

# GRAND SARAH

THE BETH  
BOOK

Sarah Grand

**The Beth Book**

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# **Sarah Grand**

## **The Beth Book Being a Study of the Life of Elizabeth Caldwell Maclure, a Woman of Genius**

*"I cannot gather the sunbeams out of the east, or I would make them tell you what I have seen; but read this and interpret this, and let us remember together. I cannot gather the gloom out of the night sky, or I would make that tell you what I have seen; but read this and interpret this, and let us feel together. And if you have not that within you which I can summon to my aid, if you have not the sun in your spirit and the passion in your heart which my words may awaken, though they be indistinct and swift, leave me, for I will give you no patient mockery, no labouring insults of that glorious Nature whose I am and whom I serve." – Ruskin.*

*"The men who come on the stage at one period are all found to be related to one another. Certain ideas are in the air. We are all impressionable, for we are made of them; all impressionable, but some more than others, and these first express them. This explains the curious contemporaneousness of inventions and discoveries. The truth is in the air, and the most impressionable brain will announce it first, but all will announce it a few minutes later. So women, as most susceptible, are the best index of the coming hour." – Emerson.*

## CHAPTER I

The day preceding Beth's birth was a grey day, a serene grey day, awesome with a certain solemnity, and singularly significant to those who seek a sign. There is a quiet mood, an inner calm, to which a grey day adds peculiar solace. It is like the relief which follows after tears, when hope begins to revive, and the warm blood throbs rebelliously to be free of the shackles of grief; a certain heaviness still lingers, but only as a luxurious languor which is a pleasure in itself. In other moods, however, in pain, in doubt, in suspense, the grey day deepens the depression of the spirits, and also adds to the sense of physical discomfort. Mrs. Caldwell, looking up at noon from the stocking she was mending, and seeing only a slender strip of level gloom above the houses opposite, suddenly experienced a mingled feeling of chilliness and dread, and longed for a fire, although the month was June. She could not afford fires at that time of year, yet she thought how nice it would be to have one, and the more she thought of it the more chilly she felt. A little comfort of the kind would have meant so much to her that morning. She would like to have felt it right to put away the mending, sit by a good blaze with a book, and absorb herself in somebody else's thoughts, for her own were far from cheerful. She was weak and ill and anxious, the mother of six children already, and about to produce a seventh on an income that would have been insufficient for four. It was a reckless thing for a delicate woman to do, but she never thought of that. She lived in the days when no one thought of the waste of women in this respect, and they had not begun to think for themselves. What she suffered she accepted as her "lot," or "The Will of God" – the expression varied with the nature of the trouble; extreme pain was "The Will of God," but minor discomforts and worries were her "lot." That much of the misery was perfectly preventable never occurred to her, and if any one had suggested such a thing she would have been shocked. The parson in the pulpit preached endurance; and she understood that anything in the nature of resistance, any discussion even of social problems, would not only have been a flying in the face of Providence, but a most indecent proceeding. She knew that there was crime and disease in the world, but there were judges and juries to pursue criminals, doctors to deal with diseases, and the clergy to speak a word in season to all, from the murderer on the scaffold to the maid who had misconducted herself. There was nothing eccentric about Mrs. Caldwell; she accepted the world just as she found it, and was satisfied to know that effects were being dealt with. Causes she never considered, because she knew nothing about them.

But she was ill at ease that morning, and did think it rather hard that she should not have had time to recover from her last illness. She acknowledged to herself that she was very weak, that it was hard to drag the darning-needle through that worn stocking, and, oh dear! the holes were so many and so big that week, and there were such quantities of other things to be done, clothes mended and made for the children, besides household matters to be seen to generally; why wasn't she strong? That was the only thing she repined about, poor woman, her want of physical strength. She would work until she dropped, however, and mortal man could expect no more of her, she assured herself with a sigh of satisfaction, in anticipation of the inevitable event which would lay her by, and so release her from all immediate responsibility. Worn and weary working mothers, often uncomplaining victims of the cruelest exactions, toilers whose day's work is never done, no wonder they welcome even the illness which enforces rest in bed, the one holiday that is ever allowed them. Mrs. Caldwell thought again of the fire and the book. She had read a good deal at one time, and had even been able to play, and sing, and draw, and paint with a dainty touch; but since her marriage, the many children, the small means, and the failing strength had made all such pursuits an impossible luxury. The fire and the book – who knows what they might not have meant, what a benign difference the small relaxation allowed to the mother at this critical time might not have made in the temperament of the child? Perhaps, if we could read the events even of that one day aright, we should find in them the clue to all that was inexplicable in its subsequent career.

