgeous plot!

And now they were in the heart of the woods. The trees crowded close, the snow was deeper than was easy to get through. Ruth floundered in spots, laughing, and Jo took her hand to help her.

"It's drifted in a little," she said. "When we get through this dip it won't be so deep."

They struggled on, slipping over their boot tops, and though the snow was dry, Rose noticed that her voluminous skirts were getting heavy. She longed for the sensible clothes they wore at home. Suddenly a sound like some one sobbing struck her ears. She was a step or two ahead of Jo and her sister.

"Do you hear that, girls?" she asked, looking around anxiously. "I thought I heard some one crying."

"Crying!" exclaimed Jo. "Perhaps it's a fox or——"

But at that moment the sound broke out again, and crying it undoubtedly was. They hurried on, a little scared, turned a bend, and there, sure enough, huddled in the snow at the foot of a huge evergreen, sat a small, a very small boy.

"Gee-willikins!" grunted Rose, while Jo rushed forward, and Ruth stared, white and frightened. She was very young.

"He's alive safe enough," said Jo, in her deepest voice, as the small boy started wailing in earnest at sight of her. Rose joined her, and the two bent over the youngster, who looked up at them, pale and with his face streaked with tears. "Poor little thing! How on earth did he get here, d'you suppose?"

"He must be lost," hazarded Rose, rubbing the boy's hands, that were almost frozen. Ruth had come up by this time, and the three began to

question the child all together. He only stared in response, but when Jo drew a cookie out of her pocket, he smiled faintly, and began to munch it.

“Poor baby, he’s famished. How did you get here all alone, little man?” And Jo bent over him, wrapping part of her cloak over the shivering little body.

He gurgled an unintelligible reply, but stopped crying.

Rose looked at Jo. “He’d have probably died out here if we hadn’t come this way,” she whispered. “What are we going to do with him?”

“We’ve got to get him home somehow,” Jo answered. “I wonder if he can walk.” She turned to the boy, and smiled encouragingly. “Can you come a little way with us, sonny?”

His eyes filled with tears again, but he nodded.

“Tell you what, girls,” said Jo, briskly, “I’ll try to carry him a bit. You two go ahead and trample down the snow as much as you can, and I’ll follow. It’s like a story, isn’t it?”

She got the little lad up, wrapping her cloak round him, and holding him snuggled close. He put his arms round her neck, and smiled.

“Dear little cold thing,” Jo muttered hoarsely, and then began to struggle back home as well as she might. But very soon she had to sit down and rest.

“I’ll take him now, Jo,” said Rose. “We can do it somehow, turn and turn about.”

And so they did, but it was awfully hard work. The youngster fell asleep, shivering still, for he was wet with melted snow, and his torn shoes showed bare toes. A forlorn mite!

The skating party was forgotten as the three girls struggled homeward through the drifts. Pretty nearly exhausted themselves, they finally reached the cottage. The lamp was lighted in the living room, and the light streamed hospitably down across the path.

Mrs. Marsh met them at the door.

“What is it, girls? Why, what little boy—the poor child! Jo, run and tell Hannah to get some milk heated.”

Taking the child in her own motherly arms, Mrs. Marsh hurried into the room and sitting down close beside the fire, began taking off his wet, half-frozen rags, while the girls told her breathlessly how they had found him

sobbing under the evergreen. He seemed very drowsy, and looked pitifully white and thin in the glow of the fire.

“Jo rubbed his hands and wrapped him in her own cloak; she must be frozen herself,” said Rose, “but she wouldn’t hear of letting me do it. Oh, dear, is he going to die?”

Ruth began crying. The little boy did look so badly.

“Hush, dears. Of course he isn’t. Why, he’ll be fat and smiling before I get through with him,” laughed Mrs. Marsh. At this moment Jo, followed by Hannah, came in with the hot milk. Hannah rushed off to get a woollen nightgown, while Rose crumbled some bread into the bowl of milk, and Mrs. Marsh fed the half awake child spoonful by spoonful.

“Luckily he isn’t frost-bitten,” she murmured. “Jo, dear, get the crib down from the garret with Hannah’s help, and make it up warmly in the little room off mine. I’ll get him to sleep, and then we’ll try and find out where he belongs.”

Bathed, fed and wrapped in the snug nightie, the little boy looked, as Jo said, like a fairy changeling. Tucked into the crib, he immediately fell sound asleep.

“Put on your wraps, girls, and we’ll run down to the village and find out what we can,” said Mrs. Marsh. “How fortunate it was that you went that way, Jo, with your little friends. But I fear Meg must be worried at your not meeting her. We’ll go to the river first, and see what we can discover there.”

The river made a fine sight. A broad stretch had been chosen for the skaters, and along the banks huge bonfires were waving in the wind and filling the air with the sweet breath of burning wood. Dark shapes flitted over the ice, or crowded round the fires, and a gay medley of shouts, laughter and talk rose upward.

Meg and the two children were soon found, and Meg heaved a relieved sigh when she saw her mother and sister and Rose and Ruth hurrying toward them.

The news was quickly told, and other interested persons gathered round. Presently word went about that a Mrs. Gillig, a widow who lived more or less on charity, had been seeking her only child since early in the afternoon. Some one ran to fetch her, and presently she and Mrs. Marsh were headed toward the Marsh cottage.

“The dear child, he just wanted to help me,” the widow kept repeating. “Told me this morning, he did, that he was going to find a fairy as would make things easy for me. Little attention I paid to his talk, bless his poor heart, and so off he goes, and it’s near getting killed he’s been.... Heaven be merciful!”

She thanked the girls tearfully before going with Mrs. Marsh.

“It’s a hard job you must have had bringing him back,” she said, “and many wouldn’t have been brave enough and sensible enough. Fortunate it was that ye went by when ye did, or where’d my little boy be this minute?”

“Poor thing,” said Jo, as they watched the two women hurrying away, Mrs. Marsh giving her arm to the widow. “I shouldn’t wonder, you know, if after all her boy did find a fairy, because mother is a good fairy if ever there was one.”

Mrs. Marsh had insisted that the girls stay behind to enjoy the fun, for there was to be a supper later, and the skating was perfect. So they put on their skates, while the young people of the village crowded round and were introduced, and off they went, each with a boy, while the lights shone and the stars began to come out, and spirits sang to the tinkling of the skates. It was splendid.

Presently they gathered at one of the fires. Amy, her cheeks glowing, announced that she had never before been at such an “auspicious” occasion. Meg and Beth were busy unpacking a huge lunch basket. Jo came skating up, all alone, sturdy and independent, the fire reflected in her dark eyes.

“I’m going to write a story about that little boy,” she confided, “and call it ‘The Waif of the Woods.’ Or perhaps we can make a play of it, and all of us act it. Think of the snow-laden scene and—oh, Beth, plum-cake!” With a squeal of delight Jo plunged to help in the unpacking, upsetting a pile of tin plates that went rolling down the bank and over the ice in every direction.

“Oh, Jo, see what you’ve done,” cried everybody, while Jo began frantically to chase the bounding plates. Rose and Ruth ran laughing to help her....

“Come along to supper, girls,” said a familiar voice. “You ought to be hungry after your day in the snow.”

Rose and Ruth caught their breath. There in the open doorway stood their mother, the light from the hall lamp streaming round her. The fire was burning low, but a log that had rolled out on the hearth spread a smell of burning wood through the room. As they slipped off the settee, feeling a little dazed at the sudden transition, they heard a tiny chuckle....

CHAPTER IV

A LOOKING-GLASS VISIT

It was one of those warm spells that turn up so unexpectedly in winter, and that almost make you believe that you've slept right through the cold months, and that spring is sitting out there in the sun, ready to begin her immortal business of turning the earth into grass and leaves and flowers. But of course she isn't, and often the next day will be so freezing, blowy, grey and grim that you go about smiling scornfully, as well as you can for a stiff face and chattering teeth, and saying to yourself that never, NEVER will you let yourself be fooled again.

But of course you are.

Anyhow, this was a real spring-feeling day, and Rose and Ruth whooped with delight when their Dad told them they might ride out on the range with him and have a camp-fire lunch. Then they must ride straight back alone.

They were used to that, however, and liked the excitement of riding alone across the mesa and down through the shallow cañon that brought them in sight of their home.

The warm wave had swept most of the snow away, though there were streaks of it left in all the shaded spots. And oh, but the prairie wind was sweet as it blew into their faces.

Pink-faced and laughing, they reined in their cow-ponies at the turn of the trail to wave farewell to Marmie, who stood at the open door flapping a dish-cloth in return. Dad let out a huge yell, and the dish-cloth flapped harder than ever. Then they set the broncos to loping, and soon even the cottonwoods had disappeared from sight behind the rocky shoulder that guarded the beginning of the cañon.

A glorious morning they had of it. Dad let them race up on the mesa, timing them, while Jim and Hank, two of the boys, shouted cheers. Rose came in only the least bit ahead, and that was because Ruth had to swerve away from a prairie dog hole. And then the lunch!

“Marmie knows what we can hold after riding all morning, doesn’t she, Dad,” grunted Ruth, surveying the wreck of tin cans, paper packages, chicken bones and sardine boxes which were the sole survivors of a sumptuous feast.

“She sure does,” agreed Dad. “But how a pindling little thing like you can hold the half of what you’ve put away beats me.”

“I’m not pindling,” asserted Ruth indignantly, throwing herself forthwith upon her father and belabouring him with both fists, in which exercise she was immediately joined by her sister, and what a grand scrimmage the three of them had. Finally they got Dad flat on the ground and both sat on him, panting but triumphant. When he suddenly sprang right up on his feet, sending them rolling, while he roared with delighted laughter.

“I may be old and tuckered out but I can send you two spinning like tops,” he jeered.

“Dad, you aren’t a bit old,” Rose declared anxiously. “You’re the youngest father in the world.”

At that he laughed some more, and then told them they must set off for home or Marmie would be worried.

The wind was blowing up colder as they rode back. But in their sheepskin coats they were cosy enough, and jogged along cheerily over the brown, dry grass. It was a six or seven mile ride, so they went easily, for they had ridden a lot that day.

“Some little girls don’t ever ride,” Ruth said. “Wouldn’t it seem funny not to have any horses, and to walk whenever you went anywhere.”

“They go in cars,” said Rose. “Electric cars, you know.”

“I’d like to see a electric car,” Ruth returned, rather uncertainly. “It must be like magic, Rose.”

Rose nodded. “But not so magic as our fairy.”

“Oh, no-o! Do you know, I dreamed about our fairy last night, and she told me she was coming to see us to-day. I wonder if she will. Wouldn’t it

be fine, just when we'll be feeling like sitting by the fire and making believe, after all this riding!"

"I wonder if she could take us to see any little girl we wanted to choose, Ruth?"

Ruth looked big-eyed at that.

"We never asked her that. Who would you like to see?"

"I'd like to go to visit Alice."

"Alice?"

"Alice in Wonderland, of course. Wouldn't you?"

Ruth fairly gasped.

"Wouldn't it be simply corking! Get along, Chump, what's the matter with you?" This to her pony, who had shied at an old log by the trail.

"Why, perhaps she would take us through the Looking-Glass! Haven't you always just yearned to find our big mirror all misty, so's you could climb through it the way she climbed through hers? Rose, let's ask the fairy the very next time she comes."

"That's what I mean to do. But remember that this is my own idea, Ruthsy, and let me do the asking."

"YOU SEE," THEY BOTH
REMARKED
CONFIDENTIALLY, "WE
KNEW ALICE, SO OF
COURSE WE HAD TO
CHOOSE YOU"

Ruth was quite willing. And when the two girls reached home, and had unsaddled their mounts and tied them up in the barn, with plenty of hay to chew on, they ran eagerly into the house, feeling that the fairy might be waiting for them. But Marmie met them at the door, and in the excitement of telling all about the ride, and the race, and how good the lunch was, they forgot the fairy.

It wasn't till after supper that they found themselves alone in the living room, snuggled cosily before the fire, deliciously tired after their energetic day. And then, before they had a chance to remember that they were expecting to see, or at least to hear, her, there she was:

“A penny for your thoughts,” said that chiming, crystal voice, close beside Ruth.

Ruth jumped, and then laughed. “You darling fairy, how you startled me,” she exclaimed. “And how wonderful of you to come. Rose and I’ve been longing for you all day.”

“Were you thinking of me just now?” the fairy asked.

“N-no. I wasn’t thinking at all. I was feeling warm....”

“Me too,” agreed Rose. “Warm and lazy.”

“Altogether too lazy for a little visit with me, I suppose?”

And then the idea flashed back into Rose’s mind.

“Of course we aren’t! And oh, fairy, could you take us to see Alice in Wonderland?”

“I don’t see why not. But you must both be very nice little girls with Alice. None of your Jiminy Cripseys, Rose, and neither of you must jump up and down and scream or run wild races. Alice is the best mannered little girl beyond the Magic Gate.”

“We’ll be ever so good, fairy. Crikey, perhaps we’ll see the White Knight or the Walrus and the Carpenter.” Rose spoke as though the two latter were one.

“There you go,” warned the fairy, in a smiling kind of voice. “What do you suppose Alice would make of ‘Crikey’?”

Ruth laughed, and so did Rose after a moment. “I guess she’ll think I’m a sort of monster too,” she said. “But that’s the *last*. Cross my heart.”

“Well, off with us, then,” said the fairy. She took the children by the hand, while they shut their eyes tight. And then, with a drop and a jerk, she let them go.

They opened their eyes to find themselves in a large, square, comfortable room, with big easy chairs standing on either side of a fireplace, in which burned a bright coal fire. On the mantelpiece were a clock and two vases, under glass domes. Round the room were low bookcases well filled with books, there was a round table near the middle, and other chairs and furniture, a bright coal-scuttle and fire irons, and on a low table near the fire a tea-tray with tea and cakes and sandwiches. Standing on the rug before

the fire was Alice, her hands behind her back, watching a black and a white kitten playing together.

But the minute the girls' eyes fell on her she looked up with a delighted smile.

"I'm so glad you could come," she said. "Please, tea is ready. Of course it's *mostly* milk. Let's have some right off, for I know I want it and I'm sure you do too."

Rose and Ruth nodded, drawing nearer. The kittens ran after a ball, thumping along with heavy sounding feet, like little lions. All three children laughed.

"That's much better," said Alice, cheerfully. "Now we won't be a bit shy any more. Will you begin with sandwiches, and have cake later?"

They would. And as they ate and drank, they noticed that they were all dressed in neat little gowns with short puffed sleeves, and wore aprons with a ruffle. Their hair was brushed back and held by a ribbon tied on top of their heads in a neat bow, and on their feet were striped stockings and heelless black slippers.

"It must be nice to be Alice in Wonderland," Rose said, munching a piece of plum-cake with great care not to drop any crumbs. "Do you go there much?"

"Oh, yes, indeed. I'm always running over, or else stepping through the Looking-Glass. It gets to be a habit, you know."

"Can we all go after we've had our tea?" asked Ruth, a little anxiously, for they seemed so settled that she could hardly believe they would do anything so wonderful as get to Wonderland.

"Would you like to?" cried Alice, excitedly. "Oh, how perfectly splendid. You see, I've never had any little girls to play with, or to go *there* with. I'm always alone. And it would be so nice if you would come with me this time."

"That's just how it is with us. We haven't any little girl friends either, and that's why the fairy takes us with her through the Magic Gate ... that's how we got here, you know."

Alice looked interested, finishing her tea quickly.

"So that's how you came? Not through a mirror or a hole in the ground?"

“We’ve often tried to get through our big glass in the hall,” said Ruth, “but it never will soften up for us. And the prairie dog holes aren’t big enough to go down.”

Just at this moment the two kittens, racing after each other, jumped up on the table, then to the mantelpiece, and then right through the mirror.

“Oh, my, the kittens will be lost,” exclaimed Alice, and there she was, up on the mantelpiece herself, and going through after her pets. Rose and Ruth followed without an instant’s hesitation.

As they jumped down on the opposite side, into Looking-Glass Land, they saw Alice running through the door; as she went out she turned and beckoned them.

They hastened after her, and gave a little gasp as they found themselves walking hand in hand with her through a green meadow. Nearby a cow looked at them thoughtfully.

“Why, I didn’t know there was a cow here,” Rose remarked, surprised.

“That’s true,” murmured the cow, in a vexed way, and immediately disappeared.

“Dear me, I wonder where she went,” said Alice.

“She went to ruminate, if you know where that is,” remarked a voice behind them. They turned and found the Red Queen, looking at them severely.

“It isn’t a place, is it?” Ruth ventured.

“Well, what sort of thing is it, then?”

“Why, I don’t think it’s a thing, either,” Rose put in.

“Ridiculous. Must be a thing or a place or a person. I suppose next you’ll say it’s me, or you. But where are your goloshes?”

“Goloshes,” the three replied. “Why, you don’t need goloshes unless the ground is wet.”

“Where I was brought up, goloshes have nothing to do with the ground,” returned the Red Queen. “They are for you. Just look at your feet!”

“It does seem as though they were wet,” Alice said, in a puzzled voice, lifting up first one foot and then the other. Rose and Ruth looked quickly at their own shoes. To their surprise they were sopping wet.

“Isn’t that extraordinary,” Rose exclaimed. “Why, I don’t remember that we went through a puddle!”

The Red Queen laughed scornfully. “Next time you’ll wear your goloshes, I hope. And now take off your shoes and stockings. Walking barefoot will help you grow.”

“Does it?” asked Ruth, as the three little girls sat down and joyfully pulled off their shoes and stockings, for who doesn’t love to walk barefoot in short fine grass! “I don’t see why it should.”

“Whys should be asked, not seen,” the Red Queen retorted. “And that reminds me....” With the last word she turned on her pedestal, and jumping about a foot into the air, rapidly glided out of sight.

Rose and Ruth and Alice continued their walk across the meadow. The two visitors had lots of questions to ask, and Alice chatted back gleefully.

“It is so very nice having you with me,” she said. “I’ve been lonely so much, and I’ve wished so hard that some other little girl would only go through the Looking-Glass or into Wonderland with me. You see, talking things over is half the fun, and now we can talk everything over as we go along—I wonder why the grass looks so far away——”

To be sure it did.

“We—we’ve grown, just as the Red Queen said we would, only how fast,” quavered Rose, a good deal disturbed. “Do you suppose it really is going barefoot that’s done it?”

“Do you know,” Alice replied, “Looking-Glass Land and Wonderland have got mixed up. We’re popping up and down just as I always do in Wonderland. But it *is* nice up here, isn’t it?”

Indeed it was. The view was so fine. By this time all three of the little girls were at least twenty feet high, and they were still growing.

“Well, we aren’t *little* girls any longer,” Ruth remarked, “though I feel like one the same as ever, don’t you? Why, it’s like climbing a hill, only ever so much faster! Look over there. Isn’t it a village? And see what a crowd of people. Let’s go.”

“I think we’d better try to grow down a bit,” said Alice. “You see, if we get among those people while we are so tall they may not like it.”

“Yes, but how are we to grow small?” Rose wanted to know, in a worried tone.

“Put on your shoes and stockings, stupid,” said a voice, and there was the Red Queen whirling past them in the air.

“I suppose it might be worth trying,” Alice remarked, “if we can get them on. They look very tiny,” and she held hers up. They looked exactly as though they had been made for a doll, and the three girls burst out laughing.

“Talk about wearing shoes too small for you,” Rose gurgled, examining her own bits of slippers. “But there’s nothing like trying.”

They sat down carefully, so as not to crush any more shrubbery than possible, for they had left the meadow behind them and were on a sparsely wooded hillside. And wonderful to say, as soon as they began to put on the tiny shoes and stockings their feet shrank to the proper size and they too. So in a minute or two they were all little girls again, and they started merrily down the hill in the direction where the village lay.

“You know, it’s awfully handy to be able to grow up like that just by taking off your shoes and stockings,” said Rose. “Just think, if you want to talk with some one upstairs when you’re playing outdoors, all you need to do is to pull them off, and then lean in at the window. How surprised people would be for a while, till they got used to it.”

At this moment there was a rustle in the bushes beside the path the girls were following, and the White Rabbit stepped out.

“How do you do, Alice? Are these little girls friends?”

“Oh, yes. This is Ruth and this is Rose, Mr. Rabbit.”

“I’m glad you did that. So many people hyphen me,” said the White Rabbit, in a pleased voice.

“Hyphen you?”

“Yes, and it’s an affectation I can’t abide. Very nice little girls, I’m sure.” Here, to the delight of Rose and Ruth, he pulled out his watch and gave it an anxious look. “Bless my stars!” he exclaimed, “I’m going to be late again.”

With that he turned and whisked out of sight in no time at all.

“How sudden people are here,” complained Ruth. “Just when you really think of something you want to say, they hurry away—and so fast!”

“It is rather provoking of them,” Alice agreed, in her quiet way. “But see, here we are at the village already.”

And so they were. In fact, they were right in the middle of it, though none of them had noticed arriving. They were in a square, with a bit of lawn in the centre where Rose felt relieved to see the cow peacefully grazing. Around the square was a row of little houses looking just like Noah’s Arks, with hinges on the roofs, and long ladders leading up. Several of the roofs were raised and from beneath them looked out the various creatures that belonged in Wonderland. Ruth pointed out the Mock Turtle excitedly. It was leading out from one of the houses, trying to arrange the ladder, while big tears rolled down its cheeks. Each time it almost got the ladder properly adjusted, it would raise one of its flippers to wipe its eyes, and let the ladder slip again.

The square was already fairly crowded, with new creatures crowding down the ladders every minute.

“There is the White Knight,” said Alice, in Rose’s ear. “Let’s go over and see if he has any new inventions.” Ruth had gone to the assistance of the Mock Turtle, and was holding the ladder while he struggled to climb out from his house.

The White Knight was sitting his horse at the edge of the grassplot. He had taken off his helmet, and was wiping his forehead with a huge handkerchief, while slowly shaking his head.

As Alice and Rose came up he smiled at them, pushing back his shaggy hair with both hands, just as he used to do.

“It’s very nice to see you both here,” he began. “Did you——” but his horse, which had been grazing quietly, just then took a step forward, and the Knight promptly fell off. Rose and Alice both hurried to help him to his feet.

“Won’t you stand with us a little while, instead of mounting again?” Alice asked. “You see, we sha’n’t waste so much time.”

“It’s better than wasting shoes,” the White Knight objected. “There’s so much more of it, you know.”

“Do tell us,” Alice put in hastily, “have you invented anything new lately?”

A gratified look passed over the Knight’s gentle face.

“Yes,” he answered. “I’ve been working on it a long, long time—that’s why I know there’s so much, you see—and now it’s all done but the making. I haven’t quite decided how to *make* it yet.”

“But isn’t that the most important part?” asked Rose.

“Well, of course, it *has* its importance,” the Knight replied, looking vexed, “but after all the inventing is the main thing, isn’t it?”

“Yes, I’m sure it is,” Alice agreed, and then she whispered to Rose, “One can’t argue with him at all, he doesn’t understand it. And he gets *so* troubled, poor old thing.”

Rose nodded, smiling. “Could you tell us just what the invention is?” she went on, turning to the Knight.

“Well, perhaps not just what it *is*,” he said. “But I might tell you about what it’s *for*.”

Rose began to feel bewildered.

“Please do,” she answered.

“It’s a trap for ideas,” replied the Knight, in a weak voice. “You see, so many ideas run wild, and if only they could be trapped we could tame them and use them.... You haven’t any wild ideas, have you?” he added this anxiously.

“Why, Marmie tells me I have,” Rose returned, “but I don’t see exactly how one could trap them.”

“Not one—no, not one. But several might. And that’s just where my invention comes in.”

At this moment Ruth came running up.

“Oh, girls,” she called, “the Mock Turtle is going to give a dance, and he’s asking all the rest, and us, too. So come over, it’s going to be such fun!”

“A dance,” said the White Knight, sorrowfully. “If it were only a song! You know I can sing tunes of my own invention,” he added, turning to Rose. “But it’s very exhausting, and the Mock Turtle has no real stamina.”

The three girls shook hands with him gravely, and he walked to his horse, that had been quietly cropping grass all this while.

“I’ll send you one of my traps as soon as it’s made,” he called back to Rose.

“Thank you ever so much,” she answered, and then the three girls hastened toward the house of the Mock Turtle, before which a large and strange crowd was collected.

There was the Gentleman dressed in white paper with his friend the Goat in spectacles, walking about arm in arm and apparently discussing the contents of a newspaper from which the Gentleman in white paper read aloud bits of news. Rose heard him read an item that sounded like this:

“Billing and Cooing are to play the finals next Tuesday of the past week. A large and enthusiastic crowd cheered the victor, whose name we hope to secure the instant it is known.”

“Perfectly ridiculous,” grunted the Goat. “I might be supposed to know *something* of Billing, mightn’t I? Well, it’s poppycock, that’s what it is.”

At this moment the cow slipped an arm—or it must have been a leg, Rose thought later, into the one not taken by the Goat, and leaned affectionately over the Gentleman in white paper.

“And who knows about Cooing if not I?” she whispered, but in so loud a way that Rose couldn’t help hearing. “And I tell you it’s false as moonshine.”

Humpty Dumpty and Tweedledum and Tweedledee were all three sitting in a row on the coping in front of the Mock Turtle’s house. They were panting and fanning themselves, and they smiled amiably at the three girls.

“Have you learnt how to be real yet?” asked Tweedledee, in a loud voice.

“Or contrariwise?” demanded his brother.

“It’s your turn,” announced Humpty Dumpty.

But the girls couldn’t stop there. They wanted to join the dancers, who were spinning round and round in the dizziest, jolliest sort of a way in the middle of the square. The grass had vanished and in its place was a round shining floor, that looked like ice.

The White Rabbit was dancing with the White Queen, looking very pleased indeed and taking a lot of fancy steps. The Gryphon and the White Knight were doing a kind of breakdown and falling down flat every few seconds, while the Frog Footman looked on and shook his head dubiously. The old lady Sheep, with her knitting in her hands, was twirling about by herself in the most remarkable way, while the Lion and the Unicorn hopped about with the Red Queen, who seemed to be in a very bad temper, for she

scowled first at one and then at the other ferociously, and each of the big creatures fairly trembled under her glances.

But as soon as they saw Alice they dropped the Queen and rushed up.

“Why, here’s the Monster,” they roared, smiling in the largest kind of manner. “And other Monsters! Come on, the dance is beginning.”

Rose found herself whirling round and round in the Lion’s grasp, while the Unicorn chose Ruth.

“You see,” they both remarked, confidentially, “we knew Alice, so of course we *had* to choose you.”

As for Alice, she and the Red Queen came flying behind, barely touching the ice-like floor as they twirled. And after them came all the strange and unreal creatures of the Looking-Glass and Wonderland. Round and round they danced, like leaves in autumn.

Suddenly Rose and Ruth found themselves at the head of the whole crowd, who were ranged behind them in double column, Alice and the White Rabbit being next them. As the music struck up louder than ever—and somehow they hadn’t noticed music till now, when it seemed to come from everywhere at once—Alice leaned toward them.

“Teach them the Indian dance,” she whispered, “only hurry, HURRY!”

For a second Rose and Ruth didn’t grasp her meaning. Then they remembered that they knew a war dance taught them by a young Sioux who had herded for their father last summer. Rose let out a wild Indian war-whoop, echoed by Ruth, and crouching down and doubling their fists, the two girls commenced to step and circle, at first slowly, then faster and faster. Behind them stretched the motley gathering. Some one was throwing Bill the Lizard high into the air. The Red and the White Queen both had feathers stuck into their crowns, like an Indian head-dress. Wild yells resounded here and there from the stamping throng....

“Good-bye, dears, wasn’t it lovely?” Alice said, her arms round their necks, as they stood, bewildered, on the rug before the fire, looking so neat and English in its tidy grate....

But hold on! It wasn’t Alice’s fireplace before which they found themselves. It was their own and Marmie was coming in with a pitcher of lemonade and a cake on a tray.

“I’ve got a treat for you, girly,” she said. “Are you all tired out by your long ride to-day?”