In deciding that she could not afford a fire for herself, Mrs. Caldwell had glanced round the room, and noticed that the whisky bottle on the sideboard was all but empty. She got up hastily, and went into the kitchen.

"I had quite forgotten the whisky," she said to the maid-of-all-work, who was scraping potatoes at the sink. "Your master will be so put out if there isn't enough. You must go at once and get some – six bottles. Bring one with you, and let them send the rest."

The girl turned upon her with a scowl. "And who's to do my dinner?" she demanded.

"I'll do what I can," Mrs. Caldwell answered. The servant threw the knife down on the potatoes, and turned from the sink sullenly, wiping her hands on her apron as she went.

Mrs. Caldwell rolled up her sleeves, and set to work, but awkwardly. Household work comes naturally to many educated women; they like it, and they do it well; but Mrs. Caldwell was not one of this kind. She was not made for labour, but for luxury; her hands and arms, both delicately beautiful in form and colour, alone showed that. Her whole air betokened gentle birth and breeding. She looked out of place in the kitchen, and it was evident that she could only acquit herself well among the refinements of life. She set to work with a will, however, for she had the pluck and patience of ten men. She peeled vegetables, chopped meat, fetched water, carried coals to mend the fire, did all that had to be done to the best of her ability, although she had to cling many times to table, or chair, or dresser, to recover from the exertion, and brace herself for a fresh attempt. When she had done in the kitchen she went to the dining-room and laid the cloth. The sulky servant did not hurry back. She had a trick of lingering long on errands, and when at last she did appear she brought no whisky.

"They're going to send it," she explained. "They promised to send it at once."

"But I told you to bring a bottle!" Mrs. Caldwell exclaimed, stamping her foot imperiously.

The girl walked off to the kitchen, and slammed the door.

Mrs. Caldwell's forehead was puckered with a frown, but she got out the mending again, and sat down to it in the dining-room with dogged determination.

Presently there was a step outside. She looked up and listened. The front door opened. Her worn face brightened; backache and weariness were forgotten; her husband had come home; and it was as if the clouds had parted and the sun shone forth.

She looked up brightly to greet him. "You've got your work over early to-day," she said.

"I have," he answered drily, without looking at her.

The smile froze on her lips. He had come back in an irritable mood. He went to the sideboard when he had spoken, and poured himself out a stiff glass of whisky-and-water, which he carried to the window, where he stood with his back to his wife, looking out. He was a short man, who made an instant impression of light eyes in a dark face. You would have looked at him a second time in the street, and thought of him after he had passed, so striking was the peculiar contrast. His features were European, but his complexion, and his soft glossy black hair, curling close and crisp to the head, betrayed a dark drop in him, probably African. In the West Indies he would certainly have been set down as a quadroon. There was no record of negro blood in the family, however, no trace of any ancestor who had lived abroad; and the three moors' heads with ivory rings through their noses which appeared in one quarter of the scutcheon were always understood by later generations to have been a distinction conferred for some special butchery-business among the Saracens.

Mrs. Caldwell glanced at her husband, as he stood with his back to her in the window, and then went on with the mending, patiently waiting till the mood should have passed off, or she should have thought of something with which to beguile him.

When he had finished the whisky-and-water, he turned and looked at her with critical disapprobation.

"I wonder why it is when a woman marries she takes no more pains with herself," he ejaculated. "When I married you, you were one of the smartest girls I ever saw."

"It would be difficult to be smart just now," she answered.

He made a gesture of impatience. "But why should a woman give up everything when she marries? You had more accomplishments than most of them, and now all you do, it seems to me, is the mending."

"The mending must be done," she answered deprecatingly, "and I'm not very strong. I'm not able to do everything. I would if I could."

There was a wild stampede at this moment. The four elder children had returned from school, and the two younger ones from a walk with their nurse, and now burst into the room, in wild spirits, demanding dinner. It was the first bright moment of the morning for their mother, but her husband promptly spoilt her pleasure.

"Sit down at table," he roared, "and don't let me hear another word from any of you. A man comes home to be quiet, and this is the kind of thing that awaits him!"

The children shrank to their places abashed, while their mother escaped to the kitchen to hurry the dinner. The form – or farce – of grace was gone through before the meal commenced. The children ate greedily, but were obediently silent. All the little confidences and remarks which it would have been so healthy for them to make, and so good for their mother to hear, had to be suppressed, and the silence and constraint made everyone dyspeptic. The dinner consisted of only one dish, a hash, which Mrs. Caldwell had made because her husband had liked it so much the last time they had had it. He turned it over on his plate now, however, ominously, blaming the food for his own want of appetite. Mrs. Caldwell knew the symptoms, and sighed.

"I can't eat this stuff," he said at last, pushing his plate away from him.

"There's a pudding coming," his wife replied.

"Oh, a pudding!" he exclaimed. "I know what our puddings are. Why aren't women taught something sensible? What's the use of all your accomplishments if you can't cook the simplest dish? What a difference it would have made to my life if you had been able to make pastry even."

Mrs. Caldwell thought of the time she had spent on her feet in the kitchen that morning doing her best, and she also thought how easy it would have been for him to marry a woman who could cook, if that were all he wanted; but she had no faint glimmering conception that it was unreasonable to expect a woman of her class to cook her dinner as well as eat it. One servant is not expected to do another's work in any establishment; but a mother on a small income, the most cruelly tried of women, is too often required to be equal to anything. Mrs. Caldwell said nothing, however. She belonged to the days when a wife's meek submission to anything a man chose to say made nagging a pleasant relaxation for the man, and encouraged him to persevere until he acquired a peculiar ease in the art, and spoilt the tempers of everybody about him.

The arrival of the family doctor put an end to the scene. Mrs. Caldwell told the children to run away, and her husband's countenance cleared.

"Glad to see you, Gottley," he said. "What will you have?"

"Oh, nothing, thank you. I can't stay a moment. I just looked in to see how Mrs. Caldwell was getting on."

"Oh, she's all right," her husband answered for her cheerfully. "How are you all, especially Miss Bessie?"

"Ha! ha!" said the old gentleman, sitting down by the table. "That reminds me I'm not on good terms with Bessie this morning. I'm generally careful, you know, but it seems I said something disrespectful about a Christian brother – a *Christian* brother, mind you – and I've been had up before the family tribunal for blasphemy, and condemned to everlasting punishment. Lord! – But, mark my words," he exclaimed emphatically, "a time will come when every school-girl will see, what my life is made a burden to me for seeing now, the absurdity of the whole religious superstition."

"O doctor!" Mrs. Caldwell cried, "surely you believe in God?"

"God has not revealed Himself to me, madam; I know nothing about Him," the old gentleman answered gently.

"Ah, there you know you are wrong, Gottley," Mr. Caldwell chimed in, and then he proceeded to argue the question. The old doctor, being in a hurry, said little in reply, and when he had gone Mrs. Caldwell exclaimed, with wifely tact —

"Well, I think you had the best of that!"

"Well, I think I had, poor old buffer!" her husband answered complacently, his temper restored. "By the way, I've brought in the last number of Dickens. Shall I read it to you?"

Her face brightened. "Yes, do," she rejoined. "One moment, till Jane has done clearing the table. Here's your chair," and she placed the only easy one in the room for him, in the best light.

These readings were one of the joys of her life. He read to her often, and read exceedingly well. Books were the bond of union between them, the prop and stay of their married life. Poor as they were, they always managed to find money for new ones, which they enjoyed together in this way. Intellectuality balanced the morbid irritability of the husband's temperament, and literature made life tolerable to them both as nothing else could have done. As he read now, his countenance cleared, and his imaginary cares fell from him; while his wife's very real ones were forgotten as she listened, and there was a blessed truce to trouble for a time. Unfortunately, however, as the reading proceeded, he came to a rasping bit of the story, which began to grate upon his nerves. The first part had been pleasurable exciting, but when he found the sensation slipping from him, he thought to stay it with a stimulant, and went to the sideboard for the purpose. Mrs. Caldwell's heart sank; the whisky bottle was all but empty.

"Oh, damn it!" he exclaimed, banging it down on the sideboard. "And I suppose there is none in the house. There never is any in the house. No one looks after anything. My comfort is never considered. It is always those damned children."

"Henry!" his wife protested; but she was too ill to defend herself further.

"What a life for a man," he proceeded; "stuck down in this cursed hole, without a congenial soul to speak to, in or out of the house."

"That is a cruel thing to say, Henry," she remonstrated with dignity.

"Well, I apologise," he rejoined ungraciously. "But you must confess that I have some cause to complain."