CHAPTER V

A TOURNAMENT AND A RESCUE WITH ROWENA

There had been three days of grim and gloomy weather, but little cared Rose and Ruth what colour the sky might be, nor how iron-bound the world without. This because it was close to Christmas, and they had been extremely busy finishing Christmas presents. You kept running upon them bent mysteriously over some task, and what a shriek of agony either of them gave when thus surprised!

But now the presents were really finished, two whole days before the Day. And so when the fourth morning broke just as grey and cold as ever, with a moany kind of wind dragging about outside the house, and leaping inside with a whoop whenever the door was opened, the two girls were, as Rose remarked, “plum disgusted.”

“No one with a spark of life in him could sit down quietly with nothing to do and Christmas hanging over his head,” she grumbled. “I’m too excited inside. If we could tear about outdoors with any comfort at all—but I’m sure my nose would break off if I hit it with a pencil this minute, and we’ve only been out twenty minutes.”

Ruth shivered in an agreeing way. Suddenly a smile broke over her face:

“Rose, we’ve forgotten all about the fairy!”

“Good Crickey! What’s the matter with us? I’m sure she’ll come and take us somewhere if only we go into the living room and feel thoroughly lonely. Oh, Ruth, where could we go this time?”

“I’ve an idea, a peachy one. But just you wait till she comes, and then I’ll ask her if I can choose this time.”

So the girls ran joyously into the big, comfortable room, piled logs on the fire, heaped a lot of cushions on the rug before it, and snuggled down

deliciously to wait, and feel lonely.

“I wonder if we’ll ever be able to see her,” Ruth murmured. “Wouldn’t it be funny to meet her somewhere and not know her unless she spoke first?”

“Huh! I guess if we saw a fairy anywhere we could be mighty certain _____”

“It was *your* fairy, eh?”

Both girls started, as they always did when the honey-sweet tinkle of that voice made itself heard. And then they giggled delightedly.

“Oh, fairy, here you are. And we do want one of your Magic Gate adventures so much. We’re *so* lonely and tired of its being such horrid weather that we can’t stay out a second without feeling friz, as Jake says.”

“Which means you wouldn’t be sitting here and wishing for me if you had an earthly thing to do?” and the fairy’s voice sounded a bit mocking.

“Fairy, dear, it isn’t our fault. Somehow you never get into our minds when anything else is going on, or when any one else is there. Don’t you fix it that way yourself? We’re sure you do. I guess we wouldn’t think of anything but you if you didn’t.”

The fairy laughed. “So you’ve found me out,” she gurgled. “Clever young ones. Yes, I suppose I am at the bottom of it. I couldn’t have you calling for me all the time, or I’d like to know how I’d get through my work. Well, what shall we do now I am here?”

Ruth leaped up excitedly:

“May I wish, this time, fairy? Oh, please let me!”

“Of course you can, dear child. But don’t plunge about like a bewitched windmill. I can’t keep my wings still in such a commotion.”

“I’m so sorry,” Ruth said, hastily sinking down on the rug. “How I wish we could see your wings.”

“They are rather nice, if I say it as shouldn’t. But come now, what is it you were going to propose?”

Rose listened eagerly, wondering where Ruth meant to go. She had a plan of her own, and was hoping Ruth wouldn’t choose that, so that she could get her turn next time.

“Please take us to visit Rowena—you know, in ‘Ivanhoe,’” Ruth almost whispered, so thrilled was she at the idea of seeing her favourite heroine.

Rose sighed with relief and with pleasure, too. It wasn't her plan, and yet it was so splendid.

"Fine idea," said the fairy, briskly. "Give me your hands, and—poof!!"

When the two children opened their eyes the fairy, as usual, had gone and they stood hand in hand, staring about them.

They were standing in a sort of avenue through a forest. On either side sturdy oaks crowded close, with holly and other shrubs and bushes. Underfoot the grass grew thick and short, scarcely trampled by the light traffic that passed over it.

The dew lay heavy, and it was evidently very early in the morning. The two girls looked about, wondering whether any one were in sight. But the wood seemed deserted, except for hundreds of birds fairly singing their little heads off. Then Rose gave Ruth an excited glance.

"Look at our clothes this time, Ruthsie! Aren't they simply scrumptious?"

They were all of that. Rose wore a pale blue, straight cut skirt of shining silk, and over it a tunic of purple wool, very fine and soft. This tunic reached almost to her knees and was embroidered round the bottom and the sleeves, which were wide and elbow length, in a rich design of yellows and blues. Her hair hung in two braids, twined with silken threads and turquoises, and a small, light hoop of silver held a floating pale blue veil on her head, a veil that almost reached the ground behind. Several bracelets and a chain round her neck gave the finishing touch to her glory. Ruth's dress resembled her sister's, except that it was in various shades of yellow. Both had soft shoes that terminated in upward-curling points at the toes.

"ROOM FOR THE LADY
ROWENA, THE LADY
ROSE, THE LADY RUTH,
AND THE NOBLE THANE
CEDRIC!"

"Aren't we *wonderful*!" gasped Ruth, lost in admiration of their grandeur.

At this moment a sound of barking and a confused shouting became audible, and grew louder. Then down the green reach of the avenue came riding a picturesque cavalcade.

In front were a group of men dressed in short green doublets and scarlet tights. Small, close-fitting caps trimmed with grey fur were on their heads and bugles were slung from their shoulders, which, as they drew near the two staring girls, they set to their lips with a flourish. A clear, sweet call rang on the air.

Behind these young men rode a man somewhat older in years, of a fine and free bearing. He wore a cloak of scarlet cloth trimmed with fur, sweeping back from doublet and hose of green. A hoop of silver studded with blue stones bound his long, golden hair, that fell straight down upon his shoulders. A short straight sword hung at his side, and in his hand he held a spear.

Beside him on a small white horse rode a lovely girl. She, too, wore green, a flowing gown, embroidered with gold, and from her head floated a snowy veil, which could not hide the yellow glory of her hair. Her blue eyes laughed, and in her cheeks the healthy colour glowed, but for the rest her skin was milky white. Rose and Ruth had never seen a skin so fair.

Behind these two came a dozen men in brown and scarlet, with shields on their arms. Two of them led a pair of horses like that ridden by the young girl. These were saddled and bridled, the broad reins, like those on the rest of the horses, being richly decorated. The saddles were queer side affairs, bulky and soft, and also very splendid in appearance.

Down upon the girls swept this gay train of riders, huge dogs circling about them; and as they advanced, the young girl waved her hand joyously.

“Look, noble Thane,” she cried, “there they are awaiting us, even as I said.” She rode up with the words, jumped lightly from her horse, and clasped first Rose and then Ruth in her arms. They responded with delight, for never had they seen so sweet a maid.

“Dear Rose and Ruth, I grieve you should have had to wait for us, but the hour sped too fast; the noble Cedric would by no means hurry over breaking his fast, and so detained us at the start,” and she smiled mischievously toward her companion. “But will ye mount, and come with us? A tourney has been called not far from here, and we go to see the knights joust. Bring the palfreys,” she added, motioning to the two men with the led horses.

These rode forward, and at the same time the leader, Cedric, saluted gravely.

“Welcome, maids,” he said. “Cedric the Saxon and the Lady Rowena are overjoyed to meet with you.”

Inspired by the solemnity of his manner, Rose courtesied, and Ruth quickly followed her example. Then the two girls were lifted into their saddles, which felt like a couple of rocking-chairs to the hardy westerners, accustomed to their Indian ponies and Mexican saddles, especially when the palfreys started off on an easy amble. But certainly these present trappings better suited the rich clothes they wore.

Rowena put herself between her two new friends as they set merrily off under the trees. Cedric the Saxon rode ahead, looking back now and then with a smile. He seemed a pleasant man, and was hardly less fair of skin than Rowena herself.

“The lists are set not far away,” Rowena told them. “Never till now have I seen knights jousting, and brave will be the sight. They say that King Richard will be there before leaving for the Holy Land to conquer the infidel. Will that not be a wondrous thing? Never was there a Norman I could abide but this same Richard Cœur de Lion, who is truly a gallant knight.”

“Think of seeing King Richard! Oh, let’s hurry,” exclaimed Rose.

Rowena laughed. “We will arrive in good season,” she said soothingly, “and the Thane will not go at a harder pace when he takes maidens with him. ’Tis but a scant three miles farther. See, yonder rides a train bent the same way.”

Sure enough, through the scattering trees, that grew more openly here, with the grass green under them, another group of horsemen rode through the sun-flecked shade. The light flashed on steel, and rioted in the blues, scarlets and yellows of their doublets and cloaks. There was a prodigious clanking as they raced along, and a sound of hearty laughter. Only for a moment they showed, and then the forest hid them once more.

Ruth and Rose had a thousand questions to ask, and Rowena apparently liked nothing better than to reply. Ruth was particularly interested in finding out who was going to do the fighting, and whether any one could get killed.

“They grow pretty fierce sometimes, don’t they?” she asked.

Rowena nodded. “Many a young knight is injured in these mock battles. But a man must abide the chance of the day.”

“Like foot-ball games. I never saw one of those yet, but lots of boys are hurt in them, and some are killed every year,” she told the Saxon girl.

“Men are made that way, I trow,” Rowena answered. “With all this jousting and the real wars, I marvel there is a man left alive.”

Just here the woods broke away, and the little company came out on the brow of a hill, that sloped down by easy degrees to a fair plain. Two little American girls gave a gasp of admiration as they gazed at the scene spread before them.

In the centre of the plain was an oblong square, surrounded by a stout palisade. Up from this the ground sloped in every direction crowded with gay tents and pavilions, with grand-stands decorated with streamers, and hung with rich tapestries. Throngs of brilliantly clad people were climbing to the various seats, glittering as they moved like fireflies over a field of June clover. Darting about between the tents and across the meadow were numerous horsemen, evidently messengers and heralds. At either end of the enclosed space were huge wooden gates, guarded by a splendid group of mounted men-at-arms. At both sides of each entrance a herald gorgeously appanelled sate his horse, pennant in hand. Before the different pavilions flashed great shields, bearing the arms of the knights who were to carry them. Hawkers of cakes and other things to eat and drink moved here and there, or displayed their wares under awnings on the outskirts of the throng. An immense buzz and rattle, mellowed by distance, rang in the air.

“In the elevated seat under the purple and scarlet canopy, there in the centre,” explained Rowena, “the King and Prince John will sit. See, those are the royal arms. At the further end are the knights challengers, and nearer us the defenders. Over opposite the King’s seat you see another throne—that is for the Queen of Love and Beauty, who will give the prizes. How wonderful it would be to occupy that seat. I would rather sit there than on the throne of the real queen.”

“Perhaps you will some day,” Rose whispered back, for the glory of it all had taken her voice away. “Isn’t it corking! Ruth, don’t you wish we lived here instead of at home? You must be awfully happy, Rowena.”

Rowena nodded. Her cheeks were glowing and her eyes shining. As they set off once more toward the lists, the two American girls thought that the earth could never hold a sight more beautiful and stirring than their own gay cavalcade sweeping down the slope to that magnificent gathering below

under the tender blue sky with the ring of huge trees, dark in summer greenery, fencing in the whole.

They dismounted near one end of the eastern gallery, as Rowena called the rows of seats, and preceded by two of their escort, who kept shouting “Room for the Lady Rowena, the Lady Rose, the Lady Ruth, and the noble Thane Cedric” and shoving aside the populace, who sometimes laughed and sometimes grumbled, they gradually attained the seats that had been assigned them. These were not very far from the royal box, and gave a fine view of the lists. Cedric was soon in conversation with a couple of acquaintances, but the three young girls settled themselves comfortably and began to take in all the details of the scene before them.

Rose and Ruth were amused to see how the rougher elements of the crowd, who were clustered thickly in the open space of ground between the stands and the palisade, knocked each other about in taking their places. Shouts, hoarse guffaws, blows, filled the air and lit everywhere. In spite of the confusion, people seemed to keep their tempers wonderfully, and to think no more of a buffet on the head or a thump in the midriff than we should of a polite request to move aside.

Suddenly an out-burst of cheers shook the crowd. Rowena rose to her feet, as did her friends, and all turned instinctively to the royal box.

“There he is ... King Richard! And that is Prince John beside him. They say there is little love between the brothers,” whispered Rowena.

Among a group of attendants two figures stood out conspicuously. One was that of a tall and finely proportioned man, who carried himself magnificently. A jewelled circlet rested on his thick, curling hair, that fell to his shoulders. His crimson cloak was trimmed with broad bands of ermine, his doublet was of gold brocade, and the jewelled hilt of his sword glittered in the sunlight. Round his neck was a heavy chain of gold in which precious stones were set. He laughed and nodded to the cheering multitude, looking to the right and left, evidently in the gayest of spirits. Beside him stood a younger, slenderer man, shrewd and handsome, with an arrogant lift to his head, who was marvellously dressed in scarlet and gold raiment.

Presently the spectators settled back into their seats, and Richard gave the signal for the commencement of the tourney.

There was a blare of trumpets, and then the heralds rode into the lists, announcing something in loud ringing voices. But neither Rose nor Ruth

could understand what they were saying. Rowena said they were calling the rules of the engagement. They were accompanied by their pages, and made a brave show as they moved slowly around the inclosure. As they passed, money was thrown to them by the knights and lords and princes, amid wild shouts from the yeoman crowd that was now packed tight between seats and fence.

Presently the circuit was completed, and the heralds left the lists by either gate. There remained two men, clad all in armour, with helmets on their heads and drawn swords in their hands. These sat like statues at either end of the lists.

The gates were left open, and through them rode ten or twelve knights in chain armour, with different coloured plumes waving from their helmets, and long shields, pointed at the lower end and decorated in colour with various designs. Each knight carried a lance in his right hand, the butt-end resting on the mailed toe of his boot, the shining head, from which a gay pennant fluttered, high in air. The horses, wild with excitement, plunged and caracoled, their gorgeous trappings swinging about them, the gold and jewels on their bridles and on the curious high, boxlike saddles flashing many-coloured rays. Slowly this gallant company rode round the lists, while every one shouted and hurrayed. Then they gathered in two opposing clumps, waited a moment, and then with short, sharp cries, hurled themselves at full gallop each at each.

They met near the middle of the lists with a crash that must have been heard a long way off. Ruth and Rose grasped each other's hands in a grip that hurt as they stared. A cloud of dust swept up into the air. Through it rolling shapes of men and horses showed dimly. As the light breeze cleared the view, the two girls saw that six of the knights lay on the ground. The rest had whirled about and were riding back to the starting point. The horses whose masters had been thrown were galloping wildly around, or struggling to their feet with snorts of terror. The fallen knights also began to get to their feet, and once up, to walk slowly toward the exits. Half way across, one of these staggered and fell.

"He is hurt," said Rowena calmly. "Was it not a marvellous fine set-to? But see, the Queen of Beauty has taken her place." Evidently the knight's injuries might be either severe or slight for all she cared.

But the two sisters could not feel so little disturbed, and watched with anxious eyes as the knight was lugged off the field between two men-at-arms. He was carried into one of the pavilions, looking very much done up.

“Do you s’pose he’s killed?” whispered Rose. But Rowena was far too much interested in the scene opposite to answer.

In fact, the new arrivals surpassed the rest of the spectators in splendour. They looked like a bank of brilliant sunset clouds, so many-hued were the floating garments of the ladies and the embroidered doublets of the youths who filled the reserved space. In their midst, wonderful in silver and rose and pale blue, stood a straight, slender, graceful girl, with a hoop of sapphires confining her rich chestnut hair under its blue veil. She looked like something dreamed of rather than a reality, so lovely she was.

The King rose and bowed to her, and she returned the salutation with a deep courtesy. Renewed cheers burst out, there was a waving of furred caps and silken streamers. Then the girl and her companions took their seats.

“She is a Norman lady,” Rowena told the girls. “When will a Saxon sit in that throne?” and her voice had a bitter note.

But now the tourney began once more. It seemed to the two girls like a vast medley of colour and motion, sharp sounds, falling men and horses, flashing spears and swords. Here two combatants battered each other with inconceivable fury, their blades resounding on shields and head-pieces; here one stood over his fallen foe, shouting like a madman, and shaking his weapon in the air. There the crash of chargers meeting shook the ground. Intervals of rest occurred, while the strained lookers-on sat back more easily, exchanging laughing comment, or pointing out some friend in the crowd. Several of the knights had been wounded, blood had flowed, a horse had broken a leg ... the crowd leaned forward, yelling, while Rose saw the King lift a great silver cup to his lips, after raising it to the Queen of Beauty opposite....

Suddenly the lists were cleared and every one began to stream off toward the refreshments.

Cedric turned to the three little maids with a smile.

“The Saxons have held their own nobly,” he said, and his eyes flashed with pride. “How like ye this great sport of knights?”

“It’s—it’s strenuous,” declared Rose, “but it’s certainly the most exciting thing any one ever did. I’ve been clenching my hands so hard I’ve almost dug my nails through the skin.”

“So have I,” Ruth murmured. “I feel dazed with it all—such noise and dash and colour and—oh, such *fierceness*!”

Cedric laughed. “And thou, Rowena?”

Rowena’s blue eyes were aflame.

“Marked thou the knight in silver?” she asked. “He is young, but how he rode, and with what ease he overthrew yonder huge fellow in black, with the Norman arms on his shield. Think ye he is Ivanhoe, the Saxon knight we have heard of? Would I were queen of the tourney, and might crown him with the bay!”

“So, so,” and her guardian smiled at the eager maid. “Some day perhaps thou wilt be queen; none will merit it more. As for the youth, I know him not. But let us away to the tents there, and get refreshments ere the jousts begin once more.”

So down they went, and preceded by two of their escort, made their way through the gay throngs, where every one wore silks and satins and fine woollens and furs and leather jerkins or else jinkling armour, or perhaps the robes of a priest or a monk, till it seemed like a gigantic masquerade.

At the tent where they stopped were cakes and goblets of wine, pasties of game, a roast sucking pig and other delicacies, which the girls, hungry after the ride and the excitement of the morning, made gallant inroads upon, drinking milk instead of the wine which Cedric quaffed, a milk that tasted odd, and which Rowena told them was goat’s milk.

Finishing their luncheon, they looked about them. The scene was bewitching, and catching Rowena by the hand, they persuaded her to leave Cedric to his meal, the while they sauntered through the crowd, enjoying the various sights.

Rowena looked doubtful, but yielded. Evidently it was a new experience for her to venture away from the protection of a servant or a kinsman.

They wandered slowly about, stopping to watch a game between a group of shouting boys dressed in tights and brilliant jackets, evidently pages belonging to great houses, and then drawn on to see several stout country

yokels pitching quoits or rolling a ball on the smooth grass. As they passed, curious glances were thrown at them, but no one bothered them.

Suddenly a sound of frightened weeping mixed with shouts of laughter broke on their ears. The crying was evidently from some little child or young girl. Ahead of them a circle of boys and youths jostled each other about something of interest which the girls could not see.

“Some one’s getting hurt inside that ring of boys,” Rose exclaimed. “A little girl, I’ll bet. Let’s see what we can do,” and with the words she began to push forward, closely followed by Ruth.

Rowena called to them, however. “Come back, it is none of our affair, and there is danger...” But they paid no attention, and not wanting to be left behind, she also crowded to the front. A sharp scream from the still unseen child gave Rose additional energy.

“Room, you varlets,” she cried boldly, adopting the language she had heard used by their escort. “Room for the Lady Rose and the Lady Rowena and the Lady Ruth. Room, I say.”

Somewhat astonished, the crowd gave way slightly, and peering through the break Rose saw a lovely girl a little younger than Ruth cowering to the ground, while a crowd of young bullies evoked shrieks of laughter from the onlookers by pelting her with crusts of bread, apple cores, clods of turf and anything else that came handy.

“Daughter of an unbelieving Jew,” they yelled. “Who are you, to wear all those fine garments when honest Christians starve....”

Rose didn’t wait one moment. With an actual roar of rage she burst through the circle and catching the nearest boy by the arm she hurled him to one side—luckily, as she explained to Ruth later, he wasn’t half her size.

“You pack of cowards,” she cried, facing the amazed crowd of tormentors with her eyes on fire with scorn and wrath. “You make me sick. Go and find some one of your own size; why, if I had a few of our cowboys here with me, you’d get the worst licking any of you ever heard of. If there’s an ounce of manhood in the lot of you, you ought to die of shame.”

Ruth and Rowena closed in on either side, and now the three girls turned to the terrified child at their feet. The crowd growled, but several mumbling something to the effect that they must be highborn ladies or princesses, broke up in some confusion and drew away.

“You’re all right now,” Ruth murmured soothingly, smoothing the tumbled hair of the rescued maiden, who rose to her feet, panting a little through fright and surprise, the tears still standing in her immense black eyes. “Come, we’ll take you to your people. Who are you, and where is your father or your mother?”

“I am Rebecca, daughter of Isaac of York,” whispered the child. “Oh, do not leave me to be killed! Yonder, beyond that furthest tent on the slope, my father has a pavilion. Take me back there, and we will escape from this frightful place.”

The poor little thing trembled from head to foot, and Rose threw a protecting arm about her.

“You’re all right now, dear,” she said. “Come along with us, and we’ll see you safe with your father. How lovely you are,” she added, almost involuntarily.

It wasn’t surprising, however. The young Jewess had an exotic beauty, like some tropic flower which her somewhat fantastic dress, with a strong hint of the Orient in its flowing lines and changing hues, suited to admiration. Her skin was a clear olive, her hair glossy black, her eyes deep and wonderfully dark.

Rowena withdrew from her with a gesture of haughtiness.

“Will you touch the Jew’s daughter?” she said to Rose, a note of scorn in her voice.

“Don’t be silly,” replied Rose, somewhat roughly. “What’s the matter with all you people anyhow? You make me tired. Come along, Rebecca.”

The little thing gave Rose a grateful glance, but seemed too astonished to reply. The party immediately set off toward the indicated pavilion, and reached it without adventure, though every one they passed stared at them in amazement. Rowena evidently would have preferred to stay behind, except that she did not want to be left alone. In her eyes the little Jewess was a nuisance at the least, and it was clear that she could not understand what possessed her two friends in acting toward her with such kindness.

Within sight of the place where her father had pitched his shelter, Rebecca looked up at her two rescuers.

“Thank you, highborn damsels, most gracious ladies,” she stammered, her voice tremulous. “Now I am safe—ye will not want to come farther.”

Pressing her hands to her forehead, to her lips and to her breast, she made a deep salaam. “Farewell, and a thousand, thousand thanks.”

And then she darted toward the pavilion like a young antelope, disappearing within its shelter with one backward, smiling look.

“Isn’t she a little wonder,” exclaimed Ruth. And at that moment a loud blare of trumpets shivered the air.

“The tournament is to begin again,” cried Rowena. “Let us hasten back....”

They turned, but everything blurred before their eyes. The brightly dressed people, the decorated lists, the gay tents, the great horses in their splendid trappings. A second’s dizziness....

“Wasn’t it gorgeous!”

They both said it at the same instant, opening their eyes on their own familiar room.

“But I don’t think I would care to live with Rowena after all,” Rose added. “Those times *looked* all right—but——”

“Yes, that’s how I feel,” Ruth agreed.

CHAPTER VI

AFTERNOON TEA IN CRANFORD

Christmas was over, and Rose and Ruth were sure there had never been one more full of fun nor more unexpectedly rich in “just-what-I-wanted” presents since time, or at least all of time they were personally interested in, began.

In the first place, they had each had a new saddle given them, having always, until now, to make shift as well as might be with two discarded ones no longer fit for heavy use. They almost took their new saddles to bed with them, so rapturous was their delight in them.

“Don’t they smell good?” Ruth declared, sniffing at hers as though it were a flower.

Rose agreed. “They are the most beautiful saddles in the world, Ruth. Oh, dear, I wish the weather would give us a chance to try them on the broncos!”

But so far it hadn’t, for Christmas had come in with a storm, and the snow was too deep for riding. So the two girls tried their new snow-shoes, second to the splendid saddles in the joy they created. They got a few tumbles in the soft snow, and lay helpless with laughter till their father pulled them up and started them fresh. But before long they were expert enough to get along without assistance, and even to race each other.

There had been other gifts; no one had expressed a wish, it seemed, all the year, which had not been remembered. And there had been a tree and a joyous dinner ending with a real English plum pudding, such as Marmie had learned to make when she was a little girl in England. Dad had been gloriously happy over the sweater Rose and Ruth had spent months in

knitting for him, and Marmie simply tickled to death over a patent dishwasher they had got for her, assisted by Dad. Oh, it was a great Christmas!

After a day of strenuous exercise on the snow-shoes the girls were in their usual places before the log fire, watching the strange glowing pictures in the flames. The days were so short that though it was already dark, it was still a long way to supper, and Ruth was wondering which of her new books she would begin with, and whether Rose would get up and light the lamp if she asked her, when her sister remarked:

“It will be my turn to wish the next time the fairy comes, and do you know what I’m going to ask her to do?”

“What?”

“Do you remember how Marmie has told us about her visit to Knutsford, in England, when she was little? And that that is the real name of Cranford. Well, don’t you think it would be dandy to go there the next time we go through the Magic Gate?”

“Jiminy!” exclaimed Ruth, adopting one of her sister’s expressions, in her excited approval of the idea.

“Last time, when you wished, I was so afraid you’d choose that. Rowena was a fine wish, though. But there must be lots of nice little girls in Cranford, and we will have such fun if the fairy takes us there—I wish we could take our new saddles with us.”

“The little girls in Cranford haven’t any cow-ponies,” Ruth returned.

“I should say *not*.” But it wasn’t either of the girls that said that.

No, it was Honeysweet, as Rose had inwardly named their fairy, because of that small, golden voice of hers. And now, in the joy of hearing her, she divulged this name.

“Very pretty,” agreed the fairy. “It’s always been a favourite of mine, too—honey, I mean.”

“Then can we call you Honeysweet after this?”

“Why not make it *Honeysqueak*, since it’s my voice you’re alluding to?” replied the fairy, laughing.

They laughed too. What a funny name, and her voice wasn’t at all a squeak. But the name caught their fancy, all the same, and was immediately adopted. Fairy Honeysqueak! Who ever heard anything so absurd, and how

the girls giggled. Then Rose told her wish to go to Cranford and meet the little girls of that delightful village.

Honeysqueak thought it an excellent plan. "They are extremely good little girls," she said, "and I'm sure you couldn't be in better company. I'll take you there for tea, which is the proper time to visit in Cranford. Indeed, I think the good ladies have the kettle on the fire already, expecting you. So give me your little paws, and shut your eyes...."

They found themselves walking sedately up a paved street between high walls, over which fell pink and yellow roses, jasmine and ivy. Evidently there had recently been a shower, for the cobbles were shining with wet, while here and there a puddle gleamed. But the sun was out again, and the sky blue above them. No one was to be seen, but they seemed to know where to go, turning to the right at a corner without the slightest hesitation.

Nothing so demure as their two selves had ever met their eyes before. They were dressed in the quaintest little gowns imaginable, made of flowered muslin, with full, ruffled skirts over—yes, actually!—over lace-trimmed pantelettes that were gathered in close to their ankles. Low, heelless slippers with ribbons that crossed behind and tied in front in a tiny bow, and white stockings were on their feet, and in addition they wore odd overshoes with supports under the instep that lifted them nearly a couple of inches above the damp pavement. Clack-clack went these queer things with each step they took.

FOR THERE WAS PETER
ON THE DOCTOR'S
HORSE, WITH RUTH
MOUNTED BEHIND HIM

Snowy white undersleeves of sheer lawn with hemstitching, and tuckers to match completed their gowns, while on their heads were the cutest poke bonnets, tied under the chin with a huge ribbon bow. Their hair was arranged in quantities of curls, which filled in the bonnets all round their cheeks most attractively. Rose's ribbons were pink, as were the flowers of her printed muslin, and Ruth's blue, the babyest blue.

They smiled at each other. Each wore mits, and carried a reticule over one arm, a neat parasol being in Rose's possession.

As they turned a corner they met a boy in long green trousers reaching almost to his ankles and buttoning to an absurd short-waisted coat with a double row of brass buttons down the front and a wide turndown collar. A low, wide-brimmed felt hat was on his head, and a mass of curls hung from under the brim.