He was standing behind her as he spoke, and she felt that he eyed her the while with disapproval of her appearance, and anger at her condition. She knew the look only too well, poor soul, and her attitude was deprecating as she sat there gazing up pitifully at the strip of level greyness above the houses opposite. She said nothing, however, only rocked herself on her chair, and looked forlornly miserable; seeing which brought his irritation to a climax. He flung the book across the room; but even in the act, his countenance cleared. He was standing in the window, and caught a glimpse of Bessie Gottley, who was passing at the moment on the opposite side of the road, and looked across at him, smiling and nodding invitingly. Mrs. Caldwell saw the pantomime, and her heart contracted with a pang when she saw how readily her husband responded. It was hard that the evil moods should not be conquered for her as well as for Bessie Gottley.

Bridget came in just then, bringing the belated whisky.

"Oh, you did order it," he graciously acknowledged. "Why didn't you say so?" He opened the bottle, and poured some out for himself. "Here's to the moon-faced Bessie!" he said jocularly.

Mrs. Caldwell went on with the mending. Her husband began to walk up and down the room, in a good humour again. He walked peculiarly, more on his toes than his heels, with an odd little spring in each step, as if it were the first step of a dance. This springiness gave to his gait a sort of buoyancy which might have seemed natural to him, if exaggerated, in his youth, but had the air of an affectation in middle life, as if it were part of an assumption of juvenility.

"Won't you go on with the reading?" his wife said at last. His restlessness worried her.

"No," he answered; "I shall go out. I want exercise."

"When will you be back?" she asked wistfully.

"Oh, hang it all! don't nag me. I shall come back when I like."

He left the room as he spoke, slamming the door behind him. Mrs. Caldwell did not alter her attitude, but the tears welled up in her eyes, and ran down her haggard cheeks unheeded. The children came in, and finding her so, quietly left the room, all but the eldest girl, who went and leant against her, slipping her little hand through her mother's arm. The poor woman kissed the child passionately; then, with a great effort, recovered her self-control, put her work away, gave the children their tea, read to them for an hour, and saw them to bed. The front door was open when she came downstairs, and she went to shut it. A lady, who knew her, happened to be passing, and stopped to shake hands. "I saw your husband just now sitting on the beach with Bessie Gottley," she informed Mrs. Caldwell pleasantly. "They were both laughing immoderately."

"Very likely," Mrs. Caldwell responded with a smile. "She amuses my husband immensely. But won't you come in?"

"No, thank you. Not to-night. I am hurrying home. Glad to see you looking so well;" with which she nodded, and went her way; and Mrs. Caldwell returned to the little dining-room, holding her head high till she had shut the door, when she burst into a tempest of tears. She was a lymphatic woman ordinarily, but subject to sudden squalls of passion, when she lost all self-control.

She would have sobbed aloud now, when the fit was on her, in the face of the whole community, although the constant effort of her life was to keep up appearances. She had recovered herself, however, before the servant came in with the candles, and was sitting in the window looking out anxiously. The greyness of the long June day was darkening down to night now, but there was no change in the sultry stillness of the air. Summer lightning played about in the strip of sky above the houses opposite. One of the houses was a butcher's shop, and while Mrs. Caldwell sat there, the butcher brought out a lamb and killed it. Mrs. Caldwell watched the operation with interest. They did strange things in those days in that little Irish seaport, and, being an Englishwoman, she looked on like a civilised traveller intelligently studying the customs of a savage people.

But as the darkness gathered, the trouble of her mind increased. Her husband did not return, and a sickening sensation of dread took possession of her. Where had he gone? What was he doing? Doubtless enjoying himself – what bitterness there was in the thought! She did not grudge him any pleasure, but it was hard that he should find so little in her company. Why was there no distraction for her? The torment of her mind was awful; should she try his remedy? She went to the sideboard and poured herself out some whisky, but even as she raised it to her lips she felt it unworthy to have recourse to it, and put the glass down untouched.

After that she went and leant against the window-frame. It was about midnight, and very few people passed. Whenever a man appeared in the distance, she had a moment of hope, but only to be followed by the sickening sensation of another disappointment. The mental anguish was so great that for some time she paid no attention to physical symptoms which had now begun. By degrees, however, these became importunate, and oh the relief of it! The trouble of her mind ceased when the physical pain became acute, and therefore she welcomed it as a pleasant distraction. She was obliged to think and be practical too; there was no one in the house to help her. The sleeping children were of course out of the question, and the two young servants, maid-of-all-work and nurse, nearly as much so. Besides, there was the difficulty of calling them. She felt she must not disturb Jane who was in the nursery, for fear of rousing the children; but should she ever get to Bridget's room, which was further off? Step by step she climbed the stairs, clinging to the banister with one hand, holding the candle in the other. Several times she sank down and waited silently, but with contracted face, till a paroxysm had passed. At last she reached the door. Bridget was awake and had heard her coming. "Holy Mother!" she exclaimed, startled out of her habitual sullenness by her mistress's agonised face. "Yer ill, ma'am! Let me help you to your bed!"

"Fetch the doctor and the nurse, Bridget," Mrs. Caldwell was just able to gasp.

In the urgency and excitement of the moment, there was a truce to hostilities. Bridget jumped up, in night-dress and bare feet, and supported her mistress to her room. There she was obliged to leave her alone; and so it happened that, just as the grey dawn trembled with the first flush of a new and brighter day, the child arrived unassisted and without welcome, and sent up a wail of protest. When the doctor came at last, and had time to attend to her, he pronounced her to be a fine child, and declared that she had made a good beginning, and would do well for herself, which words the nurse declared to be of happy omen. Her father was not fit to appear until late in the day. He came in humbly, filled with remorse for that mis-spent night, and was received with the feeble flicker of a smile, which so touched and softened him that he made more of the new child, and took a greater interest in her than he had done in any of the others at the time of their birth. There was some difficulty about a name for her. Her father proposed to call her Elizabeth – after his sister, he said – but Mrs. Caldwell objected. Elizabeth was Miss Gottley's name also, a fact which she recollected, but did not mention. That she did not like the name seemed reason enough for not choosing it; but her husband persisted, and then there was a hot dispute on the subject above the baby's cradle. The dispute ended in a compromise, the mother agreeing to have the child christened Elizabeth if she were not called so; and she would not have her called Eliza, Elsie, Elspeth, Bessie, Betsy, or Bess either. This left nothing for it but to call her Beth, and upon consideration both parents liked the diminutive, her father because it was unaccustomed, and her mother because it had no association of any kind attached to it.

For the first three months of her life Beth cried incessantly, as if bewailing her advent. Then, one day, she opened her eyes wide, and looked out into the world with interest.

## CHAPTER II

It was the sunshine really that first called her into conscious existence, the blessed heat and light; up to the moment that she recognised these with a certain acknowledgment of them, and consequently of things in general outside herself, she had been as unconscious as a white grub without legs. But that moment roused her, calling forth from her senses their first response in the thrill of warmth and well-being to which she awoke, and quickening her intellect at the same time with the stimulating effort to discover from whence her comfort came. She could remember no circumstance in connection with this earliest awakening. All she knew of it was the feeling of warmth and brightness, which she said recurred to her at odd times ever afterwards, and could be recalled at will.

Some may see in this first awakening a foreshadowing of the fact that she was born to be a child of light, and to live in it; and certainly it was always light for which she craved, the actual light of day, however; but nothing she yearned for ever came to her in the form she thought of, and thus, when she asked for sunshine it was grudgingly given, fate often forcing her into dark dwellings; but all the time that light which illumines the spirit was being bestowed upon her in limitless measure.

The next step in her awakening was to a kind of self-consciousness. She was lying on her nurse's lap out of doors, looking up at the sky, and some one was saying, "Oh, you pretty thing!" But it was long years before she connected the phrase with herself, although she smiled in response to the voice that uttered it. Then she found herself on her feet in a garden, moving very carefully for fear of falling; and everything about her was gigantic, from Jane Nettles, the nurse, at whose skirt she tugged when she wanted to attract attention, to the brown wallflower and the purple larkspur which she could not reach to pull. There was a thin hedge at the end of the garden, through which she looked out on a path across a field, and a thick hedge on her left, in which a thrush had built a nest at an immense height above her head. Jane lifted her up to look into the nest, and there was nothing in it; then Jane lifted her up again, and, oh! there was a blue egg there; and Jane lifted her up a third time, and the egg had brown spots on it. The mystery of the egg awed her. She did not ask herself how it came to be there, but she felt a solemn wonder in the fact, and the colour caused a sensation of pleasure, a positive thrill, to run through her. This was her first recognition of beauty, and it was to the beauty of colour, not of form, that her senses awoke! Through life she had a keen joy and nice discrimination in colours, and seemed to herself to have always known their names.