“Here you are,” he remarked cheerily. “Mrs. Jenkyns sent me to see if I could find you on the way. Tea is ready, and all the young people are gathered to meet you.”

“Are we late?” asked Ruth anxiously, pattering along faster on her amazing footgear. She thought the things harder to manage than snow-shoes.

“Oh, no,” answered the boy, gallantly offering an arm to each of the girls. And so escorted, they turned in at an open gateway, proceeded up a very neat box-bordered path, and found themselves in front of an open doorway that led into a tiny hall. From beyond came a sound of voices.

As they paused, releasing their guide the better to settle their bonnets before going in, a pretty maid in a very large white apron and cap to match came tripping down the hall. Smilingly she took the parasol, helped to untie the poke bonnets and asked them to leave their pattens in the corner of the hall. So they slipped off the clackety things with relief, and followed the maid toward the voices.

“I feel rather frightened,” Ruth whispered, and Rose nodded for answer. She looked a trifle flushed and nervous. Everything was so sort of hushed, as she confided to Ruth later.

At the door the two girls were met by a sweet-faced old lady in very full skirts, wearing a large lacy cap trimmed with ribbons on top of her white hair.

“I’m sure it’s most pleasant of you to come, dears,” she said. “George told me he found you right at the corner. And now come and meet the young people before we sit down to our tea.”

Sitting primly on the straight-backed chairs and a long settee between two windows were some six or seven girls and three little boys. The girls were all dressed in the same fashion as Rose and Ruth, and the boys wore the same funny trousers and short coat that adorned George, who was to be

seen near the tea-table, holding a large flowered cosy while the maid set down a tray. George appeared to be a very useful little boy.

The smiling lady took Rose and Ruth round the circle, saying agreeable things that were evidently meant to make the children feel at ease, but did not succeed particularly well in so doing. In fact, every one seemed tongue-tied to an alarming degree. Presently the circuit had been made, however, each little girl dropping a curtsy, gravely returned by the two sisters. Then the old lady released their hands.

“Now I’m sure you’ll all behave most genteelly,” she said, “and be sure to eat a nice tea. Martha will see that everything is right. I don’t want to restrain you in your enjoyment, and so I’ll leave you to make friends in your own way; I know young people like to be left to themselves.”

With that she smiled more benignly than ever, and moved off through an archway into an adjoining room, where Ruth, who was nearest, saw that a group of ladies were gathered about another tea-table. They all wore the fluffiest sort of lace caps, and skirts that spread wide, with bows of ribbon and narrow ruffles and braid trimmings. Some had fichus, some lace tuckers, all had bunches of curls hanging over their ears. A subdued murmur came from them.

With a concerted movement, the little party of “young people” now advanced to the tea-table. Martha set about filling cups and handing sandwiches and cake. With the munching every one began to unbend.

A rather tall girl with dark curls who looked even more serious than the others seated herself beside Rose.

“I am Deborah, the Rector’s eldest daughter,” she said quietly. “Perhaps you have never been in the house of a Rector before? It is a great pity that my honoured father is absent or you might be permitted to go in and curtsy to him. Peter ...” this somewhat sharply, addressing a slender lad in a blue coat with waistcoat and trousers of nankeen, who had pulled Ruth’s curls and was smiling mischievously as she looked from one side to the other, trying to catch her tormentor in the act.

“Deborah,” he returned, mincingly.

“Leave off your teasing ways,” she said, shaking her head. “He is a bad, wild boy, Ruth, if he is my own brother.”

“I don’t mind,” asserted Ruth, and she fixed a daring eye upon him. “Come near enough and I’ll pull your curls ... since you have them!”

He laughed, and took a seat beside her. Deborah turned back to Rose, who was looking curiously around at the circle of proper little maidens who were eating and drinking so very, very nicely, and seeming so exceedingly staid and grown-up.

“Don’t you ever make a noise?” she asked Deborah.

“Why should we make a noise?” Deborah’s face expressed genuine amazement.

Rose sighed. She began to feel an irresistible impulse to leap up and give one good yell—Red Indian yell, she muttered to herself.

A little girl with exceedingly blonde curls, pink cheeks and blue eyes, a plump and pretty little face, whispered:

“Would you like to see the sampler I am working? It is very sweet—three rules for a good girl, the digits, the letters, and a rose.”

“Don’t boast, Matty,” chided Deborah.

“It isn’t boasting to say what it looks like,” retorted Rose, who began to dislike Deborah.

“Oh, but I’m sure Deborah is right,” Matty whispered again. “She is a superior child, every one says so.”

At this moment Ruth and Peter burst out into a hearty laugh. All the grave childish faces turned to them, and many a small hand in the act of conveying a delicious morsel of cake to a waiting mouth, paused midway.

“And then Windy Bob gave a yell you could hear half a mile,” Ruth was saying, “and got out his knife and started to cut the rope. But Rickety Bob just needed that little minute to get ahead—and WIN!” She ended with a shout.

“What is she talking about?” asked Matty, interestedly.

“I guess she’s telling about the race between Windy Bob and Rickety Bob, the two oldest cowpunchers in Wyoming,” said Rose. “It was a corking race, all right.”

“Listen to this,” Peter was saying. “Did you ever hear anything so amusing! Couldn’t we all go out there some time?”

“Go where, Peter?” It was Deborah’s voice, clear and disapproving.

But the other children were all crowding round Ruth. "Tell us the story, too, won't you, please?" they demanded. "What is a cow-puncher, and where do they get such funny names?"

"Oh, Lord, Rose, they don't know what a cow-puncher is," Ruth remarked, looking toward her sister in astonishment.

"Tell you what," proposed Rose, who was getting rather tired of the solemn tea, "let's go outdoors and find a horse and show them some tricks. Have any of you got a pony?"

"There's the doctor's nag," said Peter, eagerly. "He's nothing very much, but he has more life in him than a sedan chair—which is the horse most used hereabouts."

"Come on then," said Rose, getting to her feet. It was easy to see that Deborah objected. But then she was curious—and with a cautious glance between the curtains, which had been dropped by the maid so that the card playing ladies might not be distracted by the playfulness of the young people, she followed the bunch of boys and girls, who were pressing after Peter, Rose, and Ruth in no small excitement.

Peter led them up the neat and narrow street, where one or two passers-by stared at the children in amazement. For they were chattering at the top of their voices, and laughing in the most unrestrained manner over the reminiscences of Ruth and Rose, who, delighted at so appreciative an audience, raked up all the old cowboy yarns they could recollect, and told them with fervour.

Just as Rose concluded a description of a round-up in the heyday of range life, a description she had heard a hundred times from old Windy Bob, who had cooked for her father's outfit during several years, they reached a peaceful, grassy meadow, gay with golden buttercups. In the midst of this meadow a small horse was grazing.

"There he is," announced Peter.

"Is there a saddle and bridle?"

To be sure there was, and Peter ran off to get both from the stable. In the meanwhile Rose inveigled the horse toward her with a lump of sugar brought from the tea. The saddle was unlike any she had ever seen, but Ruth and she got it on, as well as the bridle.

Both girls could ride like the true Westerners they were, and now, tucking their voluminous skirts neatly about them, they showed off before that admiring herd of children in their quaint clothes, making them appear like miniature men and women, children who had never made a noise before in all their well-managed lives.

But they made plenty now. When Rose bent down from the saddle at full gallop and picked up a handkerchief from the grass, their shouts of applause rent the air. When Ruth stood up in the saddle for a few perilous yards even Deborah gasped with wonder, and as for Peter....

Peter evidently thought Ruth the very nicest girl he had ever seen. He was a handsome, gallant-looking lad, with dark curls that did not make him look girlish, and a bright, fun-loving glance. He climbed into the saddle next, and stuck there too, but when he tried to do Rose's trick, off he tumbled, among the yells of the other boys and to the terror of all the little girls. He laughed, and tried again, and fell again, and Rose went to show him how. As for the little horse, it seemed too astonished at these extraordinary proceedings to protest by so much as a shrug; it just did, as nearly as it knew how, what it was urged to do.

After they tired of the riding, Ruth proposed squat tag. It too was new to the Cranford boys and girls, but they took to it rejoicingly. How they raced, and shouted, and laughed. And what havoc the game played with flowing skirts and white ruffles and lace tuckers, and how flushed the young faces looked under the little poke bonnets, though many of these were flung on the grass in the abandon of the sport.

It was a royal afternoon.

Before the hilarity had begun to die down a sedan chair born by two respectable servants in wigs and long full-skirted coats came slowly down the street. Behind it came two more, and after these a group of ladies moving in the gentlest possible manner, and chattering together over the agreeable party that had but that instant broken up.

Upon the shocked ears of this genteel group broke a wild screeching, mixed with even wilder laughter. As they turned their heads in the direction of the sound, they saw—well, by the expression upon their faces as they stood rooted to the dust of the pavement, it was evident that they couldn't believe their own eyes.

For there was Peter on the doctor's horse, with Ruth mounted behind him, reining back his panting steed before a circle of hopping and yelling children who were flourishing sticks in the most threatening manner. Ruth was screaming wildly, and Deborah—Deborah the superior—was waving a carving knife in Peter's face.

"Good gracious," stammered one of the ladies. Whereupon the sedan chairs came to a sudden halt, three tops lifted simultaneously, and three astounded faces appeared above them.

"Are they all mad?"

Rose suddenly caught sight of the little procession, frozen into a horrified immobility. She saw that an explanation was necessary, and hastily scrambled under the fence.

"We're playing Indian," she said. "Peter has rescued Ruth, the trapper's daughter, from her Indian captor, and has been intercepted by the rest of the tribe ... it's *very* exciting, and he does it so splendidly."

"Look, look at their frocks, my poor dear Arabella," gasped one of the heads in a sedan chair to another.

But now the rest of the children had perceived the interruption. A sudden silence fell upon them. All but Peter. Slipping off his horse, together with rescued Ruth, he laughed aloud.

"My, we'll all catch it," he said. "But it was worth it! It's the most wonderful day we've ever known. I'm glad I rescued you, Ruth."

"I'm glad, too," Ruth answered. "You make a splendid backwoodsman. Must we stop?"

"I rather think so. Look at the ladies," and he waved toward the group in the street.

Miraculously, it seemed, mothers, aunts, and elder sisters had appeared, and were sorting out the different boys and girls who belonged to them. Slender hands in silk mittens were lifted in horror to the skies, as the ruin of clothes and the dust of Indian conflict and cowboy life were more and more revealed. There was a storm of low-voiced protest, like the whisper of winds in a forest of firs, faces turned pale, and there was a snuffle here and there among the reprimands.

"We were just playing," Rose reiterated.

“Yes,” added Ruth, feeling that they two were the ones to blame. “We wanted to show them what fun it is to be pioneers, that’s all.”

“In Cranford,” came back the stern reply, “we are ladies and gentlemen. You have all forgotten your manners. Dear, dear, what will people say?”

And then they all drifted away, driving their captured children before them. All but Peter. Smiling, he took a hand of each of the girls and shook it.

“You’ve given the old ladies lots to talk about,” he said, “and that is what they need. And now will you come home with me and....”

But Peter wavered before their eyes even as he spoke. Dizzily they closed them. When they opened them again, they were home indeed, but it was their own familiar ranch home, not Peter’s.

“I wish he could have come with us,” mourned Ruth. “I did love Peter, didn’t you, Rose?”

CHAPTER VII

A LETTER FROM LORNA

Late in the afternoon the wind had begun blowing, and by dark it was shrieking and howling and shaking the ranch house as though it were a living thing, and were trying to snatch them all up and carry them off to an unknown place. Ruth had been reading a legend called "The Flying Dutchman," and she whispered to Rose, as they waited for Marmie to take them up to bed, the story of the demon ship with its ghostly crew, that flew on the wings of a wild wind, bringing the tempest with it, to leave some unlucky vessel to fight in vain against the strength of wind and wave.

"Out on the ocean it would go scudding by, all murky black and elfy white," Ruth said. "The poor sailors on the good ship would see it, and know they were doomed. A dreadful man stood at the helm, leering, and the wind shrieked and howled ... like that ..." and she stopped, a little pale, as the house trembled at a new and stronger rush of the gale.

"Could the Flying Dutchman and his magic ship fly over the land to us here?" she asked Marmie, when they went to bed. But Marmie laughed, and told the two girls that even magic ships must stay on the water.

"It's going to be a hard blow," Marmie said, "but you mustn't be frightened. The house is quite safe, and fortunately the boys have got the stock safely corralled. But they've had a job over it. Dad says he's never had a harder time, and that he thought his horse and he would certainly be blown clean up to the moon before it was done."

And blow it did all night. The girls kept waking up and hearing the sound of it, and their beds rocked, so that they thought they really might have blown out to sea, after all. Rose even got up to peer out of the window, but there, in the grey light, for the moon was shining through clouds, she saw

the red roofs, snuggled under the hill; one of the cottonwood trees however, the biggest of all, lay flat.

When morning came the wind was gone, but torrents of sleety rain were falling.

So there was no going out to play. After lessons and dinner were over and Marmie had gone to see about putting things to rights, Rose and Ruth settled themselves in the living room. Rose was painting with her box of water colours, and Ruth sat looking into the fire, very quiet and rather drowsy, for she hadn't slept much through the wild night.

Though it was early in the afternoon the room was pretty dark, for the skies were black and grey, and the sleet pushed itself against the windows like a heavy curtain.

"What do you suppose I'm painting?" Rose asked her sister suddenly.

Ruth jumped. She must have been almost asleep.

"Are you going to be an artist when you grow up, Rose? If you are you can make pictures for my stories, because I'm going to be an author, and write wonderful books with fairies and heroines and wild robbers and splendid knights in them."

"Yes, but what d'you think I'm painting now?" insisted Rose.

"A ship with the Flying Dutchman on it?"

"No."

"Can I see and try to guess?"

"All right," agreed Rose, apparently not troubled by the suggestion that her painting might be difficult to identify.

So Ruth came and leaned over the artist's shoulder, and looked at the drawing on the big sheet of paper.

In the background was a large dark green tree that arched splendidly over the top of the picture. On the ground underneath were some flat-topped mushrooms, and seated on one of these was a little creature with a golden crown and flowing hair, dressed in a sort of rainbow coloured fuzzy looking garment, and carrying in one tiny hand a slender flower stalk topped by a white blossom.

Ruth gasped with admiration.

"It's the best picture you've ever made, Rose!"

Rose looked at it complacently.

“Isn’t it nice? I meant the dress to look like mist, but I couldn’t, so I changed it to a rainbow. Well, what is it?”

“A fairy.”

“Of course—but *what* fairy?”

Ruth gave a delighted shriek. “Why, OUR Fairy, of course. Oh, I wonder if it looks like her.”

There came a tiny chuckle from somewhere near.

“So that’s what you think I look like,” remarked a chatty dewdrop-falling sort of voice.

Rose and Ruth whirled round and round like a couple of well spun tops. But nothing could they see except what was always to be seen, and in their excitement they didn’t even see that.

“Look, here I am, right beside my portrait,” laughed the voice.

Well, you can be sure they stared hard enough. Ruth thought she saw a slight glow, more like a light that was thinking of shining than one that had really begun its work. If you can imagine the shadow of a light, that is as like it as anything.

“HUSH, LORNA. NO ONE
SHALL HURT THEM. BUT
THEY MUST GO FROM
HERE AT ONCE. TWO OF
MY BOYS ARE SADDLING
NOW!”

“No, that’s not a very good picture of me,” the fairy said, evidently giving up the hope of making herself truly visible. “I’m not a fair fairy, not at all. That may account for the difficulty you have in seeing me. I’m the brunette of the family—and my edges are a trifle indeterminate—I never could see any reason for having an edge all round you. But never mind about me. What are we going to do, now I’m here? Shall we throw open that Magic Gate for another little adventure?”

Rose jumped up and down, stiff-legged with joy.

“What jolls! Oh, do take us to visit some little girl again.”

“Please,” begged Ruth, hugging herself breathless, as she did at times when stirred beyond control.

“I thought of taking you to see another child even lonelier than you two ever thought of being. She’s quite a way off—back in the seventeenth century, and in Devonshire, or Exmoor, if you prefer it—into the bargain. But we’ve a long rainy day before us.”

“Who is she, fairy?”

“Her name’s Lorna—Lorna Doone. I’ve told her to expect you, so perhaps we’d best be off at once.”

“Lorna,” gasped Ruth. “Oh, Rose, remember?”

Rose nodded. “We had her book last Christmas. Shall we see John Ridd, too?”

“I shouldn’t wonder. And now give me your hands.”

Which of course they did, and had their little thrill of a fall as they shut their eyes, and opened them to find themselves standing beside a flowing brook, with green forest trees bending overhead.

“Rose, Ruth—oh, I’m glad to see you,” called a very sweet voice, and as they turned toward it they saw a pretty girl with a great wave of dark hair falling over her shoulders, running toward them down a little slope. She was dressed in a straight cut gown of green velvet, with fine white chemisette and sleeves of sheerest lawn. Her great eyes shone with pleasure, and her red lips were parted in excitement.

“And we, too, Lorna—dear Lorna,” they called back. They ran to meet her, and the three of them clasped hands halfway up the slope of soft grass, and then kissed rather shyly.

“Come to my bower. We will have a lovely day. I have received permission to play here till evening, and there is a little luncheon laid out for us—but come.”

As usual, Rose and Ruth found they were dressed in the same style as their small hostess. Very fine and pretty they all looked, and very happy they felt in the clear sun and shadow under the mighty trees.

The bower was a lovely spot of twisted branches and rustic work, all overgrown with vines and flowers. Inside, on a table made of a thick section of some forest tree, smoothed and mounted on a sturdy wooden pillar, were

set various goodies—a small meat pie, a tiny roast bird, bread, a jug of milk and preserved fruits.

Merrily they sat down to the picnic.

“Nay, but the trouble I had to fetch enough here for the three of us,” Lorna told them. “I got one of the lads to carry the basket with the bread and milk and bird, and the rest I carried myself, waiting till there was none to see me go.”

“Suppose they came here,” Rose enquired.

“They are most of them gone on a long ride,” Lorna returned, and she looked a little pale. Then her eyes filled with tears. “I fear they are gone on a bad errand,” she whispered.

Ruth threw affectionate arms about her, while Rose patted her shoulder.

“Never mind, Lorna dear. It is not your fault, and you are sweet and lovely. And perhaps you are mistaken this time.”

“When the Doones go riding harm is pretty sure to befall,” Lorna said, though she ceased to cry. “And now let us play.”

Play they did. Rose and Ruth taught their hostess several new games—games they played at home. One was tree-tag, and what a runner Lorna proved. With flying hair and laughing eyes she slipped beyond touch, rushing from tree to tree, uncatchable as a wood-sprite. How they laughed.

Time flew. Flew faster than they dreamed. Suddenly, as they sank in a shouting heap after a hop-skip-and-a-jump race, they heard a heavy step crunching the gravel by the brook, and the next instant a tall, dark man with gloomy and disturbed features stood before them.

Lorna sprang to her feet.

“How is this, Queen?” asked the man, roughly enough. “What little maids are these, and how came they here with you in the valley of the Doones?”

Lorna met the man’s eye highly, with no sign of fear. “These are my friends,” she said, “here under my protection. I know not how they came, but they mean no harm—surely I can be allowed a playmate once in a while. I will tell Sir Ensor if ye affright them—or harm them.”

“Well, come and tell him,” answered the man. “Come ye all,” and his fierce look swept the two other girls with a glance that sent a quick shiver

through their veins, “and we shall see how Sir Ensor takes the matter.”

He turned as he finished and strode off through the brush. Lorna gave her friends a somewhat tremulous smile.

“Dear me,” she whispered, all her fine show of courage gone, “I hope no harm will come to you. But truly I think not. Sir Ensor is kind when he wills to be, and we have but played together. They will take you beyond the gate and set you down on the moor, and then you must find your way to some of the good folk of Exmoor. Perhaps”—she hesitated and then a sudden smile chased the fear from her face, leaving it clear and rosy as a wild flower—“perhaps you will even make your way to the Ridds, and see that good boy, John, with his gentle voice and kind eyes. He came here once, long ago, in the earliest of spring when the snow still patched the ground here and there, though primroses had begun to bloom in the forest. And I like him. I would like, too, to send him a word by you....” She stopped talking suddenly, darted into her bower, and fumbling in a corner, brought out a sheet of paper and a quill pen and ink. “Wait but a moment, I will write a few words to him and if you see him you will give him my letter. That will be good fun.”

Rose and Ruth thrilled with the excitement of it all. “I don’t care if they do set us down on the moor, Rose,” Ruth whispered. “It won’t be any wilder than the prairie, and we were never frightened there. But I wish we had our horses, and that Lorna could come with us.”

Rose nodded. “Isn’t she lovely? And if only we do find John——”

Lorna came running with a folded paper in her hand. “Here it is, just a greeting. Hide it, and hasten, for they will suspect something unless we go at once to Sir Ensor.”

So down the slope they raced, and reached the green bottom of the valley in no time at all. A lovely picture they made, the three sweet maids, flushed with their running, their eyes ashine with excitement. An elderly, tall, thin man watched them as they came toward him, and smiled, though his face did not look like one much given to smiling.

The girls saw him suddenly, and their gay chatter died. But he waved a friendly hand.

“Nay, fear nothing, children,” he called. And as they drew nearer, still somewhat fearfully, he asked them how they had got into the Doone valley.

“Our fairy brought us,” answered Rose. “I don’t know just how. You shut your eyes, and take her by the hand—and there you are.”

“How is this, Lorna?” asked the old man, and straight and active he looked for all his years, “Know you ought of a fairy?”

“Some fairy has found out how lonely I am here with no little maid for a playmate, and found a way to bring these friends hither,” Lorna said. “Oh, Sir Ensor, you will not have them harmed,” and with the words she began to cry and sob.

“Hush, Lorna. No one shall hurt them. But they must go from here at once. Two of my boys are saddling now, and will take them out on the moor and leave them within walking distance of some of the good Exmoor folk.” Sir Ensor sneered a trifle over the end of his sentence. “I doubt that any of them would care to see my stout youths at too close range,” he concluded. Then, turning to Rose and Ruth, “You must have your eyes bound,” he said, sternly. “And do not come hither again, with or without this talk of fairies.”

Lorna flashed a smile at them, and as her kinsman walked slowly away she threw her arms first round one and then the other of her new friends.

“We had a happy day—and now my letter is safe. They will take you close to the Ridd farm. And perhaps some day you will come back, or perhaps your fairy will take me to play with you.”

“Gee-whillikans, but that would be fine,” exclaimed Rose. “I wonder if she could? We would give you the time of your life, Lorna. And how you’d love riding our cow-ponies, wouldn’t she, Ruth?”

“And sitting by the fire telling stories,” added Ruth. “Oh, Lorna, we like you so much. What a pity you can’t come along now.”

Lorna shook her head. “They wouldn’t let me go—I’m their ‘queen,’ you know. But some day I will be big enough to have my own way, and then ——” she smiled, tossed back her dark curls, and kissed the two sisters once more. At that moment two young men rode up on a pair of fine lively horses.

“Up with you, little maids,” they shouted, galloping close, and with a last look and wave of their hands, Rose and Ruth were swung up in front of their escorts, and large kerchiefs were tied before their eyes. Then the horses broke into a run, that carried the two girls swiftly away. They heard

Lorna's voice calling a last good-bye, and responded lustily, while the men laughed not unkindly.

Part of the way must have been very rough, for the horses struggled along slowly, and once the two men dismounted, leading their mounts, and asking the girls whether they could stay in the saddle. The indignation with which both replied that they certainly could do so, and that they weren't afraid of any horse, greatly amused them.

"So, so—little spit-fires. Not afraid of any horse, eh? Nor afraid of any man, either?"

"Not of you, anyhow," Ruth replied; "you are too nice and young and laughy to be cross."

At that the two laughed harder than ever. And then there was more galloping, and suddenly a stop.

"Here we leave you to go the rest of the way afoot," said the taller of the two men, whom the other called Jan. "Have a care the wolves do not devour you—they won't be won over by your wiles and saucy ways."

They plucked the bandage from the children's eyes with the word, whirled their horses about, and were off at top speed.

Rose and Ruth exchanged a rather frightened glance.

It was the word "wolves" that had scared them. But they decided that the men had only been teasing them, and started bravely off in the direction opposite to that the riders were taking.

They had walked some time and began to feel tired, when Rose grabbed her sister suddenly by the arm.

"Look—look there," she whispered, excitedly.

Ruth saw a moving object on the edge of the moor, and thought "wolf." But the next moment both girls realised that it was another horseman. He drew near rapidly, and presently approached them. He was a big, handsome, jolly-looking man, and rode a beautiful strawberry-roan mare, that looked both wild and gentle.

For a moment he sat in silence, looking down on them, while they stared up at him. Then he swung himself from the saddle, and patted his mare on her sleek shoulder.

"Isn't she a beauty?" he remarked.

"I know who you are," Ruth told him, still staring. "You're Tom Faggus the highwayman, and this is Winnie, your wonderful strawberry mare. Oh, Mr. Tom, do take us to the Ridd ranch. We are so tired, and we don't know how to get there."

"So that's the way of it. And how do you two little maids happen to be walking the moor alone at this hour?"

Whereupon they told him, and when he heard the Doone name he frowned.

"Lucky to get away at all," he muttered. "But come, we'll see whether Winnie will allow us all three to jog on together to Ridd's house, where I'm sure we'll find a welcome. How will it be, Winnie, my lady?"

The mare turned her lovely head and looked softly at her master, whinnying a low response.

"Up with us, then," he exclaimed. And swinging the two little girls aboard the gentle creature, he mounted himself, setting Ruth before him and Rose behind.

"And now Winnie shall do as she likes," he said, and bending forward past Ruth he whispered a word or two. Winnie laid back her ears, and then started off with a motion so smooth and swift that both girls gasped in delight.

"To think of riding your beautiful horse, Mr. Highwayman," Rose ejaculated. "Golly-winks, it seems too good to be true! Did you ever stop a stage?"

Tom laughed. "Surely you don't think I'll admit anything like that? Stop a stage? You wouldn't care to ride with a man who'd do a thing like that, now, would you?"

"Oh, yes," they both answered, earnestly. "Of course we would. You are a good highwayman, we know all about you."

"How's that? I don't seem to know you two half as well."

The girls tried to remember. But somehow they only felt hazily that they had heard a good deal about Tom Faggus.

"Perhaps the fairy told us."

Tom laughed again, very heartily. He didn't seem to think much of fairies.

And now they were riding up to a house sunk a bit between the bare moor hills, with a high hedge running along one side, and trees beyond. A long, low house of stone, with thatched roof and overhanging eaves, and vines clambering up the walls. In the growing twilight, with the lights shining from its windows, it looked delightfully homey and hospitable. Men moved about in the yard, and as the mare reached the gate, a tall, handsome boy ran out.

“Is it you, Cousin Tom,” he cried eagerly.

“That it is. And here are two young maids with me whom I found lost on the heath.”

The boy looked curiously at the sisters, and as they started to slip to the ground he helped them, kindly if clumsily, to reach a footing.

“It’s John Ridd, isn’t it?” Rose spoke, half shyly. He looked at once so young and so big one hardly knew how to take him.

“John it is,” Tom said, fondling his mare. “And where is your mother, John?”

She came from the house at the word, and welcomed Tom and his charges very prettily. Hearing they had escaped from the Doones she shook her head sadly, and her eyes filled with tears, for she had cause enough to hate these robbers. John listened eagerly to the tale the girls told, when they were all in by the fire together, the mother getting supper and making things comfortable.

What a splendid big kitchen it was, with its rafted ceiling from which depended huge hams and flitches, and vari-coloured bunches of herbs. A great fire burned briskly at one end, a long table set with blue and white china stretched down the middle, with heavy wooden chairs about it. Snowy curtains fluttered at the small-paned windows, and a row of geraniums bloomed on each sill. Rose and Ruth thought they had never seen so inviting a room.

So there they sat, toasting their feet before the blaze, while they watched the spit that held a great roasting goose turn slowly round and round. John asked many slow questions concerning the Doones, but of Lorna he spoke no word.

“We love Lorna,” Ruth said of a sudden. “Don’t you love her, John?”

He looked at her startled.

“Why yes, I think I do. Who could help loving such a maid?” he replied. “But ’tis long since I saw her, and then only for a few minutes ... among primroses.” He smiled more shyly than seemed possible for so stout and huge a youth, who looked as though he were already a fit match for most men.

“Lorna has sent you a letter,” whispered Rose, drawing it from her pocket cautiously, for she felt that none but John should know of it.

“Lorna—a letter!” The boy flushed scarlet, and took the folded sheet as though he feared to hurt it in his great hands. “Why, the sweet maiden! What said she?”

“That she liked you—and hoped some time to see you once more,” Rose told him. “And I think—I seem to know somehow——” but here her faint memory failed her. She could not remember what happened to John and Lorna. But she knew she liked them both.

John tucked the letter carefully away in his coat unread. And it was a gay supper they all sat down to, when his mother called them to the table. Tom had some good stories to tell, adventures on long rides where he had met some who would have been as glad not to meet him. But it was plain to be seen that he harmed them not at all. They gave their money over without any fuss, as soon as he expressed a wish for it.

“Which is all the better for me,” laughed Tom. “For I would not kill any man, no, nor harm any, either. But how shall I refuse to take the fat purses they are so kind as to lay in my hands?”

“Tom, Tom, you will lie in a bloody grave, I fear,” sighed Madam Ridd. “But better men than you have done that.”

And they all knew she was thinking of her husband, killed by the Doones. And Rose, who sat beside her, laid her warm hand lovingly on the widow’s. She smiled at the caress ... Rose smiled back.... And suddenly felt a sort of blurr.... She clutched Mistress Ridd’s hand more firmly. There was a moment of darkness....

And there they were, she and Ruth, back home, quite cosy in the settle by the fire.

CHAPTER VIII

LITTLE MAID MARIAN

Rose was carolling gaily:

“Under the greenwood tree,
Who loves to lie with me,
And tune his merry note
Unto the sweet bird’s throat—
Come hither, come hither, come hither,
Here shall he see
No enemy
But winter and rough weather.”

Ruth joined at the last line.

“I never can remember the other verse,” she said, as Rose too fell silent.
“It is always the first verse that’s easy, isn’t it?”

And then began the airiest, fairiest singing ever a child listened to. Have you ever seen the spiderwebs stretched across the grass-blades in the early morning, all ashine with tiniest dew-drops? Well, if they were turned into music, they would probably sound like the singing Rose and Ruth heard:

“Who doth ambition shun
And loves to live i’ the sun,
Seeking the food he eats
And pleased with what he gets—
Come hither, come hither, come hither,
Here shall he see
No enemy
But winter and rough weather.”

“Oh, Fairy, Fairy Honeysqueak,” they breathed, when the miraculous loveliness of it ended.

“That was right, wasn’t it, every word?” asked the fairy briskly.

“Think of your knowing Shakespeare’s song.”

“Why shouldn’t I? He loved fairies, and did a great deal to make us known. He is a prime favourite with us all.”

“How wonderful. Did he ever see any of you?”

“Probably. I never met him myself, however. I was rather new then, and not going about a great deal. I’d recently come from the moon; you know many of us come from there; and I hadn’t quite got the hang of things here yet. But talking about greenwood trees, why don’t you girls let me take you to visit Maid Marian? She lives in Sherwood Forest, and you’ll probably meet Robin Hood, and may see some of the real greenwood life. You know, after all, there’s nothing else quite as good, or so we fairies think.”

Nothing could seem better than such an invitation, and Rose and Ruth were delighted.

“What luck, my singing that song! But I wish we could hear you sing some more, Fairy Honeysqueak.”

Honeysqueak laughed. “You absurd child, I haven’t any real voice at all. My companions make fun of me every time I try to train any young Hylas or grass-hopper for the spring music. But I’m a good teacher, voice or no voice, they have to admit that. But let’s be running along, dears, Marian is expecting you.”

They reached their two hands towards the voice the Fairy had been maligning, felt her own slip into their clasp, then that tiny sinking feeling and little shock ... and there they were!

They found themselves seated on a wooden bench, their backs up against the wall of a house, in front of them what looked like a public square, crowded with a merry throng in the picturesque garments of stage folk. The upper story of the house against which their bench was placed projected so as to make a pleasant shade, and between the moving throng they caught glimpses of a green on which games seemed to be in progress, while a group near them to the right was collected in front of a punch and judy show, the squeaky voices of the actors sounding funnily distinct above the general commotion.

“I’m so glad you could get here for the Fair,” said a young girl who was seated beside Rose, “and how fortunate we are to have so brave a day for it.

Have you ever seen the wrestlers and the single stick exercises?" She bent nearer and whispered:

"It is almost certain that bold Robin and some of his merry outlaws will come for a trial with these village gabies—and then we shall see what we shall see."

A bonny-looking girl she was, with a fair English skin and pale gold hair worn in heavy plaits that reached below her waist. She was dressed in a rose-coloured bodice and overskirt, prettily draped over a flowered petticoat, and her shoes had high red heels. She wore no hat, but the sun seemed to have no effect on her fairness. Her eyes were almost black, a strange contrast, and were laughing and mischievous in expression.

"So you are Maid Marian?" Rose stated, rather than asked. Ruth was lost in the puppet show, having got up to go a little closer, and Rose could see her grinning broadly at the witticisms Punch was uttering.

"See your sister, quite taken with the show," returned Marian. "They are funny little creatures, to be sure. But let us push our way nearer the common, and so get a look at the lads there."

They rose and, gathering in Ruth, who didn't want to leave the mimic drama till Maid Marian whispered that Robin might arrive at any minute, and once he did they would never be able to get within sight of the contestants, they shoved and wriggled through the jolly holiday crowd until they found themselves in the front row of observers.

"GREETING, SWEET
MAID," HE SAID TO
MARIAN

It was a gay sight. Two stakes, from which fluttered many coloured streamers, were set up at either end of a broad stretch of greensward. On this several young men were engaged in trials of strength. Just opposite the girls a handsome young fellow, tall and active, lithe as a cat, was exchanging rapid blows with a shorter, thickset man, who was none the less extremely agile. Their weapons were stout staves, and the way they went at each other was most thrilling. Shouts greeted their efforts, and from the applause and laughter when either man got in a good stroke, it was easy to see that both had plenty of friends.

Not far distant two other lads were wrestling, struggling on the ground, breathing heavily as they tugged and strove together. There were others besides these, but too far off to engage the girls' attention.

"Ho-ho! well struck, Tom," roared a fat man beside Rose, as one of the two who were having the bout at single sticks delivered a resounding thwack on his opponent's leather cap. "Nay, but the boy is a wonder. He'll win, I'll wager my best calf on it. Saw ye that now ... lay on, Tom; ye'll have him on his knees to you."

Tom was the shorter of the two young men, and though he had got in a good blow or two, it did not look as though he had the best of his adversary. That young man fought on with a smile, dodging and springing about, and presently he came down hard on Tom's cap, so hard that the young fellow reeled.

"Where's your Tom now!" shouted another man, thumping the fat gentleman on the back. "And the calf? Will ye wager the calf now!" A chorus of laughs and shouts greeted this inquiry, but the fat man was no whit disturbed.

"It wouldn't be easy for thee to wager a calf, Ned, unless it were one of those you carry about with you," he retorted.

At this moment there was a disturbance at the further end of the common. Men crowded thither, surging across the grass and being pushed back again. And then three men clad in Lincoln green, with long bows in their hands, broke through the fringe of people and strode out into the open.

Marian gripped the arms of her two friends.

"'Tis Robin Hood himself," she whispered. "The one in the centre, with the long feather in his cap. The two with him I know not."

A group of men surrounded the three new arrivals, apparently discussing something of interest, for there was much waving of arms and loud speech. Presently a burst of laughter broke from the onlookers, and the group drew away, leaving Robin and his companions alone.

"A match, a match!" yelled the crowd, enthusiastically.

"What are they so excited about?" asked Ruth of Maid Marian.

"They want a shooting match with the long bow and broad arrow, but the sheriff and his assistants are loath to grant it, since they know Robin is sure

to win, and the sheriff hath a son whom he would fain see carry away the fine prize offered.”

“But if they don’t hold the match he couldn’t win it, either, could he?”

“Once Robin has gone, thinking there is to be no match, the shooting would soon begin,” laughed Marian. “But Robin will not go ... not he.”

To be sure, what with the expostulations of the crowd and the fact that Robin and his men sat themselves down on the grass composedly to wait, the sheriff yielded.

“Since ye wish it,” he called, “the match will be held. Listen to the rules, and see ye mark them well.”

Joyous cheering answered him.

“Oh, what fun,” exclaimed Rose. “Let’s get where we can see him.”

But they were already in an excellent position, thanks to Marian. The rest of the contestants busy on the common had all cleared off, including the two young men who had belaboured each other so diligently with sticks. They were now chatting together, while they pulled on their leather jerkins, in the most amicable manner, while the fat man looked on with a goodnatured grin.

Several men were employed setting up the target at one end of the field, others were drawing a white line on the grass at the opposite end. The spectators arranged themselves in two long lines, those in front sitting or reclining on the grass, and every one in the merriest of spirits.

It was an unforgettable sight, that many-coloured, picturesque throng of men and women and children, all so eagerly interested. Little family parties sat together, half-grown boys raced in and out, somehow getting through the close-packed rows, older men pressed together, discussing distances and records. At the end near the white line Robin Hood and his men lounged, chatting, leaning on their long bows, observed by every one. Several others with bows began to collect near them, one whom the Maid pointed out as the sheriff’s son. He was a jolly-looking lad of about eighteen, with a shock of red hair.

“He can shoot well,” she told the two girls, “and were it not for Robin might win the prize. You can see it there, a bow of the finest yew, mounted in silver, as is the quiver with its twelve fine arrows.”

She indicated a pavilion near them, where the bow with several other prizes was displayed. And now the first to shoot stepped into position.

He was a stout, middle-aged man, and wasted no time in preliminaries, but fitting an arrow to his string, he drew it to the head and let go. It grazed the target, sinking into the large shield that had been erected behind it.

Others stepped up, some doing worse, some better. Then the sheriff's son took his turn. He carefully adjusted his arrow, waited an instant, and let fly.

A cheer went up. The arrow was within two rings of the center.

"Almost a bull's-eye, Will," shouted two or three, encouragingly, and the youngster smiled as he stepped back.

Robin now took the archer's place. Drawing his arrow to its head, he seemed to let it go carelessly. For an instant it looked as though it had missed the target entirely. Ruth and Rose felt their hearts sink, for they wanted bold Robin to win. But Maid Marian was laughing.

"He has split the other," she cried. And "It's a tie, it's a tie," came calls from the onlookers here and there.

All this while the three girls had been slowly drawing nearer and nearer to the end of the course where Robin and his men stood. As he stepped back, smiling, he caught sight of them, and instantly walked over.

"Greeting, sweet maid," he said to Marian. She answered him smiling and blushing, and turning to Rose and Ruth, "These be friends of mine," she said, "and of thine too, Sir."

He bowed gallantly. "Come ye to the greenwood when this is over, and we will have a little feast of celebration; for I fear the sheriff's red-headed boy will not carry off that bow. It has taken my eye, Marian."

Marian whispered something, on the pretence of bending down to fasten her shoe-lace. To Rose it sounded as though she had said:

"The sheriff means to keep it ... a messenger went this morning to Nottingham ... you know what that may mean."

Robin looked startled for a second. But another cheer from the crowd made him turn to the target. The sheriff's son had shot again, and there stuck his arrow, not two inches from the centre of the bull's-eye.

"Come on, Robin," yelled several, "beat that an you can."

Once again Robin shot, carelessly as before. And again the arrow split that of his opponent. There was a hush over the crowd, in the midst of which the sheriff's son once more aimed at the target. This time his arrow found almost the very centre. Wild cheers went up, and many called to Robin to better that.

Once more he stood poised, his great bow bent. Then he let fly. The arrow sang through the air, and quivered in the centre of the target, close beside the other.

"I think," said Robin, in a clear voice, "that when ye come to measure ye will find mine the closer by the fraction of an inch." And as the crowd pressed about the target a wild shout told that he spoke truth.

"It's Robin, bold Robin hath won," they cried.

"You are a wizard, Sir," said the sheriff's son, gracefully enough. But his father frowned.

"Give me my prize," quoth Robin, "for I and my men must be away."

"Not so fast," returned the sheriff. "There is much to be done first. If you cannot abide the proper time, you must even leave your prize behind."

Murmurs from those near greeted this speech.

"Nay, nay, fair play," they muttered. "Englishmen will not stand by to see what is fairly won denied to him who won it. Give Robin his prize, hear you. Your son is a great archer, but he lost this day ..." with other such protests.

But nothing cared the sheriff for their growls. Two or three of his men were by, and these he set before the pavilion.

"Now on with the foot races, lads."

Some of the villagers heeded him, and the runners grouped themselves ready for the word, while the older men cleared the track, shoving the spectators back into line with much racket of voice and commotion generally.

In the midst of all this Maid Marian whispered to Rose and Ruth, who were looking on at it all with great interest.

"Can you run?"

"Run? D'you want *us* to race?" both of them asked incredulously, staring at the young men who waited in a tense row.

Marian giggled, her black eyes snapping.

“I want you to help me get Robin Hood his lawful prize,” she continued, speaking low and hurriedly. “As soon as the race starts, when all are watching to see who wins, we must slip into the pavilion, grasp bow and arrows and quiver and make a dash for the edge of the forest yonder. You see Robin and his men are heading there now. They will be ready for us ... will you do it?”

“Of course—won’t we, Ruth? Golly, I hope we make it.” And Rose felt her heart going faster as she looked at the strip of road and the rising slope that lay between the common and the forest. Robin and his men, apparently giving up any intention of claiming the prize, were walking slowly across the grass. The sheriff’s son was talking to his father, evidently far from pleased at his parent’s way of winning prizes for him, or so the girls judged by the expression of his face and his gestures, for he was too far off for his words to be heard.

With Marian to manœuvre, the girls soon found themselves before the pavilion, and there they stood, looking in as though lost in admiration at the brave show inside. The men stationed at the entrance paid no attention to them. Seeing that Robin and his friends had gone, they lounged forward to get a better view of the approaching race. Marian slipped inside, followed close by Rose and her sister. A wild shouting behind told them the race was on. Instantly each grasped one of the coveted articles, Rose getting the arrows, which were stood beside the quiver to make the better showing, Ruth snatching that and Marian the bow. Lightly they turned, and saw only the broad backs of a row of spectators, all eagerly urging the runners on by name. They stepped out, circled the pavilion, and were about to start running toward the forest when the sheriff’s son stood before them.

Gasping, but clutching tight to their plunder, the girls halted, wavering like birds who tilt on a bough.

“So-ho?” exclaimed the red-headed youth. Then he grinned. “Brave wenches ... hasten, I’ll not hinder ye,” he said, “but go to it, or the matter will go hard with you.”

Off they sped, flew across the road, and were lightly mounting the opposite slope when a yell behind told them they were discovered.

“Crikey,” panted out Rose, “what’ll they do?”

Do? They all came after with another mad yell. Glancing over their shoulders, the girls seemed to see the whole village leaping and plunging across the road. Ruth saw the sheriff's son drag back one man by the arm and throw another to the grass, but the rest came on, though most seemed simply amused. The old sheriff, however, with four of his men, looked to be blazing with rage. His arms were going like windmills, and he roared like a lion, while he sailed along at top speed, well in front of everybody. With their heads over their shoulders, watching him, the girls hurried on.

And then, with the most remarkable unanimity, every soul suddenly stood still, and silence fell on them all. It was as though some magic spell had been spoken, turning the whole active, howling throng into statues. The sheriff stood stiffer than any one, with his mouth open after his last yell.

Instinctively the girls looked round.

And there, in a picturesque line, stood at least forty men dressed like Robin Hood, each with his bow drawn to his ear, and an arrow trembling on the string.

Maid Marian burst into a silver peal of laughter, and dropped into a walk. Rose and Ruth imitated her. They felt important, too, let me tell you, walking slowly up toward that stalwart row of men, carrying the prizes, while behind them the village stood transfixed.

Near the edge of the forest Robin and the two men who had been with him ran down to meet them, laughing heartily, and complimenting them on their bravery.

"Come to the greenwood life with us," they said. "What have you maids, so bright and so brave, to do with those dull fellows there?" And Robin waved his hands with a scornful gesture of dismissal to the villagers. Then he set a small horn to his lips and blew a gay call. The sheriff, with an anxious eye over his shoulder, led back his crestfallen men, followed or preceded by the entire village, all of whom seemed just as eager to get back as a moment before they had been to come forward. All but the sheriff's son, who had taken off his cap and waved a salute to the three maids in the most gallant manner imaginable.

"*He's* nice, isn't he, Rose?" remarked Ruth, waving back. "But what a horrid father he's got."

And then they plunged into the cool green forest with Robin Hood and his band and pretty Maid Marian.

The soft shadow closed about them, the men in their green suits, with scarlet feathers in their caps, pressed forward, laughing at the success of the plot. Robin walked beside Marian, admiring the captured bow. The leaves rustled, birds sang, a lovely smell of growing things filled the warm air.

Rose and Ruth walked proudly beside Robin's two friends, who had relieved them of their share of the capture. And they told the girls gaily how Robin, knowing very well the slippery ways of the sheriff, had prepared his little surprise.

"It isn't the first time he has fooled his honour the sheriff, nor will it be the last. But he could hardly have got what he won so neatly had it not been for you and Maid Marian. Many a laugh he'll get out of it."

They came presently, still talking over the adventure, to a lovely glade in the forest where fires were burning and venison roasting before them. Long tables were set out under the trees, loaded with huge pasties and flagons of mead and wine, with mighty loaves and baskets of fruits, and all most handsome with glittering silver plate.

Here they were seated close to Robin himself, who saw to it that their plates were heaped with the delicious food. What an appetite every one had, and how the talk ran gaily on, with anecdote and jest, and many a word of praise for the three girls who had foiled the sheriff so neatly.

"We are being heroines, my dear," said Rose to Ruth, and Marian added, "isn't it nice?"

Just then Robin stood up, lifting his silver cup high.

"A toast, my merry men all," he cried, "a toast to the three prettiest, bravest, coolest young maids in all Sherwood Forest."

The men all sprang to their feet, their eyes on the blushing trio, happy but shaking with shyness, and gave a great cheer, clinking their drinking horns:

"To the brave and fair and sweet," they shouted.

And as the shout died down, the forest quivered, wavered, fell away....

And there was Rose's canary, which had been sent for as a birthday present and had only come two days ago, singing his little head off, and Marmie's voice calling to supper.

CHAPTER IX

THE ADVENTURE IN GUINEVERE'S CASTLE

Marmie decided it was grip, after the usual remedies had had no effect whatever on the generally wretched feeling that made both Rose and Ruth as miserable as wet kittens.

"I feel as though I had been broken to pieces and then put together again all wrong," Ruth told her sister, as they lay in their little white beds, and Rose coughed and sneezed something that sounded like "So do I."

However, this terrible sensation lasted only a couple of days. After that they began to weary of staying in bed. The sun was bright outdoors, and they could hear exciting noises downstairs, and at mealtimes Marmie and Dad laughed several times, but when the girls wanted to know what all the fun had been, Marmie couldn't remember at all.

"Why, we didn't laugh any more than we ever do, dears. Indeed, I thought we were rather glum."

"Can't we get up, Marmie?"

"Perhaps for a bit to-morrow. But just stay quiet to-day and get strong. You've had fever, you know."

And she piled their beds with toys and books, and went away to attend to other things, leaving a big bell within reach so that either of them could ring if anything was wanted.

But they didn't feel like playing or like reading. It seemed as though the bedclothes smothered all the fun out of that sort of thing.

"Why are people sick?" asked Ruth, fretfully.

"Probably to make them appreciate being well. Just think how we go on almost all the time bursting with health, and never stop to like it."

“I do like it,” Ruth returned indignantly.

“But just the way you like to breathe, without thinking about it. Now we think about it, though. Golly, I’d like a big piece of pie this minute.”

They both sighed.

“Well, well, well!” exclaimed that raindrop-falling voice they loved so much to hear. “What’s all this woe?”

“Oh, Fairy, Fairy Honeysqueak! We’ve been sick, but we’re better. How perfectly splendid of you to come. We were just wishing we could do something besides lie here and think about good things to eat we can’t have. Can you take us on an adventure? Or can’t we go till we are well again?”

Rose had poured out these questions and explanations in a breath, and when she stopped Honeysqueak laughed in her most delicious fashion.

“This being ill is one of the absurd ways of mortals that I simply cannot understand,” she said, finally. “But I don’t believe there’s much sickness in you two any longer. Certainly not enough to keep us from going on an adventure. Indeed, that’s what I came for. And as I want to see an old friend of mine, *I’m* going to choose this time.”

“And where will you choose to go? Darling fairy, tell us, because we want to know who your old friend is.”

“I’m going to take you to see little Guinevere, and have a chat with old Merlin myself.”

“Queen Guinevere?” gasped Ruth.

“Well, she isn’t queen anything yet, because she’s only a little girl. But she lives in a castle, and her mother’s a queen.”

“Hurry up and let’s go,” begged both the excited girls, stretching their hands toward the sound of Honeysqueak’s voice.

Her tiny hands slipped into theirs, and immediately their eyes closed. Off they floated ... floated ... thump!

Before them a huge grey arch of stone curved into the air, barred by a great iron gateway. Through the bars of this gate they could see a moat full of dark water, and hanging in the air, or so it seemed, was a bridge.

“Blow the horn hanging by the gate,” said the voice of Honeysqueak.

“Why, you haven’t gone this time, fairy, have you! How lovely! Will you stay with us all through our visit?” asked Rose delightedly.

“I’ll be about,” returned the fairy. “You see, they are all used to fairies here, and one more or less won’t matter. But blow the horn.”

Ruth had found the horn while Rose talked, a golden bugle hanging from a ring in the stone arch; now she set it to her lips and blew with all her might.

At once the barred gate rose upward, while the bridge fell. The way lay straight across the moat. But all this while never a man showed himself.

The girls walked rather fearfully across the bridge, for they weren’t sure that it might not spring up into the air again and shake them off. It remained quiet, however. On the further side a strip of greensward separated the moat from the wall of a castle. The castle was built with two round towers and a square middle portion, in which a huge and heavy door of wood strengthened with bands and bolts of iron, with a small window in the upper part, frowned inhospitably. A kind of bronze gong hung beside this door.

“Strike the gong,” said Honeysqueak.

THE YOUTH,
DISMOUNTING, WALKED
SLOWLY TOWARD
GUINEVERE

This time Rose stepped forward, took up an iron hammer that rested on the ground, and struck the gong a couple of resounding thwacks. The hollow tumult that ensued rolled on and on, first gathering strength, then diminishing, then once more swelling into a perfect sea of sound; it seemed as though all the echoes in the world had collected there, and were playing with the voice of the gong.

“My crikey,” murmured Rose.

And then the door swung slowly open. In the entrance stood a mighty man dressed in chain armour, over which hung a splendid silken tunic of scarlet with embroideries in gold. A sword hung at his side, the visor of his helmet was closed, and in his hand he held a spear.

“Who comes?” he asked gruffly.

“Friends of the great Merlin,” answered the voice of the fairy. “Let us pass.”

“Ye are welcome,” answered the knight, stepping aside. “Enter.”

So the two sisters walked hand and hand into the castle, the knight going on before. He led them into a lofty room hung with tapestries, with rushes strewn over the floor. High windows with thick glass in small irregular panes let through a soft light, and working near them at a great frame on which was stretched a piece of embroidery, sat a young girl. Her long golden hair curled down her back, while on top of her head she wore a sort of cap of threads of pearls. Her dress was straight and narrow, of shining white with silver threads, a golden chain hung round her neck, and there were bracelets on her arms. Rose and Ruth looked at her in wonder. Never had they seen a fairer sight.

“Princess Guinevere,” said the knight, bowing low, “here are friends of the great Merlin. I brought them here, according to thy command.”

“Ye are right welcome, princesses,” said Guinevere, smiling sweetly, and coming forward. “I trust ye are not weary with travel ...” and she clapped her hands together lightly. At once two maidens entered, carrying bread and honey and milk, which they placed on a table. In the meanwhile Guinevere had taken each of the girls by the hand and now she led them to two stools by the table.

“Will ye not eat and refresh yourselves?” she said.

“Thanks, Princess Guinevere,” replied Rose. Ruth was too thunderstruck at finding herself a princess to say anything. Looking at Rose and herself she found they were dressed much as Guinevere, except that instead of white she wore a gold-coloured silk, and Rose a lovely lavender embroidered with palest green. In spite of her astonishment she set to heartily at the bread and honey, as did Rose.

“Merlin told me ye would arrive to-day,” Guinevere continued. “And fain am I to see ye. There have been strange doings in the castle, and I wot well that ye can help me if ye will. The King, my father, is away on a quest, and except for the knight ye saw and my maidens I am alone. Sure are we that there is some enchantment afoot, for yesternight there were strange sounds throughout the castle, and this morning at cockcrow a loud voice summoned all my knights, one by one by name, to come and do battle. They rode out, armed and with drawn swords in their hands, and vanished forthwith, nor have we seen ought of them since.”

“Good gracious, I should think some of them would have stayed here to look after the castle,” ejaculated Rose.

“It would scarcely beseem them to refuse battle,” returned the Princess, “and the castle is safe from attack. Unless there be evil enchantment at work. But Merlin will soon be here, and there is none so great in magic as he.”

“It would be too bad if he didn’t come,” Ruth said, as she admired the golden chain that hung round her neck and reached as far as her waist, “for the fairy came especially to see him.”

“What fairy?”

“Our fairy. Fairy Honeysqueak. You know she brought us, and she said she wanted to have a chat with Merlin.”

“Ah,” said Guinevere. “Perhaps she too will help my knights and me.”

“I guess so. But couldn’t we do something?” It was Rose that wanted to know.

“Let us go up into the tower and watch,” replied Guinevere. “Possibly some knight sore beset might fly back here, and it were well to be prepared to give him speedy ingress.”

So up into the tower they went, by a winding stairway, narrow and slippery, so worn were the stones of which it was built. Every few steps a long slit in the wall gave a glimpse of the outdoor world, a shimmer of blue and green, a flash of meadow or a glint of water shining in the sun. And presently the three girls emerged on top of the turret and were able to overlook the country between the battlements that formed a screen behind which they could keep hidden.

It was a strange sight for Rose and Ruth.

A great forest stretched on three sides of the castle, beyond the square enclosed by the moat and the high wall. This forest was open, however, with grassy glades, and you could see far into the green, shadowy expanse. On the fourth side stretched a rolling meadow, through which a stream meandered, while far away a lake lay gleaming. But what was strange was not forest or lake or meadow, but the fact that, wherever the girls looked, they saw two knights in furious combat.

In one of the glades a large knight in black armour was hacking frantically at a smaller knight, who wore a scarlet sleeveless sort of a jacket over his armour. The smaller knight didn’t seem to mind the blows showered upon him, but whacked back in good measure, rising in his

stirrups and whirling his sword with both hands. The horses stamped and circled, kicking up the dust.

These two were the nearest, but in all the glades and scattered about the meadows were other combatants, and always a knight in scarlet fought a knight in black.

“Yonder are my knights, the noble lords in scarlet,” Guinevere informed them. “Would Merlin were here to help us.”

“Here is Merlin, Princess.”

Rose and Ruth turned quickly toward the new voice. There stood a fine looking old man with a long sweeping grey beard, and singularly bright and piercing eyes that shone under heavy eyebrows. He was wrapped in a long black cloak embroidered in many colours with strange figures, and on his head was a close-fitting cap of black velvet.

“Oh, Merlin,” cried Guinevere, “what does this mean, this calling forth of all my knights to do battle with these black warriors? And see them fighting in a circle, nor can I mark that one among them all hath the advantage.”

Merlin shook his head slowly.

“It has taken all the powers of my magic, lady, to prevent thy knights from being overborne. There is a wicked and fierce queen, called by the name of Carla of the Quaking Pool, who hath laid a spell upon this castle and all those who would fight for thee. And unless some one come soon to our succour, I do fear ...” and again he shook his grey head.

“What, Merlin, thou afeard?” asked a voice, and Rose and Ruth were rejoiced to recognise the Fairy Honeysqueak. “’Tis not like thee. Who is this wicked queen that she should so prevail upon thee?”

“She is a sister to the Lady of the Lake, but she is evil,” returned Merlin, sadly. “But right glad am I to see thee again, my lady fairy. Wilt thou not give me help in this danger?”

“I had come hoping for some quiet talk with thee, Merlin, but it is not to be,” said the fairy. “What with this danger and thy weakness. Yet help cometh.”

“It is sore needed,” returned the wizard. “See, even now, my magic avails little.”

Rose and Ruth, looking eagerly between the protecting walls, saw that the ring of red champions was weakening. One by one they began to give way, though still fighting desperately.

“Lordy!” exclaimed Rose, breathlessly, “just look at the fearful whacks that big black Knight is giving to the little red one—there, he nearly got him down that time. Can’t we do something? It seems awful to stand here and watch our soldiers getting the worst of it.”

At this moment there was a great shout from all the black knights, and with the roar of that shout the red knights dropped their weapons, or fell from their horses, or stumbled, if they were afoot, and fell to the ground. It seemed indeed as though some bad magic were at work.

Merlin groaned, and Guinevere began to sob. Ruth looked frantically round for the fairy, forgetting she could not be seen.

“Fairy, can’t something be done?” she cried.

“We’re doing all we can,” returned the voice of the fairy, and it seemed to be a sort of gasp, as though she were indeed straining every power she had.

At this moment a number of damsels ran from the forest and gave each of the red knights something to drink from a shining goblet. At once these fell to with renewed strength, laying on so lustily with their swords that the black warriors were now forced back.

“See, see, they’ve got their chance now,” Rose yelled, jumping up and down in her excitement. “Oh, Guinevere, let’s run down and see what we can do, if those other girls can help that much.” And with the word she turned and began racing down the spiral stairway as fast as she could go.

Ruth followed without a second’s pause, and after her came Guinevere, though Merlin called out something as she vanished from the roof that sounded like “beware!”

The three girls soon found themselves outside the castle. At a word from the Princess the solitary knight let down the drawbridge, and raised the portcullis. Out ran the three, and turned to the little glade where the red knight was fighting so doughtily with his huge antagonist.

But what was their astonishment to find no one there at all. Everything looked quiet and peaceful, there was not even a broken grass-blade to mark the spot of the desperate encounter.

Rose and Ruth stared, bewildered. But Guinevere trembled.

“This is magic,” she whispered. “Let us return forthwith to the castle, Lady Princesses. If it be not too late.”

They turned, but the forest seemed to have closed in upon them, and the castle could not be seen.

Hand in hand they made their way along a path that appeared to lead in the direction where the castle must be. Presently they reached a crossing. Here an old man was sitting.

“Tell us, kind sir, which is the right pathway toward the castle?” asked Guinevere.

The old man mumbled a few indistinct words, and waved with his hand toward the left. So thanking him, the three young damsels proceeded on their way. But they had not taken three steps before a voice called to them faintly to turn back. And Rose felt sure the voice was that of the fairy.

“I think so too,” said Ruth. “Let us turn as she says, Princess Guinevere.”

Guinevere consented, so the three turned back. And no sooner had they done so than they saw the castle, but it looked a great way off.

When they reached the spot where the old man had been, he was no longer there.

With the castle in sight, they pushed along as fast as might be, their hearts thumping anxiously. What a bewildering business it was! Rose and Ruth felt as though they were walking on quicksand, everything seemed so uncertain.

“But what has become of all the knights?” Ruth wanted to know.

And then one appeared, the big black knight, right in the middle of the path. And he smiled full evilly upon the three.

“Welcome, Princesses,” he said. “Yet it meseems that three fair damsels should not be wandering thus unattended through the Perilous Forest.” And again he smiled.

As Ruth told her sister later, that smile felt like an icicle slipped down her back.

Then he set a horn to his lips and blew a shrill call. The girls shrank together, looking anxiously around. No sooner had the echoes of that call died to silence when two other knights in black armour rode up. Bending

from their saddles, the three each grasped one of the maidens, swung them to the horses' backs, and set off full tilt into the forest.

Rose saw Ruth before her, bobbing up and down, and looking back as well as she might could catch a gleam of Guinevere's bright hair as she was carried along by her captor. She could not see much of her own knight, for his visor was down and he was all covered up in his armour and a black cloak that streamed behind him as they rode.

"Help, Merlin, help!" called Guinevere, but her cries were suddenly stifled, as though the knight who bore her before him had covered her mouth. He was the big knight who had first halted them.

Rose felt angry. It seemed to her that Merlin really ought to do something for them, something that would count.

"Dear fairy," she whispered, "what shall we do?"

And immediately the fairy's voice came clear and sweet.

"Keep your courage," it said. "If you don't get frightened, everything will come out right. But no one can help you if you are afraid."

"I'm not afraid," replied Rose sturdily. And with the words she felt a glow run over her, chasing away the chill that had struck into her very vitals when the knight dragged her up in front of him. "We'll beat them," she added, and laughed.

Just then the knight who rode ahead with Ruth drew rein, checking his steed. Looking by him Rose saw that the way was blocked by a knight in red.

Instantly the three black knights dropped their captives to the ground and prepared for battle. Ruth and Guinevere joined Rose, their eyes shining.

"We mustn't be frightened," whispered Rose. "The fairy has just told me. There they go...!"

Bang! The first of the black knights spurred his horse straight at the red knight, who set his spear in rest, and charged to meet the onslaught.

Over went the black knight and lay still on the ground.

The two sisters gave a shout of triumph.

"One!" cried Rose, just like the Count of Monte Christo in the play.

And then, to their amazement, the red knight turned his horse and rode away at full speed.

“Something’s wrong,” declared Ruth. “What does he act like that for?”

She looked to Guinevere to explain, but the young Princess shook her head sadly.

In the meanwhile the other two knights had run to see whether their comrade were yet alive. But he lay dead, with the red knight’s spear head in his throat.

Then the big knight took Guinevere, while the second knight swung both Rose and Ruth to the saddle of the dead knight’s horse, and once more they set off in a wild gallop.

Presently the way was again barred by a knight in red, and this time he too killed the knight who fought him, and then made off at top speed. Now only the big black knight remained. Grimly he put the three girls on the two free horses, driving them before him through the forest.

The shadows were growing long now, for the sun was climbing down the western slope of the sky. The three girls rode silently, watching eagerly to see if a new champion would not come to meet them. Soon indeed one came crashing through the trees, and silently opposed the big knight.

This time, however, after a dreadful crashing and smashing, the black knight threw the red one to the ground. Leaping from his horse he rushed to his fallen foe, drawing his sword. Before he reached him, however, the red knight vanished. They mounted and rode on, and once again the same thing happened, and the girls began to feel afraid, though they struggled against it, while the big knight cursed wickedly.

Then suddenly an old man stood before them. As they gazed at him, they saw it was none other than Merlin.

Lifting one hand, he stayed the big knight.

“Ride no farther, rash knight,” he said, in a deep voice. “My magic has prevailed, and thou goest but to thy doom.”

The knight answered with a short, contemptuous laugh.

“Out of the way, old fool,” he ordered. “Thinkest thou to stop me when I have laid two of thy knights low this very half hour?”

“Leave these damsels here with me, and thou shalt go free with thy life,” answered Merlin. “One awaiteth thee who wilt surely slay thee. Yet would I

liefer that he and the Princess Guinevere should not meet—for that meeting reads darkly in the book of Fate.”

“Out of my way, or ’twill be the worse for thee!” shouted the knight fiercely. With the words he put spurs to his horse and charged upon Merlin. But the old man had disappeared.

Once again he drove the horses with the girls upon them before him. And the day darkened.

Then, in the path, Rose, who sat in front of Ruth on the leading horse, saw a new champion sitting on a great black horse. But he himself looked to be no more than a youth, slender and wearing no armour, though on his arm was a shield and in his hand a sword that shone in the shadow like a streak of lightning in a black sky.

“Loose those damsels, false and caitiff knight,” cried this youth, in a clear voice. “And set thyself to thy defence, or thy hour has come.”

But when the black knight saw the mere boy who opposed him he laughed aloud.

“Child,” he cried, “I will crush thee in my bare hands ... dare ye oppose me!”

Without waiting for further parley the youth rode forward, while the girls drew aside with heavy hearts, for they hated to see this young man killed by their fierce captor. And how he could help being killed, after the success of this huge knight with stronger fighters, they knew not.

But the youth was stronger than he looked, and swift and brave beyond any imagining. He managed his horse so wonderfully that again and again he escaped a mighty blow aimed at him by the black knight, and landed immense buffets upon that proud man. On and on they fought, breathing hard, uttering short exclamations. And ever the youth got his shield between the sword of the black knight and his body, and ever he rained blows on his adversary like winter rain.

Rose and Ruth and Guinevere sat looking on, trembling with terror of a sort, though they were too excited to feel really afraid. And suddenly they saw the youth rise in his stirrups and bring his blade down on the casque of the black knight with so mighty a blow that it was split asunder, and with a frightful crash the knight fell dead upon the ground.

The youth, dismounting, walked slowly toward Guinevere. The girls saw that he was very pale, and that he staggered as he walked.

“It is a great joy to have saved thee from this evil man, lady,” he said, in a weak voice. “And now I pray thee to tell me of some holy man nearby, who will help me of my wounds, for I am sore hurt.”

“Come with me into my castle, where my maidens and I will tend thee carefully, fair youth,” returned the Princess. “Right gallantly hast thou fought, never so young a knight did so valiantly before this. How may I thank thee?”

“I require no thanks—joy enough it is to look upon thee and to have served thee,” returned the youth. “But let us e’en hasten, for I am passing faint.”

Then, to the great relief of Rose, who feared that the boy would die before they could possibly get back to the castle, she saw that they stood in the meadow before the walls. The gate was open, and a stream of knights in red armour was riding hastily toward them. In a few moments the youth was lifted to the saddle of one of these knights and the whole cavalcade, conducting Guinevere and the girls, rode into the donjon keep.

Merlin met them looking grave.

“It was not well, Princess, to leave this castle,” he said. “Now that has happened which cannot be gainsaid. But at least my magic has prevailed, with the help of my friend, the fairy. And now to assist this noble lord.”

With his wand he touched the face of the youth, who lay in a swoon, supported by a knight. At once the young hero opened his eyes and stood up, healed of his hurts.

Gravely he looked into the eyes of the princess, who returned his gaze with steady eyes in which tears shone, however.

“Thou hast saved me from I know not what of evil,” she whispered. “Wilt thou not tell me thy name, fair youth?”

“My name is Lancelot,” answered the youth. And Merlin sighed.

The princess took a knot of ribbon from her dress, and gave it to her rescuer.

“Sometime we shall see each other, when we are both older,” she said. “I feel this to be true. Do not forget me, noble Lord Lancelot, and know well

that I shall keep thee secure in my heart and memory.”

“The mischief has begun,” murmured Merlin, but no one noticed the old man.

With another long look at Guinevere, Lancelot turned and walked lightly from the hall; the knights and ladies watched him as he mounted his steed, which waited at the doorway. Once in the saddle, he turned to look again at Guinevere, who was watching him with shining eyes. First lifting the ribbon to his lips, he bowed his head, and thrust the knot into the bosom of his embroidered doublet. Then he swung his horse to the right about, and sprang away into the purple evening.

Guinevere stood silent, her hands pressed to her heart.

“Come,” said the fairy, “we must go. I’ve had a good deal of anxiety to-day, and I want to get home.”

With the words the scene wavered, faded. And there were Rose and Ruth in their little white beds, with Marmie at the door bringing in some delicious-looking jelly.

“You’ve been so good and quiet that I’m going to give you a treat, youngsters,” she smiled at them. “Just look at this!”

CHAPTER X

IN THE HIELANDS WITH DI VERNON

It didn't take Rose and Ruth a great while to pick up, once they were allowed out of bed. All the same, Marmie thought it best for them not to be too energetic in their amusements for a bit.

So, though the January weather was bright and not very cold, the two girls could not go riding yet, and at the earliest hint of sundown Marmie would come to the door and call them in.

"Come along, girlies. I've got a big piece of chocolate cake and a glass of milk for each of you, right before the fire. You can play indoors as much as you like, but the hens and you must be out of the cold when the sun slips behind the hill...."

And she waited for them, smiling, as they came back from feeding the chickens, a pail hanging between the two, their knitted red caps drawn tightly down round their faces, that were looking round and rosy again.

"Oh, goody! chocolate cake," shouted both, skipping joyously and swinging the pail. "You sweet Marmie! Do you know, the old red hen laid an egg to-day, and so did the pullet that crows, and that Dad said never would be anything but a *feminist*. I guess he'll be surprised!"

"I guess he will, and we'll give him that egg for his breakfast to-morrow. But hurry in—I'm freezing."

My gracious, but that cake and milk were good! The girls pretended they were two grown-up ladies, and that Ruth was visiting Rose, and they conversed in the most perfect manner while they ate and drank, being careful not to lose so much as a crumb.

They giggled a lot, too, but if you asked why I'm sure I don't know, and I don't believe they did. After all, that is the pleasantest kind of giggling, that

just comes, as Rose once said, rolling up from inside you without your having anything to do with it.

So when Ruth said that she had been obliged to leave her six children at home because they all had chickenpox, both girls went off into a perfect gale of laughter. It was only when they stopped for breath that they heard the fairy's voice, and it was all mixed up with laughter too, saying:

"What in the world are you two young ones laughing at? And if you're having such a good time of course you won't want to go visiting with me."

At that they laughed again, all three of them, especially when Rose tried to explain why they were laughing. So she gave it up finally, which was easy since after all she didn't know.

"Oh, Fairy Honeysqueak, I do wish we hadn't eaten up all the cake, so that we could have had some for you. Do you like cake?"

"No, I usually take a little pollen and dew when I'm hungry," replied the fairy. "Cake is too solid for my constitution. So don't worry. And now where shall we go?"

After some excited conversation on that topic, it was decided that they would visit Di Vernon, whom the girls had long known in "Rob Roy."

"You know she hasn't any girls to play with either," Rose reminded Ruth. "Only that great pack of stupid boy cousins. I'm sure she'll be glad to see us, and I just love her."

Whiff!!

And there they were, side by side, beside a noisy, rushing stream that leaped down small precipices and swirled round tiny promontories in the liveliest manner imaginable, now shining in the sun, now dark under shadowy copses or bending trees. A most delectable stream.

Wading about in one of the larger pools was a dark, pretty girl dressed in a short kilted skirt, with a gay plaid wrapped about her shoulders. Her black hair hung down her back in curls, tumbling from under a fetching cap with a long scarlet feather in it. She was kicking the water about with her feet and laughing. On the shore, beside her shoes and stockings, lay a rod and creel. "I came here to meet you," she called, "and got weary waiting, after catching as fine a string of trout as any one would wish to see. Come, come down the bank and play in this fresh water a wee bit before we start back to

Osbaldistone Hall, where we are to have a try with the falcons, so my uncle said.”

Rose and Ruth found themselves looking just as Scotch as the lassie before them, in plaid and kilted frocks. Down the little bank they scrambled, and off came shoes and stockings in a jiffy. Di opened her creel for them to see the shining catch, and begged them to try a cast in the pools above. But the two preferred to wade, especially as they hadn’t a notion how to fish with the artificial flies Di had been using.

“We fish with worms at home,” said Rose, “though Dad says he’s going to teach us fly fishing next summer. You must be a dandy at it.”

“I cannot allow my cousins to beat me at any such sport,” answered Di, as the three clambered up on a rock lying in mid-stream and squatted down to watch the racing water. “They box and wrestle and tramp, and jeer at me for not being expert in such matters, as though I had been born a huge ungainly boy. So when it comes to fishing or riding or falconry, I’ll not let them pass me.”

There was just a fascinating touch of Scotch brogue to Di’s speech. Ruth thought she was the loveliest creature she had ever seen, with the clear colour shining in her cheeks, her clustering curls, her flaming sun-brown eyes and graceful, slender body.

“ROB ROY IS FRAE THE
HIELANDS COME, DOWN
TO THE LOWLAND
BORDER”

“Is it far to your home from here?” she asked.

“Just a bit climb and a run down into the glen. Let’s be off, for bonnie as this burn is it’s time we were thinking of dinner.”

What a tramp that was, under the spreading trees near the brook, up to a heathy hill where the air was sweet as honey and the butterflies rocked over the flowers that crowded every step of the way! Di pointed out the Cheviot hills, rising high, huge rounded domes, desolate and frowning but wonderfully picturesque.

From the hilltop the girls looked down on Osbaldistone Hall, a fine old building that seemed to be of huge size, peeping out here and there from

behind the splendid grove of oaks that crowded close upon it. A narrow footpath led down the slope into the glen, and Di led the way along this at a dancing pace.

Diana took her two friends toward the Hall by way of an ancient garden guarded by high hedges of holly, between which ran narrow grassy paths, giving every now and then on open spaces where once there had been carefully tended flowerbeds. Now these were overrun with weeds, but the hardy perennials that yet struggled there managed to bring to bloom many a lovely flower. Larkspur and Canterbury-bells, marigold and late roses made the garden sweet and bright, and both the young Americans kept exclaiming with joy over the pretty sight.

“Do you love flowers?” Di wanted to know. “Are they not delightful, and the more so, I think, for this neglect? We will return here later if there be time, but now we must make our way to the dining-hall or uncle will begin to bluster.”

Passing through an arched stone passage, they came out into a square courtyard surrounded on all sides by the massive old Hall. Doorways and windows opened to this court, and servants were scurrying across it. Diana crossed it and led on through a maze of vaulted hallways until, passing through a great double door, they came out into a long room, also vaulted, paved with stone, with a mighty fireplace at one end, in which, for all it was warm summer outside, a fire crackled and flamed. Heavy oak tables were set for the meal, and just as the girls entered at one side, a crowd of men and boys tumbled in at the other, laughing and shouting and calling commands to a dozen dogs who poured in with them. When the boys saw Rose and Ruth, however, they immediately fell silent, staring half-sullenly, half-shyly in their direction, and shuffling forward awkwardly to their seats.

“These are my cousins, and you can see their manners are hardly polished,” said Di, somewhat scornfully. “But here comes my uncle; we will go and greet him if the dogs will let us be heard.”

Sir Hildebrand came in at that moment, a tall, broad-shouldered, handsome man in a green cloth suit that would have been magnificent if it had not been shabby. He was shouting at two of his hounds, and flourishing a riding whip. It seemed to Rose and Ruth that never in this world had they heard so astounding a racket as echoed and roared under the vaulted stone

roof. Di moved along unconcerned through it all, and they after her. As they reached the baronet he looked down at them with a quick, attractive smile:

“Well, Di, my girl, any one been bothering you—none shall cross my Di,” he cried in a big hearty voice.

“Nay, Uncle, every one treats me with the greatest respect. But here be two friends of mine I would have you welcome to Osbaldistone Hall.”

No sooner said than done, and the baronet made the two sisters welcome in a jovial way, telling them to eat their fill at his board and to consider his roof their own for as long as they chose.

“It shall ne’er be said that Di, the only female in Osbaldistone Hall, couldna’ ha’ her will here. All friends of hers are friends o’ mine and my sons’.”

The dinner, plentiful and confused, with servants bringing in and taking out dishes and filling glasses, all the while exchanging remarks with the herd of young men as well as with the laird himself, went on to a prodigious din. The dogs yelped, knives and forks rattled. As the brothers lost their early shyness of Rose and Ruth they addressed remarks across them to each other, all having to do with riding or hunting in some form. Di regarded these youths with a mingling of amusement and scorn, while they were evidently afraid of her quick tongue. The youngest boy, who seemed not more than a year or so older than she, she left alone, however. He was an odd, unattractive, squat figure of a boy, but there was an air of ease and self-possession about him that was very different from the rough, ungainly bearing of his older brothers.

Dinner was hurried over, so that the party might get away for the sport with the falcons.

Sir Hildebrand wanted to know whether the two girls were fond of hawking, and good at it. But they told him they didn’t even know what he meant.

“Know nought of hawking!” exclaimed the baronet, evidently vastly astonished. “Well, well! Ye should see Di at it—eh, but she’s a wonder.”

In the courtyard a number of horses waited, saddled and bridled, and a couple of fine pointers ran round, nosing and barking eagerly. Di ordered one of her cousins to help her two friends on their horses, while Sir Hildebrand did the same for her.

“Hollah, cadger!” cried the old sportsman, as soon as he was himself in the saddle. “Bring out the birds.”

An old fellow came from an archway with a wooden frame on which several beautiful hawks were sitting. They had a sort of hood on their heads, made of leather with a topknot of feathers, with an opening in front for the strong, hooked beak. Each bird was secured by a strap round one leg, and several wore bells.

The men and Di were all drawing heavy gauntlets on their left hands. The cadger went round, hobbling, from one to the other. Di chose a fine falcon, stretching out her wrist for it to hop upon.

“Since you do not understand the sport, you must be content to look on,” she said, smiling at Rose and Ruth. “Ride close by me, for this pretty lady I’ve chosen is the best flyer and footer among the lot. Ten years she has been at the work, and is still strong and fierce as though she were but three.”

“Isn’t she beautiful, and doesn’t she seem tame!” Rose remarked, as they put their horses to the canter, swept out under the arched entrance to the courtyard and through an inclosure and started for the open fields. “What is she going to hunt?”

“We’re after grouse,” returned Di. “Wait till you see her at work.”

On swept the group of riders, and what a splendid sight it was, the mettlesome horses, the dogs running free on either side, the birds balancing on the wrists of the hawkers. White, rolling clouds were drifting across a pale blue sky, and the smell of the wind was sweet with perfume. Rose and Ruth enjoyed the free, light gait of their horses; once they met a hedge, saw the rest go lightly over, and followed, though it was new to them, and their hearts did come up into their throats. But the horses went over like birds, scarcely jarring the girls at the landing.

Presently they reached a wide sweep of rolling country, overgrown here and there with thick clumps of gorse and bracken or dwarf trees, and green with grass or purple with heather, a lovely sight. Here the field spread out, and the two dogs began to quarter. Di’s eyes lighted with excitement.

“Follow close,” she called. “We’ll keep near Jock, who is as good a dog as master ever owned. Watch now.”

Checking their horses to a walk, the girls rode after one of the dogs, letting him keep well in the lead; they began to feel excited. Suddenly the dog stopped, rigid, quivering ever so slightly, with his head turned to a big clump of golden gorse.

Instantly Di unhooded and set free her hawk, that rose into the air with one mighty sweep, took a few wide circles, and hung on wings that seemed motionless. With a short, sharp bark the dog rushed in, and on the instant, with a great whirring of wings, up flew a small covey of grouse.

Like lightning the hawk dropped through the air, falling straight upon one of the terrified grouse and bearing it down to the ground.

“Perfect,” cried Di, riding forward and blowing a small whistle. At the sound the hawk rose and flew back to her, lighting calmly, though its eyes were flashing, on Di’s extended wrist.

“Get the game, Thornie,” the girl called to one of her cousins, who had also set his hawk at the covey. “See, your bird is stooping to ... ah!”

The second hawk had missed striking, and was once more wheeling up into the air. In the meanwhile the rest of the grouse dropped to earth and disappeared in the undergrowth.

Thornie jumped off his horse and picked up the dead grouse, a fine big fellow.

“’Tis a braw beastie, that of yours, Cousin,” he remarked, as he stuffed the game into a bag. “’Twas my father trained her, as you ken....”

“Your own is not so bad, Thornie, if ever you could get started in time. But you wait till the game is up before you cast, and then have nothing for your pains.”

The boy turned sulkily away.

“I guess he doesn’t like to be teased,” Ruth remarked, looking after him. She thought Di a trifle severe.

Di laughed. “Who could help teasing the stupid lad?” she answered. “It’s good for him, too. ’Twill teach him a little humility, for it’s his private opinion that there’s no better hawker in the country than he. But isn’t she a beauty?”

“She’s wonderful,” exclaimed Rose. “How do you ever teach them? Wild as a hawk is what I’ve always heard, but I never knew anything so tame and

well-trained. Why, this is lots more fun than chasing jackrabbits.”

For a couple of hours they raced about across the downs, flushing covey after covey. Sometimes four or five hawks were in the air at once and it was thrilling to see them swoop down in arrowlike flight. They often missed at the first swoop, but when the grouse were flushed a second time they usually got them.

Di proved a fearless rider, sending her horse over the rough ground, jumping ditches and swerving suddenly as she followed her hawk in the chase. Rose rode a close second, but Ruth dropped back a little, unused to the side-saddle.

Di saw that she was tiring, and rode up to her, pulling the hood back over her bird's handsome head.

“We've had enough,” she said. “Let's ride back and leave these boys to work with their courtesy released from the necessity of waiting upon us.... A necessity that, as you see, weighs heavily on them,” and she gave an amused glance across the field, where her cousins were paying precious little attention to anything except the business in hand. “We'll see if Maisy won't give us a cup of tea and a few bannocks, which surely won't come amiss after all this riding and slaughter.”

Taking a short cut, they soon brought up at the Hall again, and Di led them to a smaller, cosier room than the place where they had dined, where there were books and comfortable chairs and hangings on the walls.

A rosy-cheeked maid brought them the tea, which they took with a good appetite. Di amused them with tales of her rough cousins' exploits, and she had just set them laughing by a description of how two of them had tried a race riding with their faces to the tails of their two horses, and how they were run away with, when a wild, shrill, multitudinous music suddenly burst in upon them.

“Great Jingo, what's that?” Rose exclaimed.

“It's the bag-pipes—something's afoot,” and Di sprang to her feet. “Come, we'll see what's to be seen.”

Running through a maze of passages the girls hastened toward that shrilling commotion, and once more found themselves in the great dining room. There a sight, crowded and picturesque, met them.

The room was full of Highlanders in all the glory of kilt and tartan, bonnet and plaid. Two pipers were marching back and forth at one end of the chamber with quick, short steps, blowing with all their skill. In the centre of a group stood a man of powerful appearance, with a shock of red hair showing under his bonnet. He looked toward the girls as they entered, and Rose saw that he had the glance of an eagle, so proud and wild it was.

“’Tis the MacGregors—and Rob Roy himself!” exclaimed Di, and her own eyes shone.

“Welcome, Chief,” she said, advancing toward the red-haired man with dignity. “My uncle is hawking, but will be hame on the instant, and glad to see you and any of your clan. I trust the business that brings you to our roof is fortunate.”

“Greeting, Miss Diana,” returned the Highland chief, in a deep, guttural voice that was singularly impressive. “Well I ken that it is always welcome I am at this house. We come on business that may well turn out a bluidy one, but not here and not now.”

At this moment the baronet entered, his dogs leaping about him. Instantly he walked straight to the chieftain, his hand extended.

“Well, MacGregor.” He beckoned to a servant. “Bring refreshments for our guests, and quick about it,” he said. “Sit ye,” he added, waving his hand at the wild company, which gathered about the tables with a deal of scraping and much talk in a strange tongue—Gaelic, thought Rose, with a thrill, and turning to Ruth she whispered:

“Ruth, they must be here to help ‘the king over the water.’”

Ruth nodded. With Diana they were seated close to the wild Highlander, who was eagerly talking to Sir Hildebrand. Wine was brought in in large cups and handed about. The pipers now marched round the table, the air full of the skirling of the pipes. Then they sat down.

Sir Hildebrand rose:

“To his Excellency!” he shouted, in a voice that rang through the room.

With a great crash every Highlander leaped to his feet, and raised his beaker high in air. Rob Roy flashed a glance about the hall, and set his cup to his lips. Each of his followers did the same, and put back their empty goblets with a bang on the board.

Diana clasped the girls’ hands in hers.

“Are they not a splendid sight?” she whispered. “Is not the Jacobite cause one to sacrifice life for? Oh, one day, when I am a woman, I too will serve it!”

Her uncle turned to her.

“Do ye propose a toast, Di, and then ye must e’en run away and leave us to our parley.”

Di sprang on her chair. With her black hair floating on her shoulders, her colour high with excitement, her lips parted, her slender arm stretched up as she clasped in her hand a small glass of red wine, she was an inspiring sight.

“To the Clan MacGregor,” she cried, “and its head, Rob Roy. May God fight with him!”

There was a roar, and every Highlander, springing to his feet, half drew the sword hanging at his side and sent it back with a crash into the scabbard. The pipes broke out into wilder music, and the level rays of the setting sun shone in on waving plume and brilliant tartan, lighting up the wild, dark faces that crowded round the girls. Suddenly they burst into song, to a tune lively and ringing, and these were the words that sounded in the ears of Rose and Ruth:

“Rob Roy is frae the Hielands come,
Down to the Lowland border...”

The music faded, the sun dropped, Di’s bright loveliness wavered—

And the girls opened their eyes to find that the fire in the living room had died down and the quiet of evening settled on the house.

Yet for an instant they seemed to hear a far-off echo of the shrilling of the bag-pipes.

CHAPTER XI

A SUMMER DAY WITH RAMONA

“Oh, I wish it was summer,” sighed Ruth, looking out at the bleak landscape. “It looks as though it never in this world could be summer again, doesn’t it? I wonder if it ever forgets to come—wouldn’t it be awful, Rose, if it did! Just think, waiting and waiting, and thinking that *surely* next week summer would come, and still it didn’t, until it was winter-time again!”

“Yes, that would be awful,” agreed Rose, joining her sister at the window and looking out with her. “But wouldn’t it be nice if it forgot to be winter sometime, and summer kept right on? That’s the way it is in the tropics, I s’pose. Why don’t the inventors invent a way to spread summer all over? Spring and summer and fall and then spring right off.”

“Of course, we couldn’t ever play in the snow,” Ruth remarked.

“I Hum-mm.”

“And it would be funny to have Christmas in summer.”

“Yep, that’s true. I guess bits of winter are imperative.”

“What’s imperative?”

“I guess it means nice, very nice. Yesterday Marmie said we needed to have the kitchen done over, and Dad said ‘yes that’s imperative, and so are two new horses.’ So it must mean something nice.”

Ruth nodded. “All the same, there’s much too much winter; it’s a greedy thing, taking such a lot out of the year. I’d like to get somewhere where it only lasts a few days.”

“Perhaps the fairy would take us to a place like that,” Rose put in. “We haven’t seen her for a long time.”

“Maybe she’d take us to California.... Oh, Rose, perhaps we could go and see Ramona!”

“Goody, but that would be larks! I’m sure she will; she’s so sweet and obliging.”

“Which simply proves that listeners *do* hear good of themselves,” said the voice of Fairy Honeysqueak.

“Oh, fairy, have you been here long?”

“What do you suppose made you think of me, you funny dears?”

“Can’t we really think of you till you get here? That’s part of the magic, isn’t it?”

“Yes, it’s part of the magic. And so you were wishing for summer, eh? Or at least for summer weather.”

“We want to visit Ramona. Marmie read us all about her while we were still sick, and we did like her so much. And though we didn’t like the old Señora, the Moreno Ranch must be beautiful, even if they do raise sheep. Poor Ramona, we do love her so much!”

“Well,” said the fairy, “you’ll love her all the more after seeing her. But you’d better not say too much about being Americans, because you know the old Señora hasn’t the slightest use for you.”

“I know—but she never really knew a nice American, did she? Some of those Americans weren’t a bit nice, and I don’t wonder she thought we were pretty bad. But Ramona won’t mind, will she?”

“I don’t think she will,” and the fairy slipped her leaf-cool hands into theirs. “So shut your eyes, girls, and we’ll find out.”

The next thing the two girls knew they found themselves on the trellised walk that led from the brook to the veranda in front of the house, the delightful place where stood the great red jars in which the Señora grew her huge geraniums, her yellow musk and sweet-smelling carnations. The white, adobe walls of the house, bowered in climbing and blossoming vines, showed here and there between the tangled grape leaves that grew so luxuriantly over the trellis. Behind them sounded sweetly the murmur of the brook, mingled with the subdued laughter and chatter of the maids who were at their labour of washing the linen, and with the singing of many birds.

Rose and Ruth each drew in a long, rapturous breath.

“I guess this is where summer is born,” said Ruth.

“It smells like the middle of a rose,” agreed her sister. “But come on, probably Ramona is on the veranda waiting for us.”

They sauntered up the wide walk, and presently reached the arched veranda, where, in that raised portion at the westernmost end where the Señora spent most of her time, the sisters saw two figures bending over a large bird-cage. One of these, in its scanty black gown with a piece of lace draped mantilla-wise over her head and shoulders, was surely the Señora. The other, slender, youthful, in white, must be Ramona.

Just as the girls set foot on the steps that led from path to veranda, this white-clad figure turned, and the next instant came running to meet them ... Ramona!

Their hearts leaped to meet her, the gentle, adorable young thing, with her blue-black hair hanging so straight, her olive skin beautifully flushed, her deep blue eyes that seemed black under the thick, long lashes. And how sweet was her voice as she made them joyfully welcome.

“This is indeed a happiness,” she said, “and the Señora too is glad that you can come, for Don Felipe has been eager to see you. Will you come up and speak to the Señora at once?”

THE OTHER, SLENDER,
YOUTHFUL, IN WHITE,
MUST BE RAMONA

“Yes,” returned Rose, “but it is you, Ramona, whom we love. Will the Señora let us spend this day with you?”

“Doubtless she will consent—” and the girl turned to precede them up the steps.

The Señora turned slowly to meet the three. Her dark eyes met theirs serenely, but coldly. She did not seem very much interested.

“Ramona will take care of you, my children,” she said. “I have given her permission for this day to leave her duties in the house—it is nothing,” she added, as the two visitors began to thank her. “Ramona does not often see any one of her own age and station.”

Evidently the Señora took them for the daughters of some Mexican landholder. Both breathed a little sigh of relief. The old lady looked so dark and quiet among the radiant flowers, which tossed their heads in the wind as though they were laughing, that she made the two young Americans feel afraid of her. As Ruth said later, she felt like winter, and they didn't want anything to do with winter.

"Felipe is busy just now," the Señora finished, "but he will join you in the court, when you come in for the noon meal." She bowed her head, dismissing them.

"And the birds?" asked Ramona, hesitating.

"Oh, the birds ..." the Señora turned to the cage, where several little brown and green birds were hopping about and chirping. "I will attend to them, Ramona."

The three girls turned away, running down the steps into the garden. Never had Rose and Ruth imagined that one place could hold so many flowers. And beyond the garden came orchards of oranges and almonds, also in flower.

"How wonderful—Oh, Ramona, do you always live in the thick of such a storm of flowers?"

"Almost always, Ruth, there are flowers, more than can be numbered. But this is spring, you know, and best of all. But we must hurry ... I have something to do ... I need your help."

"What is it?" asked both girls. They saw that Ramona seemed troubled. They had stopped under a group of pepper trees, whose feathery foliage waved gracefully in the breeze. Beyond them rose the hills, blue and serrated against the deep sky. Behind, from the elevation they had reached, the house was plainly visible, long and low, white and green, a lovely sight amid its spreading gardens and meadows. Figures were moving about, dressed in white and pink and blue, girls at their work.

Ramona sighed.

"I do not know whether I am doing right," she said, "but how could I refuse? See, I have a basket hidden here that we must take with us." She bent down and from a tangle of fern leaves pulled out a covered basket.

Rose and Ruth were excited. This looked like an adventure.

"Tell us, Ramona. What are you going to do?"

“We must go to the hills and hurry, for the Señora expects us back by noon. There is hidden a poor man, running from Americans who say he has stolen a horse—they are bad men, they lie....” Ramona’s eyes flashed.

“Why don’t you tell the Señora?”

“This Indian was here last year working for the Señora, and somehow he displeased her. It was not really his fault, but the Señora would not allow him to explain. I am afraid that if she knew he were here now she might not let him go on.”

All this while the girls had been following a narrow, vague path that wound among the eucalyptus trees and was evidently rarely travelled. Ramona led the way with the basket on her arm, promising to let Rose take it when it began to tire her. Presently the path plunged into a thicket of wild mustard, which Rose and Ruth recognised at once. The filmy golden flowers floated high above their heads, and the fine branching stems and leaves made an intricate tangle through which it was slow work to force a passage. But the beauty and fragrance intoxicated the youngsters.

“What a wonderful land!” Rose exclaimed. “You have never seen winter, have you, Ramona?”

Ramona laughed. “We think we have winter here, when the nights grow chilly and there are not so many flowers, but I have heard of lands where everything dies and is covered with white cold snow, like that on the mountain-tops. That I have never seen. It must be sad.”

“Well, no, not so sad in some ways,” Ruth answered, and the two sisters launched out into a description of winter sports that made Ramona open her great eyes very wide.

They now reached a little brook, which they crossed, and found themselves among the foothills, threading along a little cañon where occasional trees clambered up the broken sides and stood boldly against the sky.

“He is hiding here,” Ramona said. Raising her voice, she gave a clear call.

From a little further on came an answer, and presently, on a rock some way up the trail, the girls saw a man standing. He disappeared, and then came into view again, heading toward them.

Ramona stopped, setting down the basket.

“Poor fellow,” she said. “He has a hard trip before him, he is going to join relatives and must cross desert land to reach them. It is hard, the way the Indians are treated.”

“Why are so many people cruel?” Ruth wondered. “When you read history or even stories, it seems as if the world were full of cruel people.”

“I guess they like to write about the cruel ones more than the kind ones,” Rose explained. “What made them say this Indian had stolen a horse?”

Ramona told them that the Americans were chasing the Indians from their homes, and that sometimes they accused them of doing things in order to get rid of them, or to kill them. “They wanted this man’s farm, and this was the easiest way to get it,” she added, bitterly. For the gentle Ramona was moved to the depths of her, and had heard many a sad tale told over the sheep-shearings and among the servants.

The Indian came up at this moment, looking rather doubtfully at Rose and Ruth.

“These are my friends, and have helped me carry this to you,” Ramona said, giving him the basket. “But I fear it is too little to help you far. Will you find any one else on the way?”

“Back among the mountains there will be some. May the Saints bless you, Señorita. My horse is rested, and I must go at once.” He looked gravely at the two sisters. “They accused me of stealing my own horse, the horse I had raised from a colt,” he said. “There is no place left for the Indians now, none at all! They must die ...”

“No, no,” cried Ramona, “things will get better, there will be a happier time for you all. Now you must go. If any enquire after you, I shall know how to send them back.”

The Indian whistled, bringing up to him a graceful black horse with white feet and nose that trotted fearlessly forward and stopped close at his side. He smiled at the girls.

“She knows me, it seems,” he said. “We are not strangers, eh?”

“What a darling she is,” Rose answered, “and as much of a pet as a dog. I should think she did know you. Come, girls, let’s help him pack her.”

Quickly they all set to work to pack the contents of the basket on the mare in such a way as not to interfere with her being ridden. And, as they were all young and the sun shone and the soft wind blew fragrance at them

up the valley, they were soon laughing together. The Indian told them how he had reared the horse, and how fleet she was, forgetting his trouble in answering their questions.

Everything was finished, and he shook hands with all three and then slipped into the saddle.

They stood watching as he threaded his way up the cañon until he reached a turning high up. There he stopped an instant, waving a salute, which they returned. The next moment he disappeared.

"I pray that all may be well with him," murmured Ramona. "And now we must hasten back. We have barely time to get to the house."

Much relieved at the fortunate ending of the adventure, the girls set off merrily on the homeward track. Ramona took them another way that brought them to a road. It was shorter, and since they did not fear to be seen now there was no need of keeping in the cover of the wild mustard.

"We have no time to push our way through that," Ramona told them. "There is only a mile on this road, and then we gain a path through the orange orchard straight home."

But they had not gone far before a cloud of dust warned them that horsemen were coming. Ramona quickly hid the empty basket in the green thicket beside the road, and the three girls walked quietly on.

It took but a few more minutes for the riders to meet them. There were three rough-looking men who pulled up their horses with a jerk.

"Hello, girls," called one of these men, "tell me, ain't ye seen an Indian goin' this way? Must of passed here about sun-up this morning."

"We see many Indians," replied Ramona. "But we have seen none pass here this morning. What do you want with an Indian?"

"Never mind what we want," returned the man, grinning at his companions. "He'll find that out when we get him. Ain't seen him, hey? How long have you been out here?"

"We have been watching the shepherds driving in the sheep from the meadows since dawn, and now we are on our way home through the orange orchard. If he had passed here we should have seen him, I think."

"Look here, he's a hoss-thief," interrupted another of the men, "and we don't want any foolin' about this. He must have come this way—there ain't

no other.”

“Go on, then, and find him,” said Ramona, calmly. “But are you so sure there is no other way?”

Beckoning to Rose and Ruth, she made as though to go on.

“Hold on,” said the first man. “Is there another way? And where the h—— is it?”

Ramona gave him a scornful glance, ably seconded by her two young friends. The girls’ hearts were thumping, but they never quivered, and continued to walk on toward the ranch.

But the man wheeled his horse so that it blocked their way.

“Look here, you got to show us that trail,” he said, and there was a menace in his voice. “We ain’t ridin’ for fun.”

The girls stopped. No one was to be seen on the road in either direction. What would Ramona do?

To their surprise she smiled gently at the man. “You do not need to talk in that way,” she said. “I will tell you how to find the trail. But I am the Señorita Ortega and not a servant, to be commanded.”

With a laugh, the men all swept off their sombreros.

“We ain’t doin’ any commandin’,” said the first who had spoken, “but we’d like to know where that trail leads off, if you don’t mind tellin’.”

Ramona laughed too.

“About two miles back, you passed a group of adobe huts, did you not?”

“Sure. Broken down old things, been deserted.”

“Ride around behind them and to the left. You’ll see two old live-oaks growing close together a little way ahead, and to the right of them the trail leads off to the mountains.”

“That’s the stuff! Much obliged, I’m sure, Señorita—didn’t get all the rest of it. Sorry to leave you, girls,” and he gave them all three a bold smile, as he swung his horse around and galloped away with his two companions.

“Crickey! but I wish his horse would throw him!” grunted Rose. “If he isn’t a brute I never saw one. But how about it, Ramona? Will he be able to catch up with the Indian? I guess not, with all the start he has, and his horse is better than theirs, too.”

“It will be a long time before he catches the Indian that way,” smiled Ramona. “That trail leads into a blind cañon, and after they have ridden to the end, which will take them all day, they will have to ride back. They will be three sick men before they get back where they came from.”

“Ramona, you’re a wonder!” Rose laughed for the joy of it, Ruth joining in delightedly. “Won’t they be mad clean through, though! It makes me feel good to think of it!”

“That is all very well,” remarked Ramona, laughing too, “but it is getting late, and time we were home. Here, this is where we turn into the orchard.”

Under the trees they hastened their steps, and presently saw a boy on horseback coming toward them. He waved his hat on catching sight of them, and spurred his horse in their direction.

“It’s Felipe,” explained Ramona. “The Señora has perhaps sent after us, and he has been seeking. Are we late, Felipe?” she called, as he came nearer.

He rode up, bowing and smiling. A handsome boy, dark of feature and hair and slender of build, graceful as a cat.

“The Señora is troubled at your long absence, and sent me out to find you, Ramona,” he told her. “These, then, are your friends? It is a pleasure to meet them.” Dismounting, he kissed the girls’ hands gallantly and yet with entire absence of affectation.

Hooking his reins over his arm, he joined them in the short walk that remained to the house.

“It was lucky my riding in this direction,” he remarked, “but the orange trees are so sweet now, and I know how Ramona loves them, so I thought she might have led you this way.”

So, chattering easily together as though they had been friends for years, the four young people reached the house. On one of the verandas that surrounded the inner court the lunch table had been set out, and here the Señora awaited them.

“You are late,” she said, in her soft, slow voice, “I hope you have enjoyed the walk you have had. Sit down, and we will eat our refreshments before it grows too warm for comfort.”

They ate the delicious Mexican dishes in silence, for the Señora did not encourage talking. She spoke a gracious word every now and then, to be

sure, but to the girls she seemed to be thinking of something far off! There was a gloom around the Señora that reached the hearts of all who came near her. They were glad when the luncheon was over, and they were left to themselves, the Señora retiring into her own room.

It was a thrilling thing to watch the sheep being penned, for that is where Ramona and Felipe took the girls that afternoon. Wherever they went there was a greeting and a smile for Ramona, who seemed sunshine itself. Not a shepherd but called to her, not a maid but came to her for a word. As the sheep were crowded into the pens, with much laughter from the men and a deal of excited shouting, and with endless bleating by the frightened animals, new flocks coming in all the time from the hills and meadows, it seemed to Rose and Ruth that the world had fairly turned into sheep.

“What heaps and heaps!” exclaimed Ruth. “Ramona, I think sheep are more fun than cattle, after all. Only I wouldn’t dare say that at home.”

“No, they haven’t any use for sheep out our way,” Rose agreed. “Oh, see them coming in there! And look at Felipe!”

For Felipe was everywhere, ordering this man, helping that one, laughing, shouting. Now he came running toward the girls.

“We shall have a splendid yield this year, I feel sure,” he cried. “The sheep are in fine condition, and have grown fat. And what a number of lambs! Juan says it will be the best season we have had in years.”

The sun was setting as the last of the sheep were driven into the pens. A cool breeze blew in from the west, sweet with innumerable perfumes, and in the trees the mocking birds began to sing, while huge fireflies flew diamond-bright over the fields and among the branches of the trees. Ramona slipped her arms affectionately round Rose and Ruth.

“This has been a happy day,” she whispered. “And it is good to know that the Indian is now safely away beyond the hills.”

And that was all—the visit to Ramona was over.

CHAPTER XII

ROMOLA AND THE FLORENTINE BOY

Marmie said that it seemed to have been raining forever, and Rose and Ruth both felt that she was far from exaggerating.

“But anyhow, spring’s coming,” Ruth added, when she and Rose were discussing this interminable rain. “See, the snow down in the corner by the fence has gone, and that was the last patch we could see from the house. But Dad says the cellar’ll be flooded if it doesn’t let up soon.”

“Look at the perfect river that’s rushing down there behind the barn! Suppose it doesn’t stop raining for weeks and weeks. I wonder if lakes begin that way?”

“No, rain-lakes always soak away into the ground after it stops raining. Real lakes soak up from way down deep. Some of them haven’t any bottom at all.”

“Oh, Rose! Then they must go right through to China.”

“Yep, that’s what they do, I guess. Wouldn’t it be great to dive right through and come up in China?”

“D’you s’pose the fairy could do that?”

“Of course. Fairies can do *anything*.”

“Now how do you know what fairies can or cannot do, young lady?” It was the voice of Honeysqueak.

The girls whirled round from the window, through the panes of which they had been observing the steady downpour for the last half hour, for the voice came from behind them. But of course they saw nothing.

“You darling fairy! Did you get wet coming here?”

The fairy laughed. "Here you are one minute saying I can do anything, and the next wondering whether I got wet because it's rainy outside. Of course I didn't."

"How can you help it?"

"The earliest lessons they give young fairies are in dodging raindrops. Why, there is more room between raindrops if you know where to find it, than there is between a rose and its fragrance."

The girls laughed. "But that's different," they said.

"Maybe," agreed the fairy. "Anyway, there's no difficulty in keeping dry out in the rain if you can see as far as your nose and jump as far as your wing-spread."

Neither Rose nor Ruth was quite sure she understood what the fairy meant, but they thought they ought not to ask too many questions, so they only said "Oh," and wished they too had wings.

"If you aren't too busy watching the rain to come with me," continued the fairy, "I'd like to take you to see a little friend of mine, called Romola. She lives in Florence, and is rather a remarkable child."

"I know who you mean," said Ruth. "Marmie read us about her and Tito last summer in the long evenings, and once Marmie was in Florence too, and she says that some day when we're big we shall go to Italy."

"Well, I'm going to take you there now, only it's a far-back Italy, for you'll remember that we must visit the fifteenth century as well as Florence if we want to find Romola."

"Yes. What fun that will be! How good you are to us, dear fairy. You're sure it doesn't tire you to take us so far?"

The fairy laughed; and her laugh was as wonderful as sunlight on water. "You forget that all I have to do is to take you through the Magic Gate," she explained. "So give me your hands and we'll be off."

Just as Rose was thinking that the fairy's hand, in spite of being so small, felt very firm and strong, and Ruth that it was softer than the inside of a tulip-petal, the journey was over, and the girls opened their eyes to find themselves standing before a sombre stone building pierced with small windows, and none too many of these. A huge door faced them, hung on large ornamental hinges, and just as they blinked in the sudden

astonishment of the scene, these doors swung slowly open, showing a stone inner court. A young girl stood within the open doors.

Though she was younger than when Rose and Ruth had met her before, in the book, there was no mistaking her, with her marvellous red-gold hair, rippling like tiny waves flooded with the sunset, and falling far down below her shoulders. Tall and slight, clad in a straight-hanging black gown square at the throat, she looked pale and shining, almost as though there were a light within her.

“Romola!” exclaimed both the girls together.

“Oh, this is good,” the girl answered, coming forward with a smile and outstretched hands. “Will you come up first and see my father, and then go with me on an errand I must do that will take me on the other bank of the Arno?”

“That will be great,” said Rose. “How is your father, Romola?”

Romola shook her head sadly. “The blind are blind,” she replied. “But come.”

“FATHER, HERE ARE THE
TWO FRIENDS I TOLD
YOU OF,” SAID ROMOLA

They crossed the court and mounted several flights of stairs, and paused at a door while Romola lifted the latch. Inside was a short passage which brought them to a large room, lofty but dusky, crowded with shelves full of huge books, with busts and statues and pictures, with tables and great carved chairs and dim hangings. Seated near the one narrow window was a man, whose long white hair was partially covered with a black velvet cap, and who was wrapped in a dark, flowing garment that reached to his feet. He looked like a picture the girls had once found in a book, the portrait of some one called Dr. Faustus, though his face was kinder, and his eyes were closed.

“Father, here are the two friends I told you of,” said Romola, as the three young girls advanced.

“I give you welcome, my children,” returned the old man, gravely. “My daughter is going to the other side of Florence with a manuscript of mine that must be delivered into the hand of a scholar there, as she has perhaps

told you. Maso, my serving man, will accompany her, but I shall be glad if you too will be of the party, for Florence is a city whose streets are safer the more companions you have.”

The two girls were only too eager to be off into the excitement of the streets from this somewhat sad and stern chamber dominated by the blind old scholar, so they thanked Messer Bardo shyly, bade him good-bye, and made their way out, while Romola bent over her father for an instant to be sure that there was nothing he wanted.

Maso, a smiling old fellow, dressed in a sort of tunic, black, as were most of the garments worn by the Florentines, and carrying in his hand a stout stave, waited for his mistress and her guests at the street door.

“We will cross by the old bridge, Maso,” Romola told him. “And we must waste no time, for these are troublesome times, and my father will not be at ease until we are safe back once more.”

“What can happen to us?” asked Rose.

“One can never tell but that some street fight will break out—Florence is filled with fierce men,” answered Romola, as they set out down the narrow street that ran beside the river.

It was a perfect day, softly radiant, and all the city looked tawny and ruddy, as though the sun of many centuries had soaked into the walls of the houses. Here and there, from a high balcony, a splendid bit of colour was given by a piece of silk or rich tapestry flung over the railing. The crowd that jostled each other along the centre of the street, for there were no sidewalks, seemed energetic and voluble. Now and then a monk slipped past silently, dressed in a brown or black habit, or more often in a white woollen tunic reaching to his feet over which was thrown a black, full cloak. Now and then a couple of men on horseback, or some one driving a donkey, shoved the foot passers by aside, very rudely, Ruth and Rose thought.

“They might be more careful,” exclaimed Rose, in some wrath, when one tall man on a fine black horse almost knocked her over before she could flatten herself against the side of a house to get out of his way. He heard her furious exclamation, and laughed.

Maso looked anxious, and Romola shook her head. “You mustn’t get in the way of the Medici,” she remarked. “But here is the bridge, and the other

bank is not so crowded.”

“Who are the Medici?” Ruth wanted to know. “And was he one?”

“They are the rulers of Florence, and he was one of their house. See, here comes a company of men-at-arms, and the great Duke himself. We are in luck, Maso, to see so goodly a sight.”

Maso nodded, and Rose and Ruth agreed. For it was truly a fine company that came trampling through the narrow street. There were some ten men in the party, the leader riding a coal-black horse and his followers on shining bays. This leader was a splendid object, clad in a sort of tunic of chain mail, with a crested helmet on his head that left his dark and beautiful face exposed, a face at once thoughtful, proud and fierce. A jewelled sword hung at his side, and jewels flashed from his horse’s trappings. He was laughing at something said by one of his train, yet the laugh did not lighten his stern expression.

“Who is he?” whispered Rose, staring with all her eyes.

“Lorenzo the Magnificent,” returned Romola, “Duke of Florence. A goodly sight, but a wicked man.”

At this moment the cavalcade stopped just beside the three girls, and Lorenzo bent his eyes upon them.

“Here be three fair lilies,” he called. “What do you on the streets of Florence without guardian?” he added, urging his horse close to the girls, and giving them a smiling glance. They shrank back against the wall, Rose feeling a sudden terror at the bold-eyed look, Ruth catching her sister’s hand, half in excitement, half in fear, Romola answering firmly:

“Nay, my lord the Duke, we are escorted by my father’s old servant here, since my father, being blind, cannot himself guard us from insults.”

“Ho-ho,” cried the Duke, while his men exchanged amused glances. “Here is a maid without fear in her heart, eh? Insults—who has insulted you?”

Romola made no reply, but child as she was her eyes met the Duke’s bravely. Maso stepped forward timidly, whispering the girls to come away.

The Duke made a gesture, and one of his men, crowding forward, shuffled the old man out of the way, striking at him with his riding whip. The rest encircled the girls, broadly smiling now, and exchanging smothered comments. Lorenzo sate his steed in silence, staring down upon

the three. The two young Americans began to feel that the adventure was serious, but this had the effect of making them angry. It was all very well to be a duke, but there were limits.

Rose, stepping forward, straight and slim in her simple gown which resembled the one worn by Romola, suddenly spoke up.

“You ought to be ashamed of stopping three little girls like this,” she said, in a clear voice. “Just because you are a duke doesn’t give you a right to interfere with us. Go on and let us alone, please.”

Lorenzo listened to her with an expression of dreamy amusement. His eyes drooped, and he let the reins fall on his horse’s neck.

“So Lorenzo is chidden in the streets of Florence by babes,” he said at last. “We must see more of these children,” and he turned to his men. “Bring them to the palace,” he said.

Romola clutched the hands of her friends, stepping back as she did so.

“Let be, Lord Duke,” she exclaimed. “We are nothing but children—let us go to our home.”

But the Duke, turning his horse, rode on, stately and silent. Three of his men instantly snatched up the girls, and followed, surrounded by the rest in such wise that they hid the captives pretty well from sight.

None of the girls made a sound. Rose and Ruth were too astounded by this bold kidnapping to do more than gasp, and Romola, pale and dignified, seemed frozen.

Through the gay streets they rode, and everywhere the crowd saluted, bowing low. The clatter of the horses’ hoofs made a prodigious din, and Rose and Ruth, even when they got back their breath after the first shock of astonishment, felt that a scream would scarcely be heard, and if heard it didn’t look as though anybody would pay attention.

They reached a square decorated with statues, and here Lorenzo rode out alone into the centre, while a crowd, quickly growing in numbers, pressed about him in a circle. Rose and her sister thought he meant to make a speech, but what was their astonishment when he suddenly began to sing. His voice was fine and resonant, and apparently his song amusing, for shouts of laughter and approval greeted him at the conclusion of each verse.

“He often sings songs of his own composition to the populace,” explained Romola, and then she leaned nearer Rose.

The men who guarded the girls had placed them behind them on their horses, and paid slight attention to them. As the interest in the Duke's performance increased, their captors, leaning forward, and shouting with laughter, gave the youngsters a chance to escape which Romola was quick to see.

"Try to slip off your horse, and tell Ruth to do the same when you see me doing so," she whispered. "They are all intent on the singing, and once in the crowd we can easily escape."

Rose nodded, and watching her chance, spoke to Ruth. The two kept their eyes on Romola. The ring of men that had surrounded them was now broken, and several spectators were looking curiously up at the girls.

Lorenzo had just finished a verse which brought a perfect storm of applause, when Romola, with a movement cat-like and quick, slipped to the ground. With thumping hearts the sisters followed. But Ruth, not so tall as the others, slipped her hold and fell. The slight commotion attracted the attention of her captor, who instantly gave a shout.

Ruth was up at once, and the three girls dashed into the crowd, crouching low and slipping in and out like eels. The men, attempting to run them down, were checked by the crowd, too jammed to give way. Panting, the three reached a corner. Here a boy of sixteen or so leaned against the wall, sombrely watching the thronged square with its brilliant central figure.

"Help us," panted Romola. "The Duke has threatened to take us to his palace, we know not what will become of us. We managed to slip from the horses in the confusion, but they are after us ... hear the shouts!"

"Quick!" said the boy, without an instant's hesitation, and turning, he ran down a narrow street for a hundred yards, beckoning the girls to follow. At a sort of sunken gateway he stopped, drew a key from his breast, turned it in the lock, and waved them within.

Safe inside, with the door shut behind them, the girls drew long, sobbing breaths, for the struggle to get through the crowd had been severe.

They were in a dusky sort of crypt, with vaulted passages leading away in various directions.

"Come," said the boy, and walked ahead of them a short way, then opened another door, admitting them into a small octagonal chamber with benches around the walls and a table in the centre. A huge crucifix hung on

the wall at one end, and a dusky painting faced it. A little light came through a high, narrow window, while two tall candles flamed dimly before the crucifix.

“You are safe here,” said the boy. “Presently, when the hue and cry has died down, I will guide you back home. So the tyrant tried to steal you?” His voice as he spoke trembled, and a look of hate shone in his dark eyes.

“Yes,” said Romola. “These two friends of mine and I, with old Maso, were bound for the other bank of the Arno when we encountered the Magnificent. It amused him to accost us, and when we refused to be frightened, he gave orders we should be taken to his castle. What might have happened to us all I know not. In the meanwhile Maso must certainly have returned to my father, who will be in despair—for which of us can oppose the Medici?”

The boy, who wore a long red garment reaching to his heels, with a cross hanging from a chain round his neck, made a fierce gesture.

“I am a son of Holy Church,” said he, “soon to be admitted to orders. But I should be glad to run my blade through his black heart. The blood of the murdered Pazzi is in my veins, and there is no Florentine but knows how my House was destroyed by this upstart Medici—how my father was dragged at a horse’s heels through the streets, hacked into pieces and flung to the Arno.”

He told this dreadful tale quietly, without raising his voice, but the tone of him made Ruth shiver, and Rose turn pale, while Romola’s eyes flashed.

“This is no time to turn monk,” she cried. “Why are you not a soldier, and consecrated to vengeance? Will the Church help you kill the tyrant?”

“What a lot of killing and fury there is here in Florence,” said Rose. “I wonder how any of you escape.”

“The strong escape,” muttered the boy, fingering his cross. “But the mighty will be brought low ... there is One even now, though men know him not....” He stopped.

Quick, light footsteps were approaching the door opposite that by which the boy had brought the girls into the chamber. It was thrown open, and a man in monk’s garb stood on the threshold. He was of middling stature, dark-skinned, with eyes of amazing brilliance under heavy, dark brows.

A look of astonishment spread over his face as his eyes fell on the young girls.

“What is this?” he exclaimed, in a deep and musical voice. “How come these maidens here, Francesco?”

In a few words Francesco told of the escape, and that he was waiting to take the girls back to Romola’s house. The monk shook his head with a denunciatory gesture.

“The time is coming when the word must be spoken,” he said. “You have done well, Francesco, in rescuing these maids. The throng has dispersed, and it will be safe—safe as it ever is,—to return. Come with me.”

He led them out of the room and up a spiral staircase, finally bringing them out through a small door into the body of a church. The next moment they stepped once more into the street, a short, twisted way that was deserted by all except a beggar or two.

“Go as swiftly as may be,” he told Francesco, “and keep to the meaner streets. Bless you, my daughters,” he added, making the sign of the cross, and fixing his strangely luminous eyes on the girls for a moment, “peace be with you.”

He turned at the word and re-entered the church.

“Who is he?” asked Romola, looking after him.

“His name is Savonarola,” returned their boy friend. “He is a great man, and some day the world will wonder at him. But we must hasten.”

“But the manuscript,” it was Rose who suddenly bethought herself of the forgotten errand. “What about that?”

“That must wait,” Romola answered. “I must return to my father—he will want to thank you,” she added, to the boy. “You risked a great danger if we had all been overtaken, seeing what House you belong to.”

He smiled, shaking his head ... and with that the street, he, Romola, and all faded. Rose and Ruth were back in their own home.

CHAPTER XIII

LITTLE NELL AND THE BUN-SHOP

Even when you are very old, too old to care about playing games or racing with the cloud-shadows on the grass when the west wind is taking the big white ones that look like ships so gaily across the sky, even then you feel pretty good at the first beginning of spring.

Long before the grass shows a tint of green down by the fence corners and along the brookside there is a new smell to the air, a smell that makes you want to jump up and down and shout. Then come the pussy-willows, grey, demure, and fluffy, as if they had no notion how important they were. And after that—but we haven't got farther than that just yet.

For that is where the spring stood when Rose and Ruth returned from their first ride of the season to the next ranch with Marmie. A yellow and rose sky looked at them calmly from the west as they reached home and jumped off their ponies.

“Wasn't it a *heavenly* ride, Marmie?” exclaimed Rose, hauling off her saddle, the fine new saddle she was so proud of, and turning her horse into the corral. “Just think, it will soon be summer and we can stay outdoors all day long, and go on camping trips again. Jimminy-kingsy, it seems as if one couldn't wait another minute!”

“What lots of waiting there is in life, isn't there, Marmie?” said Ruth.

Marmie laughed. “Come to think of it, Ruth, you're right. And now it's supper we're waiting for, or at least Dad is. Will it cheer you up to know we are going to have waffles?”

“Oh, Marmie! Umm—and just when we're so hungry, too.”

“And after supper you two will have to amuse yourselves alone, for Dad and I are going to be busy all evening.”

Fortunately there were enough waffles, though Rose and Ruth had both doubted the possibility; they were so hungry that it seemed as though the world in all its length and breadth could hardly hold enough waffles to satisfy them. But when Daddy dared them to eat another they only sighed.

And when they went into the living room while Marmie and Dad departed to the den, where they always worked over the new schemes for the ranch together, there was the fairy waiting for them!

Of course they didn't see her. But the room was full of a wavy kind of music, and they felt at once that she was dancing.

"Is it you, Fairy Honeysqueak? And are you dancing?—what scrumptious music it is."

"I've been chatting with Spring," answered Honeysqueak, "and that always leaves me in a dancy mood. That music was the echo of her talk—it always lingers awhile. Why, even you mortals dance to her."

"Is that what makes one feel so light and jumpy? But we never heard her before."

"You mean you didn't know you heard; but you did, all the same. And now, unless you don't want the trouble, I'm going to take you to London to see a little girl who has never been anything else but just a little girl."

"Of course we want to go ... trouble! Oh, Fairykins!" That was Rose. Ruth wanted to know who the little girl was.

"She's Little Nell, and I want you to be awfully nice to her, for she doesn't get much fun, you know."

You may be sure they would be nice to her, and mighty glad of the chance. So the fairy clasped their hands and led them once again through the Magic Gate. When they opened their shut eyes, after that well-remembered little jar of landing on the other side, they found themselves in a street.

It was a busy, crowded street, with carts rattling down the middle and people hurrying along the pavements, some with parcels and baskets, all with umbrellas, for a thin rain was falling. Rose and Ruth found themselves neatly clad in long waterproof cloaks of a circular pattern that fell almost to their feet, with little hoods framing their faces, and they also had an umbrella, a big one for the two of them. Before them, smiling at them gently, was a little girl of a sweet and tender beauty, with a threadbare cloak

of the same pattern as their own and a small and somewhat battered-looking umbrella. She carried a little basket on one arm.

“It’s Nell,” said Rose, “isn’t it? We’ve come to play with you, and we are going to have a lovely time.”

Nell looked a bit startled.

“But I have work that must be done,” she said. “And my grandfather needs me, I fear. Maybe you will come with me and see him?”

“Later,” said Rose. “But really this is a good-time day. The fairy said so, and we are going to be happy every minute. You don’t have any little girls to play with, Nell. And now you are going to play with us.” Rose was decidedly firm. She had always wanted Nell to have some real fun, and here she was with a chance to give it her.

Ruth, dodging from under the umbrella, caught Little Nell by the hand.

“Come on, you sweet little thing,” she told her. “And first of all let’s get out of the rain. Is there a place near here where we can get some ice-cream or something good to eat? I’m hungry.”

“LADIES,” SAID DICK
SWIVELLER, “I WILL
ACCEPT YOUR KIND, NAY
YOUR PRINCELY OFFER.
LET US DRINK
CONFUSION IN THIS TEA
—CONFUSION TO DIRE
DESTINY”

Nell seemed to abandon her doubts. An expression of gaiety dawned in her serious blue eyes, and she squeezed Ruth’s hand impulsively.

“There’s a bun-shop just round the corner,” she answered, “and we can find anything we want there. I’ve been doing a number of errands, and my feet are so wet—it will be pleasant to get to a fire.”

“Then let’s hurry,” said Rose, and the sisters, flanking Nell on either side, with the rain dripping cheerily down their necks, hurried along the way she led them. As they went they chattered joyfully and laughed considerably. For it seemed exceedingly jolly to be scuttling along the shining pavement, with the roar of traffic in their ears, the passers-by smiling at them, and

Little Nell looking shyly up, a flush on her cheeks and excitement all over her.

“I was so happy when I knew you were coming,” she confided, “only I really did not see how I could take so much time just to be a little girl in. But I feel I can, somehow, and it’s such a wonderful feeling.”

“Do you know, I think you are *too* good,” said Rose. “I never knew any girl on earth so good as you, Nell. You’re what Marmie calls Conscientious, and that makes you work too hard. Don’t you think so, Ruth?”

“Yes, I do,” answered Ruth. “You know, if we are good very long Marmie thinks we can’t be feeling quite well. I don’t mean that we are bad, you know, but just kind of—oh, *enterprising*.”

Nell shook her solemn little head. And she looked so sweet and old-fashioned and lovely as she did that the sisters both wanted to hug her, but the umbrellas prevented.

“Life has always seemed rather a stern and difficult business, and all I can do is to hope that I shall not prove entirely useless in carrying out my share of it,” she replied, quaintly. “You speak as though it were something to play through—and you almost make me feel that you are right.” She added this with a tiny sigh and a downward look, as though half frightened by the boldness of her conclusion.

“You bet we’re right,” said Rose. “Is this the bun-shop?”

It was. A window displayed cakes and pastries, and a sign invited those who felt the pangs of hunger to step inside.

Indoors a door led them into a neat, pretty room with a bright fire at one end, some pots of geranium blazing quite as brilliantly on the window board, a red carpet with huge bunches of yellow and green posies, and snowy curtains. A couple of tables and a number of wide-armed, comfortable chairs, with a dresser, completed the furniture of the place. At one of these tables a young man was sitting, with a pot of tea and some muffins before him.

“What a dandy room,” exclaimed the sisters, squeezing Nell’s hands in rapture. “Come close to the fire, Nell, and dry yourself, or you’ll catch an awful cold. My, you *are* wet!”

And they busied themselves in helping her out of her cloak and bonnet, and in sitting her before the blaze with her feet stretched out on the fender.

A motherly woman came in while they were busy with this and asked them smiling, "Would they have tea?"

Nothing could be better, they said, though they felt daring, because Marmie only allowed them to have it on their birthdays, as an immense treat. But they thought the present occasion warranted a real spree.

So tea came, with buns and toasted crumpets, which had been timidly suggested by Little Nell. The motherly woman helped them draw one table close to the fire, in which she was assisted by the young man, who sprang forward, asserting loudly that lovely woman should not overburden her strength when *he* was present. The landlady laughed, calling him Mr. Richard.

"It's an odd fish you are, Mr. Richard," she said, "and no mistake. There, I think that will do nicely for the young ladies."

"Thanks ever so much," supplemented Rose. "Wouldn't you like to sit nearer the fire too?" she added, addressing the youth. "There's plenty of room."

"Room and to spare at the board," announced this personage, with a flourish of the hand, "so, ladies, I will accept your kind, nay, your princely offer. Let us sit together, and let us drink confusion—in this tea—confusion to dire destiny."

"What's that?" said Ruth.

"The providence that shapes our ends, roughhew them how we will!" And carrying his cup, plate and pot of tea, the young man made the transfer to the circle by the fire. "Your health, young ladies, though this is not the ruby," he finished, lifting his cup high before setting it to his lips.

The girls, including Nell, giggled.

"You're funny," said Rose. "What's your name?"

"Richard Swiveller, at your service. And yours, fair ones?"

They introduced each other gravely. And then began to make away with the delicious provender before them.

"We have met," said Dick, buttering a muffin, "we have encountered each other in this singular spot for a reason—but what that reason may be, that indeed 'twere difficult to say. Unless you know?"

“We’ve come to give Nell a good time,” declared Ruth, who felt a strong liking for the dauntless Richard. “You see, she is so good and so helpful and so busy that she has no time to play, and we want to play—after we’ve eaten.” And she bit into her bun.

Nell laughed. She began to look rosy, what with the comfort of the fire and the glow imparted by the tea.

“How shall we begin?” she asked.

“On with the dance, let joy be unconfined,” proclaimed Mr. Swiveller. With the words he drew from the bosom of his bottle-green coat a fife. “Here is linked sweetness, long drawn out, or shall be. And now, if you have finished eating, let us push aside the tables and begin.”

Suiting the action to the word, and gladly assisted by the three girls, he cleared the centre of the room, and sitting in an easy and careless position on one corner of the table, he set his instrument to his lips, beginning at once to pipe a melody, somewhat jerky, to be sure, but certainly lively and provocative.

With much laughter, the two sisters set to work to teach Nell the one-step. She was apt enough, and graceful as a kitten at play, once the newness of the experience wore off. Dick himself insisted upon joining the dancers, playing the while as well as might be, and more discordantly than ever, but with a sense of time that made up for the rest of his defects as a musician. Presently he showed them a jig, and in this Ruth soon became expert, distancing the two other girls, and evoking from her instructor the most rapturous praise.

But at last, exhausted by the vigour of their efforts, they all sank laughing into chairs, unable to take another step.

“Let’s play something quiet,” said Rose. “Do you know Up Jenkins, Mr. Swiveller?”

“No, princess,” returned Dick, sadly. “In some respects my education has been shamefully neglected. I never so much as heard of Mr. Up Jenkins.”

So they laughed at that, and then the sister instructed Nell and Dick in the mysteries of the game. Seated at the table, Rose and Nell on one side and Dick and Ruth at the other, they brought out a nice new shilling from Rose’s reticule. The business of the game was for the side holding the shilling to bring it down, concealed in one of the four hands, flat upon the

table at the command "Down Jenkins" from the captain of the opposing side. His business it was, or hers, to order up one by one the four out-spread hands, saying sternly "Up Jenkins," to each. The one under which the shilling lay to be the last. If the captain, consulting freely with the other member of his side, guessed accurately, the shilling changed over; if not, it remained in the possession of the foe. But if the enemy made the mistake of obeying the command of any one but the captain, or lifted a hand when it was simply pointed to, without waiting for the command, or broke several other rules, why the shilling was lost to them. It was a good, noisy game and, played with the fervour devoted to it by this little party, afforded endless amusement. Dick in especial proved a wonder, for his sly methods of causing the opposing captain to think the shilling was under his hand when it really lay cosily with Ruth, his extraordinary flow of language, his quick, stern commands when he was not the captain, these and numerous other tricks kept his new friends in an almost unbroken storm of laughter.

Suddenly a gleam of sunlight fell across the table, and looking out the four saw that the rain had passed. The motherly landlady entering the room at the same moment, they told her they must go. But first Rose had her fill the little basket with a variety of good things to eat, which were to be taken to Nell's grandfather. Then, bidding Dick good-bye, though he placed his hand on his heart and declared solemnly that he should not be able to support life unless he were allowed to play Up Jenkins at least twice a day with them in future, they walked out into the sunlight, which gleamed from low in the west, for evening was approaching.

Cheerily, with their umbrellas under their arms, the three threaded the crowded streets, where hucksters were calling their wares, where donkeys, drawing funny little carts, disputed the way with immense dray horses, and sprightly-looking hansom dashed by the huge busses, top-heavy with their loads of passengers. The pavements were gay with gentlemen in wide-bottomed, full-skirted coats of brilliant blues, greens and snuff browns, with curly-brimmed high hats atop of whiskered faces, and striped, tight-fitting trousers on their legs, as well as with ladies in hoop-skirts and shawls and bonnets, demure as pansies when they were young and slight, but resembling overblown peonies or immense inverted cabbages of the purple variety when they were elderly and fat.

Everybody seemed to know every one, and there was much nodding and greeting to and fro. Several nodded kindly to the Little Nell, having seen her pass the same way often before. One or two stopped to speak a word, and complimented her on her rosy cheeks and bright eyes.

“You look blooming as a wild rose, child,” said one. “And your friends too. It does an old woman good to see such happy faces.”

“She often speaks to me,” said Nell, “but I know not who she is, except that she hath, so she has told me, a daughter Barbara. She is a kind soul.”

And now they reached the door of the queer old shop where Nell and her grandfather lived. There he stood, peering out under his hand, waiting. When he saw the three girls coming toward him, he smiled gently.

“We’ve had such a good time,” said Rose, when Nell had introduced her and Ruth. “We’ve been playing together all the afternoon. And see, we’ve brought a little basketful of good things for you, too.”

So they went in and unpacked the goodies. Then the old man took them all over his shop, showing them numerous things, some queer, some beautiful, all old. Then it was time to say good-bye, for it was growing dark. The two sisters shook hands with Nell’s grandfather, and then turned to Nell herself, clasping her warmly in their arms.

“You are a dear little thing, and as pretty as a picture,” Ruth told her. “We have loved being with you.”

Rose kissed her, saying that she would never forget their jolly afternoon, and Little Nell, serious once more, embraced them tenderly, murmuring that no one had a right to be sad in a world that held such persons as Rose and Ruth, not to speak of Dick.

With which the two sisters found themselves once more safe and sound at home—after the properest good-bye they’d ever taken, as Ruth remarked.

“It’s usually just ‘swish,’ and we’re off. But this time we really took leave.”

“And how much fun we had!” sighed Rose contentedly.

CHAPTER XIV

EVANGELINE AND THE BIG BEAR

Evening lay red in the west as Marmie stood in the doorway and called to Rose and Ruth to come into supper. They were planting seeds in their own little garden-patch, and were as grimy as roots, both of them.

Rose had been devoting her energies to radishes and lettuce. Ruth to pansies and sweet alyssum, for it seemed to her that a vegetable bed ought to have a border of flowers.

“Like having flowers on the dinner-table,” she remarked, as she strewed the tiny seeds. “And they’ll go right on blooming long after your radishes have been eaten up,” she added.

“Yes, but by that time we’ll have planted peas, and then corn, and then tomatoes and then eggplants—this is going to be one round of good things to eat,” Rose returned with gusto. “What fun planting is! It’s just as magic as getting turned into a swan or a fox or any of those real things ... all right, we’re c-o-o-ming....” This last in answer to Marmie, whose voice had at last reached the girl’s inner consciousness. So they gathered up their tools and ran in to wash up before sitting down to supper.

“You little grubs,” said Marmie, “you don’t really need to get into the ground yourselves when you plant. Hurry and dig yourselves out, because Dad wants me to ride to the south ranch with him after supper. He’s got to look over the fences.”

“But it’ll be dark, Marmie.”

“There’s a full moon, youngster.”

“Can’t we go too, please, please?”

“Not this time, dears. We’ll be rather late getting back, and I want you to get to bed good and early. But soon we’ll fix up a picnic, when the weather grows more settled. I think we are going to have a very early spring this year ... why, it’s more like the end of April than the end of March right now.”

After they had waved their parents out of sight, the two girls turned back into the house a trifle forlornly.

“Dear me, I wish we were big enough to do just what we wanted to do,” grumbled Rose. “Grown-up people don’t consider enough how we young ones suffer when they don’t let us do things.”

They went glumly into the living room and sat down, trying to think of something to do. But the thought of the ponies loping out there in the moonlight with Dad and Marmie drove other ideas away.

Suddenly Ruth looked up eagerly.

“Oh, Rose, I do wish the fairy would come,” she exclaimed. “Then we wouldn’t mind being left behind.”

“That’s true. Suppose we wish for her.”

“A wish is as good as a smile,” remarked the voice of Honeysqueak. “I’ve been sitting right here some time, but such a pair of scowling faces frightened all the words away—I couldn’t get hold of one.”

“We weren’t cross, dear fairy,” explained Rose, “just sort of despairing.”

“Well, it’s no use my shaking my head, because you can’t see me,” said the fairy. “But....”

And her voice sounded just as though she were shaking it.

So Rose and Ruth both laughed rather shamefacedly, and then the fairy laughed too and the air cleared like magic.

“And now that life seems worth while again, my dears, suppose we go off on a little trip of our own?”

Nothing could be better than that, and when Ruth begged that they might visit Evangeline this time, Rose thought it a splendid suggestion, and the fairy agreed.

“There isn’t a lovelier place anywhere than Grand Pré,” she told them, “nor a sweeter girl than Evangeline. So come along, quick, quick, quick!”

And in less time than you'd take to get out of your chair, the sisters found themselves in Acadie, of a lovely June afternoon.

They were strolling along a white and curving road shaded by trees. On either hand the meadows spread, deep in grass, reaching to the blue, calm waters of the Basin of Midas on one side, on the other to the misty-topped mountains, dark with forest. Ahead of them lay the lovely village, with its white, thatch-roofed cottages and big church. Flax in bloom made broad patches of blue, a clearer, lighter blue than the sea-water, but just as beautiful. It was a smiling, lovely scene.

Coming to meet them, with a basket on her arm, was a girl of their own age dressed in a blue frock with full white sleeves and opening at the throat over a white yoke. A white cap with broad lappets topped her shining brown hair. She was as winsome a sight as ever the sun shone on, with a sweet and laughing face and a body as lissom as the swaying grain just ripening in the fields.

Rose and Ruth were dressed in the same way, and they turned their heads with delight to make their caps wave the white wings that so pleasantly shaded their necks.

"Here you are, and late too," cried Evangeline. "I had hoped to meet you nearer the village. Come, we'll return to the farm, and then my father has given permission for us to take the big, kind Alphonse and picnic on Blomidon. Will that not be a fine holiday? And on a day so fair!"

SO GABRIEL CLIMBED IN
BETWEEN RUTH AND
EVANGELINE, AND THE
LITTLE PARTY
HASTENED ON TOWARD
THE CAPE

"We only got here this minute," said Rose. "How sweet you look, Evangeline! We are so glad to meet you. Ruth said she always loved you better than any other heroine in ... in ..." Rose couldn't quite remember what she had intended saying, so she ended with a skip of joy, and the statement that a picnic on Blomidon was a wonderful idea, and who was Alphonse?

“Alphonse is the dog. Father will let me go anywhere with him, so big and strong and wise he is, and so brave and gentle. Do you like dogs?”

Of course they did, and all three of them chatting at once, they trudged merrily along the road toward the farm, roomy and generous, with big barns stretching round three sides of a square, with dove-cotes and hen-houses and kennels, and the wide-eaved gracious house in front, facing the sea.

As they pushed open the white gate of the house-place, a hearty-looking white-haired man called to them from an open window.

“Welcome, mes petites. Evangeline, offer thy friends some milk and a slice of bread and cheese, and then be off with you all, for I do not want you to be late getting home.”

A table stood under a great, shady sycamore by the door, with chairs about it, and here Evangeline spread a simple meal of bread and cheese and berries, with a huge pitcher of creamy milk. Bees murmured all about them, butterflies flitted past, and the clear air seemed to shimmer above the meadows and orchards and over the gleaming sea.

“I think this is the loveliest place in the whole world,” decided Ruth, sighing with content. “Oh, are we going to drive?” for in the yard two men were harnessing a pretty sorrel horse to a wagon with two seats, singing as they did so.

“Indeed we are. My father has business on beyond among the hills, and he will drive us close to the forest to spend the afternoon, and stop for us on the way back. It would be too far to walk.”

What fun it was, climbing so joyously into the wagon, with Father Bellefontaine helping them settle down, and putting in the baskets of dainty cakes and the bottle of fruit-juice and the basket of great red strawberries on which they were to feast under the murmuring pines, that sang an echo to the stirring waves, endless as time. And that drive!

First they went through the quaint village where every one knew them, and waved or called a greeting. Evangeline was a favourite with young and old alike, that was evident. Such a clean, bright little village, with orchards almost up to the cottage doors, these cottages so pretty with dormer windows and huge beams of wood criss-crossing the white or tinted plaster of their walls. Brilliant little gardens bloomed before many, and vines scrambled up most. Children played everywhere, and once, coming down a

side street, Rose caught a glimpse of the pleasant-faced old priest, surrounded by a group of youngsters, who were grasping at his hands and his flowing black robe, while he smiled down upon them.

Then came the spreading meadows, protected from the sea by dikes on which willows grew in long rows. And then the hills, covered with trees.

Their way led far out on the cape, and the song of the sea was always in their ears, while its blue shone between trees or stretched far as they topped some slight rise. Father Bellefontaine pointed out sights of interest here and there. They passed the smithy and were hailed by Basil Lajeunnes who worked there amid a shower of sparks to the merry ring of iron on iron. A slender youth ran out to exchange a word with them as they stopped a moment—Basil's son, young Gabriel, and Evangeline smiled at him, but said nothing.

"If there were room in the wagon we should like to take you too, Gabriel," said the farmer. "But like enough one boy with so many maids would be too bashful, ... eh, Basil?" and he laughed toward his friend, who had come to the door of the smithy and stood smiling.

Gabriel laughed too. "If there were room I would surely forget my bashfulness," he answered, his eyes dancing.

"Then in with you," cried Farmer Bellefontaine, "and you two behind make room somehow. I shall be glad enough to have Gabriel with these maids in the forest, for all Alphonse is here."

So Gabriel climbed in between Ruth and Evangeline, and the little party hastened on toward the cape, Alphonse leaping and barking around the wagon and horse as though he enjoyed it all every bit as much as the rest.

"Be wise children and do not wander too deep into the forest," warned Evangeline's father as he left the young people in the shadow of the mighty pines, baskets and all, and drove off about his business. "I shall be back by sunset."

They had little trouble taking the baskets farther in among the trees, where a spring bubbled up between moss-covered stones, to wander away in a clear streamlet. The air was redolent of the fragrance of the needles, and the shadows and sun played all sorts of fantastic games with each other as the wind stirred the boughs so high above the children's heads.

They took off shoes and stockings and paddled in the clear water, and chased each other laughing over the brown needles, silky soft to their bare feet. They sang and laughed, and Gabriel showed them a new game with a ball he had brought. Then came the picnic, and they ate every morsel, including a cold chicken, whose bones alone they threw to Alphonse. He was so clever catching them that they couldn't praise him enough, nor he be done wagging his tail.

Then Gabriel told them there was a wonderful view of the bay to be had from a nearby hilltop, and offered to lead them there. They packed up the baskets neatly, put on their shoes and stockings, and then started away, Alphonse in the lead, sniffing the breeze and dashing after squirrels, which chattered at him mockingly from a branch just beyond reach.

They had not gone very far before they came to another path branching from the one they had been following. Gabriel was not sure which way to take, so he asked them to wait at the junction while he explored a bit. Off he went, while Alphonse lay down beside the girls, whose hands were full of flowers plucked on the walk.

Evangeline told them of her life on the farm, and of the festival soon to occur, a Saint's day when all the village turned out to dance and play games, dressed in its best. She was to have a new gown, her father had promised her.

Suddenly, as they talked, Alphonse sprang up with a deep growl, his hair bristling all over him, his eyes flashing. Startled, the girls sprang to their feet, but there was nothing to be seen.

"I wish Gabriel were back," exclaimed Evangeline. "What can be wrong, that Alphonse acts so strangely?"

Still growling hoarsely, Alphonse began to crawl up the path which had not been taken by Gabriel. Then with a loud bark, he sprang forward and disappeared.

Catching each other by the hand, their hearts thumping, the three girls stared after him.

There was another sharp bark, then an angry whine, and Alphonse reappeared, running, frightened but fierce. Behind him a huge brown shadow rolled, a shadow that resolved itself into a great hairy beast in no time at all.

“A bear!”

They all gasped the words. Alphonse, seeing them, turned again and faced the huge creature, snarling like a wolf. The bear paused and reared up on its hind legs.

Then, in the dim greenness behind, a small head showed. A cub.

“Hasten!” whispered Evangeline, her voice shaking. “Up the path toward Gabriel while the dog holds her back.”

Rose and Ruth felt the most peculiar sensation in their knees as they turned to follow Evangeline. Through Rose’s head flashed a remembered description: “and his knees were like water.” That was it. But this did not keep them from flying like scared rabbits up the path under the shadowy trees. Behind them a hoarse roar burst out, mixed with indescribable growling, snarling and whining. Ruth glanced back to see dog and bear rolling on the ground together.

At this moment, Gabriel, breathless, reached them. He had heard the sounds as he was returning, and knew something must be wrong.

Quickly he put himself between the girls and the bear. He had drawn a short, broad and sharp knife from his belt, and clutched this tightly.

“Have a care, dear Gabriel,” whispered Evangeline. “It is a horrible great brute and there is a cub with it.”

He nodded. The bear was still rolling on the ground with the dog, but now she rose, snorting and shaking her head. Her small eyes gleamed as she saw the little group crouched together, Gabriel some paces in front. Growling again, she strode forward with a rolling movement.

An icy chill shook the three girls. She was going to attack.

Gabriel glanced back over his shoulder. His face was pale but steady.

“Run,” he commanded. “I can keep her back ... hurry....”

They did not stir. Rose and Ruth felt that nothing could make them move away from whatever was to come; Evangeline stood, her little hands clenched and pressed against her breast, her eyes on Gabriel and the advancing beast.

The dog had once more gathered himself up, and now came again to the attack. Just as the bear reared up before Gabriel, its great paws waving,

Alphonse sprang. The bear swerved, sinking to all fours, and the dog's teeth gripped its pointed nose.

At the same moment Gabriel closed in, knife ready. All the girls saw was a whirl of brown, a flash of steel, the white spot on Alphonse's throat he held on grimly; Gabriel thrust the knife deep into the great creature's neck, close behind the ear.

With an almost human groan the animal swung its heavy paw at the boy, and felled him to the ground. The knife dropped from his hand, rattling on the path.

Rose heard a scream—it was Evangeline—and she saw the girl spring forward to help her playmate and comrade. But Rose herself was quicker. With Gabriel's fall she had plunged at the knife, snatched it up, and now, brushing Evangeline aside, she made a lunge at the bear, which had rolled over on both boy and dog. Her knife sank into the beast's head, at the base of the brain. But the stroke was not needed ... the bear was already dead.

"It's dead," gasped Rose, and Ruth, sobbing, was beside her, struggling to drag the carcass off the boy, who lay still. Evangeline, on her knees murmuring prayers, had caught his hand in hers.

By frantic efforts the three succeeded in getting Gabriel free. Blood trickled from his left shoulder, but in an instant his eyes opened. He had had the breath knocked out of him, and it took only a few minutes to bring him around.

All the girls were crying, in an excited way, and quite unconsciously. Gabriel sat staring at the huge brown body. Suddenly he exclaimed:

"And Alphonse!"

Poor Alphonse. He had given his life for his mistress. He was crushed under his enemy. They got him free tenderly, but it was hopeless. There was no more wagging of the responsive tail, no cheery bark, no joyful gambolling life in the kindly dog. Evangeline patted him, the tears running down her cheeks.

"He died a hero's death," said Gabriel, gravely. "We will carry him back down the trail and see that he is given fit burial."

"But you, your arm, Gabriel," asked Evangeline suddenly. "It is wounded."

“Nothing much, a scratch. My mother will dress it as soon as we reach home.”

But the girls would not have that, and bound the wound up as well as might be with Evangeline’s kerchief. While they were at this work an odd whining made itself noticeable.

“Oh, look,” whispered Ruth. “It’s the cub.”

And so it was, for the little creature had slowly drawn nearer to its dead mother, and now was nosing over her, whining in a surprised, pained manner, and pawing at her with its small feet. Reaching the bleeding wound in her throat it stopped suddenly, lifted its head high in the air, and began crying.

“Poor little beast,” said Rose. “Let’s take it back with us, Gabriel. It will make a nice pet.”

Gabriel took off his leather belt and fastened it around the cub’s neck, handing the other end of the strap to Rose and Ruth. He and Evangeline then took up the dead Alphonse between them, and the cavalcade set off down the path, slowly enough. It was difficult work, but at last, with many rests, and some frantic demonstrations from the terrified cub, they got back to the spot where Farmer Bellefontaine had left them early that afternoon. It seemed an hundred years ago!

There he was, anxiously pacing about, looking now in this direction, now in the other, for the sun was setting, and he began to fear something had happened. When he saw the queer procession coming toward him he stared in astonishment, and then called out sharply:

“What is this? What have you been about?”

His astonishment grew when the story was told him, and it looked as though he too would faint, so white he grew, thinking of his beloved child in such danger.

Evangeline told him of Rose’s bravery, and he embraced her, laughing, but with tears in his eyes.

“What an affair, what an affair! And never again shall you get out of your old father’s sight, child. But my boy, what a stroke that was of thine!”

“It was plain luck,” returned Gabriel. “I struck blindly, and the blade must somehow have reached the brain. Then poor Alphonse helped me. He hung to the beast’s muzzle to the very end.”

Well, it had to be told over again on the way home, with the small cub in the lunch basket, and when they reached Gabriel's home, there was more excitement. All the village crowded round, the barber came to bind up Gabriel's wound, his father stood by beaming, his mother wept and called on heaven in thanksgiving, and every one had something to say. Several of the youths of the place determined to go out the first thing in the morning to bring in the old she-bear, and it was plain to see that they envied Gabriel his adventure. Rose too came in for a deal of congratulation and hand-shaking and even kisses, for Evangeline was quick to tell of her courage, and to praise the swiftness of the help she offered.

"In an instant she had the knife up, and then—it was wonderful, so strong, so steady," and she illustrated the stroke. Rose was embarrassed, but Ruth looked on with shining eyes.

Then all bade Gabriel farewell, each giving him a kiss. The cub squealed in the basket, the horse started off gaily, everybody waved and hurrahed—it was like a story ... the moon shone softly over the broad meadows, the wind sighed, the village dogs barked....

Or no. It was their own dogs barking! They were back at home, and when they looked at the clock they decided it was time for them to hop right off to bed.

"But that was a splendid adventure," said Ruth, "and you were a wonder, Rose. We must tell Marmie."

"If we can only remember. But we never do when she's here, Ruth," returned Rose, puzzling again over the freakish forgetfulness that came to them whenever they tried to recall for the benefit of others any of their many trips through the Magic Gate.

CHAPTER XV

THE LITTLE QUAKER-CITY MAID

There are many miracles, only we become used to them in time, and forget their marvel. We look calmly at the tiny chick pecking its way out of the egg, a downy thing with bright black eyes and crowded full of lively motion where only a short while ago there was no more than a yolk and a white with shell to keep them together. We see a worm turn to a butterfly and go on unconcerned. We see a baby begin to walk and to talk, and we behave as though that were to be expected—and so it is, for we live in the midst of marvellous happenings, as I began by saying.

And here were Rose and Ruth in the thick of the miracle of spring. Only yesterday there was nothing much to speak of. Just a beginning, a hint, a mist over the trees, a green tinge to the grass. To-day ... what a transformation.

Blue-birds were twittering and flying, song-sparrows tuning up. The trees had brought out leaves and tassels and sweet-smelling fringes. Willows were burning with yellow and rose, windflowers nodded, and Marmie's snowdrops and crocuses were all abloom along the south wall of the house. There was a delirious quality to the air, and bees hummed. One white butterfly teetered over the yellowest crocus.

The girls were wild for the school hours to pass—Marmie always taught them, for there was no school within reach—so that they could be out in it all. And Marmie let them take their luncheon and ride over to the little lake with their rods after trout.

“Be home by sunset, dears,” she had said, “and have a good time. There are many, many nice things in this old world, but being a child in spring is one of the best.”

They had a wonderful day of it, and each of them had caught plenty of fish, fine fellows that would make dandy eating for supper. Lunch had been delicious, and the spring day increasingly beautiful. Now, in the warm, mild afternoon, they felt delightfully lazy.

The ponies were cropping the grass, the fish were in the creel, and that was hung up on the limb of a tree, where it reached the water. Side by side the sisters lay, their heads resting on their saddles, drinking in the lovely day through every pore.

“Winter’s really gone,” remarked Rose, dreamily. “And what a splendid winter it’s been, Ruth.”

“Yep. We haven’t been a bit lonely this year, just because of Fairy Honeysqueak. She’s given us a lot of glorious experience, hasn’t she?”

“It’s some time since we’ve seen—I mean heard her. I wonder if she isn’t coming any more, now that spring is here at last? I wish we could at least say good-bye and thank you, don’t you?”

“Then that’s just what you can do,” the silver-sounding voicelet spoke, the clear and chiming voice they knew and loved so. “For I’m come, and I’m going to take you one last trip for a sort of farewell, because I’m too busy now that spring’s here to be able to play any more; and I daresay you’ll not have any too much time on your hands yourselves.”

“Oh, Fairy Honeysqueak, how sweet and kind of you to come once more. We shall miss you awfully. I guess we are the two luckiest girls in the world to know you. When it’s cold again and you have nothing to do, perhaps you’ll come back. Please.”

She laughed, and the sound was like the rocking of canterbury-bells atop of their long stalks, if you could only hear them.

“It has been lots of fun for me too, and maybe I’ll see you next year, though no one can tell about a fairy,” she answered. “Anyway, here we are now. And now for our last trip. How about going to Quaker-town to see a small maid called Darthea Penniston?”

“What larks! And shall we see Hugh Wynne too? And Washington? And....”

“I’m sure I don’t know what you’ll see or not see; keep your eyes open, that’s what they’re for. Except that you must shut them now, and grab my hands tight....”

So that's what was done, and once more the two felt the singular sensation, ending in a slight jar, which always accompanied their trips through the Magic Gate.

They found themselves in a garden, very bright and pretty with many flowers growing in beds bordered by little box hedges and separated by paths of red brick. A sun-dial was in the centre of the garden, where the paths met, while at the bottom of the garden ran a clear stream. Willows bowed over this, dipping the fine long ends of their slender branches in the water. A couple of benches stood under these trees. On one of these sat a little girl in a rose-pink gown, her hat hanging from her arm by long strings, a broad-brimmed leghorn with roses round the brim. She seemed to be studying, for there was a school book open on her knees.

Rose and Ruth were dressed in flowered muslin skirts, very full and reaching to their boot tops, with pointed bodices of the same pretty stuff having lace ruffles at the neck and elbow sleeves. Over this they each wore a little apron. Their shoes were square-toed, with big bright buckles, and they had on white stockings. Little bonnets were tied under their chins.

Demurely they walked down the sweet-smelling garden path toward the small, dark-haired maid seated on the bench. She pored over her book, and seemed in no special good spirits.

Just as they were on the point of speaking she looked up. Instantly a smile flooded her face like sudden sunshine on a dark day.

Up she jumped and was beside them in an instant.

"So you've really come! What good news this will be to Hugh and Jack, for I have promised them if you came that we will go to Hugh's house after school; his mother has told him to bring one or two of his school-mates to play in the garden this afternoon. And they look forward to meeting you. But we must hurry, we shall be late else, and there is no knowing what that hateful David Dove may not do in such a case."

Somewhat to their surprise Rose and Ruth found they had a few books strapped together under their arms. Evidently school it must be. So with Darthea they set off, through the gate that opened on a pretty street faced by neat houses, with cosy porches vine-embowered. Other children, singly and in groups, were bound the same way with themselves. Many of these were clad in sober grey, with white kerchiefs worn fichu-wise on the girls, and broad-brimmed Quaker hats on the boys.

“How grown-up they look in those funny clothes,” Ruth whispered to Rose. “Not at all like children. And how gravely they go along.”

Just here two boys, clad like those Ruth was criticising, in full-skirted coats and breeches reaching to the knee, with buckled shoes and wide-brimmed hats, sober-hued as mice, came round the corner of another street. When they saw Darthea and her friends they hastened their steps, and presently bowed before them gravely.

Darthea looked at them shyly under her long black lashes, introducing Rose and Ruth very prettily, however, in spite of her apparent confusion.

“This is Hugh Wynne, and his friend Jack Warner, Rose and Ruth. They are coming with me to your mother’s after school,” she added, turning to the boys.

“That is fine news,” answered Hugh smiling. “And she will have good cakes for us, and damson jam, and has promised to play at hide-and-find in the orchard with us.”

“What a dear mother you have, Hugh,” Darthea replied. “She is like one of us, yet so lovely a lady, too.”

Hugh nodded, looking much pleased. By this time the five of them had reached the school, a brick building rather plain and grim in appearance. The room where they were to study was long and low, with a huge blackboard at the upper end, near the master’s desk, and a globe by that. The master himself, a thin man with a prominent nose on which rested a pair of horn-bowed spectacles, sat waiting for the shuffling feet to be still and the children to be seated. Then he rose and began the afternoon exercises in a high, disagreeable voice.

Rose and Ruth looked about them, at the subdued rows of children, girls and boys, bent over their slates and books. When the teacher addressed one of these he or she stood up, put hands behind back, and answered in the best manner possible. Often they failed to please the master, however, whereupon he sneered at them, calling them in front of him to his desk. Once he made a boy stand up beside his desk with a paper pinned foolscap fashion on his head, at which the class giggled. But Rose and Ruth felt a helpless anger stir in them. They forthwith hated David Dove with a very real hatred.

Suddenly his eye fell on Ruth, and pointing a long finger at her, he asked her something in an abrupt tone. Confused, she did not catch his meaning.

“What did you say, sir?” she asked, her voice trembling a little.

“You know very well what I said,” returned the teacher, in a cold, slow way. “Answer me at once, or ’twill be the worse for you.”

Ruth looked helplessly at Rose, who flushed, fire leaping into her eyes.

“My sister is not a liar,” she said, addressing the teacher. “She told you she didn’t hear what you asked her, and she didn’t. Ask it again.”

There was a terrified hush over the school, and every eye turned to Rose and Ruth. As for the teacher, he seemed stunned.

Darthea jumped to her feet.

“These are friends of mine, sir,” she called out, though her voice shook more than Ruth’s had done. “They do not know the ways of this school yet, and have only come this morning for trial.”

“Ha,” exclaimed the teacher. “Then, since they are no scholars of mine, and cannot be punished for this insolence, you will please step up here, Darthea, and take a whipping for them.”

With tears, barely suppressed, Darthea stepped into the aisle and began to walk toward the desk. Utterly astounded for a second, Rose and Ruth stood motionless. Then they rushed after her, and all three came to halt before the master.

The two sisters were shaking with excitement and anger, so unjust and brutal the whole thing seemed to them. Looking up into the cold and sneering eyes of Mr. Dove, Rose spoke.

“Do you mean to say you are going to hit her! A man, and ... and ... you coward!”

For Rose had never imagined such a thing as this.

And Ruth said too, in a voice that was hoarse with emotion, “Yes, you coward.”

Darthea looked from one to the other in amazement.

Behind them there was a rustle all over the school. Murmurs rose, and some of the boys, including Hugh and Jack, stood up. The master faced the crowd of children for an instant, his eyes glittering.

“I will take this to your parents,” he said presently, looking icily around the room. Motioning to the girls, he added, “Sit down.”

Silently they returned to their places, though their hearts beat hard for some time. The hour dragged along, and at last the master rose, dismissing the school. In a moment every one was outside, crowding round the newcomers.

“You’ll catch it yet,” they said. “Wait till he’s had time to think over what to do.”

“Come along,” said Darthea. Hugh and Jack had quickly joined them, and off they went to Hugh’s big, comfortable house in the midst of its orchards and gardens. At the garden gate they were met by Mrs. Wynne, lovely in her Quaker dress, her eyes as blue as lakes, and a smile on the merriest mouth in the world.

“So here you are, the little friends of this boy of mine,” she cried. “And I have a bite or two of good things out in the garden for you. How went it at school to-day?”

They all told her at once, and she was much interested. “Brave words,” she said, “and brave behaviour too. And now let us forget all about this unkind Dove, who has the heart of a hawk, methinks.”

As they went into the garden, where under a sort of summer-house was set a table looking most hospitably loaded, she told them that Hugh’s father was at a friend’s house talking over the troubles between the Colonies and England.

“Colonel Washington and his lady are in town, up from Virginia on a visit, and the Colonel is pressing for some decisive action, so I heard your father say, Hugh. Naturally he is not too pleased at this, being a man of peace.”

“George Washington near here!” It was Rose who ejaculated these words, while Ruth stood rooted, her eyes fairly bulging.

“Yes,” returned Mrs. Wynne, calmly, and turning to Hugh, “your father thinks him a dangerous man, my son.”

“But, but, can we see him?” stuttered Rose.

Hugh’s mother laughed. “Are you so fond of the soldiers, Rose? But ’tis long since the colonel served. He is a married man now, very much settled and with a big estate to take care of in Virginia. Of course you shall see

him, if you wish to. The meeting will be over in half an hour, and he and his friends will pass here on the way to take a boat down the river.”

“It isn’t only that we love soldiers, it’s because, because....” Rose couldn’t remember just why it was so important to see Washington, though she felt her heart thumping at the thought, and saw in Ruth’s eyes the same puzzled excitement.

Mrs. Wynne turned to Darthea.

“I hear thy mother is better, child, which is good news. And you make school a far pleasanter place for Hugh, for which I thank you. Now come and help me with the tea and cakes.”

“Thank you, Mistress Wynne,” replied Darthea, smiling shyly. “Hugh and Jack and I have grown good friends at school, even though they be Quakers and I of Christ Church. May I fill these cups?” And very prettily she set about helping the others to the refreshments, while Mistress Wynne cut the cakes and served the preserves, luscious as can be imagined. Rose and Ruth and the two boys fell to in high delight, presently joined by Darthea. Then came the games, and none more joyous at these than Hugh’s sweet mother herself. They were all laughing and racing like wild things when Ruth, hiding behind a clump of Rose of Sharon, saw a group of gentlemen appearing down the street.

Instantly she rushed across the lawn, calling out, “Here comes Washington, here comes Washington,” and waving her arms. Rose was beside her in a moment, and the rest came laughing, Mrs. Wynne greatly amused at the two girls’ excitement over the Colonel.

“One would think him a hero to hear you two,” she declared. “But be quiet or Mr. Wynne will not be pleased. Softly now, we will walk down to the gate and speak to the gentlemen.”

A demure little crowd they were, standing primly, hand in hand, the three maids in front and Mrs. Wynne, with the boys either side of her, looking uncommonly pretty, behind them. Rose and Ruth saw some four or five men, two of unusual height, one of these in Quaker clothes, the other in a blue coat and cocked hat, with his hair in a queue ... the great Washington beyond a doubt!

As soon as they saw the lady the men removed their hats and bowed gravely, while the tall Quaker, frowning somewhat, asked what was wanted.

“These two maids were desirous of seeing you pass, Colonel Washington,” Mrs. Wynne told the man in blue, who stood smiling. “They could only tell me ‘because’ when I wanted to know why they were so pressing, but so it was.”

Rose and Ruth blushed, but they looked hard at the wonderful Washington, nevertheless. How tall he was, how kindly the look in his eyes, and his faint smile, as though his mind was busy with thoughts beyond the present moment, touched them. They curtsied instinctively, and Darthea did the same, flashing a mischievous look upward as she dropped her bonny head.

The Colonel laughed outright at the youngsters.

“Why these maids should desire to see me is beyond my guessing, Mistress Wynne,” he replied to the lady. “But after the somewhat grim consultation we have been engaged in, I know it is a pleasure to look on them.”

Every one bowed once more, and with another smile at the young girls, Washington turned to resume his way, bending once again to the speech of Mr. Wynne. The other men had meanwhile strolled on ahead.

The boys and Mrs. Wynne turned back to the house, but Rose, Ruth and Darthea remained hanging over the gate, watching their hero depart. At the street corner the group turned and disappeared. With a sigh the girls were about to follow their hostess into the house, when Rose noticed something lying on the pavement just where the men had turned.

“They’ve dropped something ... see!” she said, pointing this out to the two others.

“So they have!”

“Let’s go after them....”

And through the gate they flew, down the street, and there Rose picked up a wallet, initialled G. W.

“It’s HIS!” her voice struck with awe.

Already the men were out of sight. There stood the three girls, the wallet in Rose’s hands, all their eyes big with the wonder of it. What to do next?

“We must take it to him,” Darthea said. “He may not miss it until he is on board, and so too late.”

It certainly seemed the thing to do. With a backward glance at the house, but in vain so far as seeing Mrs. Wynne or the boys went, the three set briskly off down the street.

“You know the way, do you, Darthea?” Ruth panted, as they flew along.

“Oh yes! It is not far. Two turns, and then straight down to the river and the dock where the ship lies. Is this not fortunate? But how fast they have gone.”

They reached the next corner just in time to see the Colonel with Mr. Wynne turn again out of sight. Passers-by stared at them, for the streets of Philadelphia were unused to seeing three girls, bare-headed and panting, hurrying frantically along.

“Suppose we miss him, what will we do?” Ruth gasped.

“We won’t,” Rose returned. “Look, there’s the river now.”

There was the flash of water, to be sure, and the street down which Darthea now led them stepped to its edge. At the foot of it there was a dock, busy with all the stir of departing ships and arriving passengers. Sailors were rushing about, porters hoisting baggage, a crowd of men and boys jostled each other, women and children too were to be seen.

Grasping the wallet firmly, and closely pursued by Ruth and Darthea, Rose dodged in and out of the crowd to the gangway leading on board. There a soldier was stationed, and as the three came running up, looking everywhere for Colonel Washington or the men of his party, he halted them.

“Are you sailing by this ship?” he wanted to know, looking doubtfully at their hatless state.

“No, but we have something of Colonel Washington’s which he let fall on the way here,” said Rose. “Let us in quickly, so that we can find him before the ship sails.”

The man hesitated. “Colonel who? I know him not. What game are you playing?”

He looked stupid and sullen, and the girls drew back dismayed. Just then Mr. Wynne appeared on deck, coming toward the gangway.

Rose flourished the wallet at him. “Make this man let us through,” she cried. “Colonel Washington dropped this beyond your gate, and we’ve brought it.”

The Quaker looked at them severely, but motioned the soldier to allow them to pass.

“It is not meet for you to come like this,” he said sternly, looking at them gravely as they came timidly up to him. “Where was Hugh that he could not have fetched the packet hither?”

“They had gone into the house, and I happened to see it as you all turned the corner,” explained Rose. “Please, may I give it to the Colonel?” and she clutched the wallet tightly to her breast.

“Nonsense. Give it to me,” said Mr. Wynne.

Rose stood uncertainly, and Darthea gave her a look of encouragement, just a flash, but it heartened her.

“I want to give it, please, myself,” she repeated.

Mr. Wynne looked surprised, but before he could say anything Ruth saw the Colonel, talking with two of the men who had passed their gate, standing just inside a door leading into the ship’s cabin. She slipped hastily up to him.

“Please, Colonel Washington,” she whispered, touching his sleeve, “my sister has brought your wallet, which you dropped....”

Washington clapped his hand to his breast, a look of consternation on his face. “Dropped ... good heavens, so I did,” he exclaimed. “What, your sister you say?” he added, looking down at Ruth’s flushed face.

“Yes,” and catching his hand, she drew him toward the group, where Rose and Darthea faced Mr. Wynne.

As the two approached, the Colonel stepping eagerly forward, Rose saw him, and ran to meet him, holding up the precious find.

“Thank you, a thousand thanks,” he said, in his deep voice, as he took the thing from her hand. “Did you three race hither with this for me? It was a sweet and thoughtful act, and I cannot tell you how much I am under obligation to you. Even the temporary loss of this wallet would mean more to me than I care to think of.”

“But it’s wonderful to do something for you,” returned Rose, and her eyes filled with tears.

“Dear maid,” said the tall Colonel, touched to the quick, “I hope your kindness to me will not prove more than I deserve. You have done me no

small service. I wish I might requite it.” He held out both hands as he spoke, smiling so winningly that without an instant’s hesitation Rose put hers into them and lifted her face to be kissed. Then Ruth and then Darthea must have one too, while they all laughed, even Mr. Wynne.

“Foolish children,” he said. “You must forgive them, Colonel. Since Braddock’s day, you have been a hero, you know.”

The Colonel shook his head.

“The maids have put me doubly in their debt,” he said. The soldier now called out that the gangway was to be withdrawn, so Mr. Wynne drove them all before him off the ship. On the dock they stood waving as the ship drew away, watching that tall figure in blue as he returned the salute. Waving farewell till the Quaker bade them follow him home, and be sensible.

They turned back to the town as the last streak of sunlight shone on the sails, tingeing them with a pale salmony pink, and flushing the waves that rippled by the prow. Washington waved his handkerchief a last time, his white head clear against the dark woodwork behind him. Gulls swept the air above, and a chantey rose upward as the sailors worked at the ropes. Rose and Ruth felt their hearts swell to think they had served this man. Hand in hand with Darthea they followed the tall Quaker back through the streets, chatting of the adventure they had had.

“Why do you think so much of Mr. Washington?” Darthea was asking, as they reached the gate of her house, to which Mr. Wynne had taken them.

It was odd that Rose and Ruth could not quite remember what it was they knew of him. Surely he ... he....

“Why, he was the Father of his country,” exclaimed Ruth, and at the same instant Rose actually shouted: “He is the first, the greatest, the man who made us America.”

But where was Darthea? Where the bricked street, the green-bowered garden, the stiff figure of the Quaker moving off?

Gone like a dream. And there instead was the placid lake, the cottonwoods, the grazing ponies and the sun low in the western sky.

It was time to saddle and get home.

They rode back talking of it, and wondering why they hadn’t been able to tell Darthea about Washington. But at last Rose thought she understood.

“You see, where we were, it hadn’t happened yet,” she said. “The fairy took us to the time before Washington had beaten the English and made us a nation, so of course we didn’t remember ... what hadn’t yet happened.”

“But I *almost* did,” Ruth asserted.

“Think of having been kissed by Washington,” Rose continued. “I guess we’ll never forget *that*, anyhow.”

And they never did, though they never remembered at the right time to tell Marmie or Dad or anybody else, except once when Rose was talking in her sleep, her mother heard her say something to the effect that she and Ruth were the only little girls in America Washington had ever kissed. When she told Rose about it next morning, the little girl was confused.

“Somehow I think he really did, Marmie ... only I can’t explain,” she said. But Marmie only laughed, calling her a funny little dreamer.

In the summer that followed Rose and Ruth saw no more of the Winter Fairy who had taken them on so many delightful excursions through the Magic Gate. Often they talked of her, and occasionally, just before falling asleep, they thought they caught a faint sound of her voice, almost like moonbeams singing. But of this they could not be quite sure. When they turned the pages of the books in which lived the heroines she had taken them to see, it almost seemed to them at times that she had left the key of that Gate in their hands, and that the story was real to them ... real as the house in which they lived, real as themselves.

But when they told this to their mother she smiled, and said it was imagination, and kissed them.

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1. Silently corrected typographical errors and variations in spelling.
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