But those spots on the egg. She was positive that they had come between her first and second peep, which shows how defective her faculty of observation, which became so exact under cultivation, was to begin with. Beth also betrayed other traits with regard to the spots, which she carried through life – the trick of being most positive when she was quite in the wrong, for one; and want of faith in other people, for another.

Jane said: "Did you see the spots that time, dearie?"

"Spots just comed," Beth declared.

"No, dearie, spots always there," Jane answered.

"Spots *comed*," Beth maintained.

"No, dearie. Spots always there, only you didn't see them."

"Spots comed *now*!" Beth stamped, and then, because Jane shook her head, she sat down suddenly on the gravel, and sent up a howl which brought her father out. He chuckled Jane under the chin. Jane giggled, then made a sign; and there was Mrs. Caldwell looking from one to the other.

To Beth's recollection it seemed as if she had rapidly acquired the experiences of this first period. Each incident that she remembered is apparently trifling in itself, but who can say of what significance as an indication? In those first few years, had there been any there with intelligence to interpret, they probably would have found foreshadowings of all she might be, and do, and suffer; and that would have been the time to teach her. To me, therefore, these earliest impressions are more

interesting than much that occurred to her in after life, and I have carefully collected them in the hope of finding some clue in them to what followed. In several instances it seems to me that the impression left by some chance observation or incident on her baby mind, made it possible for her to do many things in after life which she certainly never would have done but for those early influences. It would be affectation, therefore, to apologise for such detail. Nothing can be trivial or insignificant that tends to throw light on the mysterious growth of our moral and intellectual being. Many a cramped soul that struggles on in after years, vainly endeavouring to rise on a broken wing, might, had the importance of such seeming trifles in its development been recognised, have won its way upward from the first, untrammelled and uninjured. It was a Jesuit, was it not, who said: "Give me the child until it is six years old; after that you can do as you like with it." That is the time to make an indelible impression of principles upon the mind. In the first period of life, character is a blossom that should be carefully touched; in the second the petals fall, and the fruit sets; it is hard and acrid then until the third period, when, if things go well, it will ripen on the bough, and be sweet and wholesome – if ill, it will drop off immediately, and rot upon the ground.

Beth was a combative child, always at war with Jane. There was a great battle fought about a big black velvet bonnet that Beth wanted to wear one day. Beth screamed and kicked and scratched and bit, and finally went out in the bonnet triumphantly, and found herself standing alone on the edge of a great green world dotted with yellow gorse. A hot, wide dusty road stretched miles away in front of her; and at an infinite distance overhead was the blue sky flecked with clouds so white and dazzling that her eyes ached when she looked at them. She had stopped a moment to cry, "Wait for me!" Jane walked on, however, taking no notice, and Beth struggled after her, whimpering, out of breath, choked with dust, scorched with heat, parched with thirst, tired to death – how she suffered! A heartless lark sang overhead, regardless of her misery: and she never afterwards heard a lark without recalling the long white road, the heat, and dust, and fatigue. She tore off the velvet bonnet, and threw it away, then began another despairing "Wait for me!" But in the midst of the cry she saw some little yellow flowers growing in the grass at the roadside, and plumped down then and there inconsequently to gather them. By that time Jane was out of sight; and at the moment Beth became aware of the fact, she also perceived an appalling expanse of bright blue sky above her, and sat, gazing upwards, paralysed with terror. This was her first experience of loneliness, her first terrified sensation of immensity.

Then the snowdrops and crocuses were out, and the sky grew black, and she sat on the nursery floor and looked up at it in solemn wonder. Flakes of snow began to fall, a few at first, then thicker and thicker, till the air was full of them, and Jane said, "The Scotch are picking their geese," and immediately Beth saw the Scotch sitting in some vague scene, picking geese in frenzied haste, and throwing great handfuls of feathers up in the air; which was probably the first independent flight of her imagination.

It is astonishing how little consciousness of time there is in these reminiscences. The seasons are all confounded, and it is as if things had happened not in succession but abreast. There was snow on the ground when her brother Jim was with her in the wash-house, making horse-hair snares to catch birds. They made running loops of the horse-hair, and tied them on to sticks, then went out and stuck them in the ground in the garden outside the wash-house window, sprinkled crumbs of bread, and crept carefully back to watch. First came a robin with noiseless flight, and lit on the ground with its head on one side; but the children were too eager, and in their excitement they made a noise, and the robin flew away. Next came a sparrow, saw the children, saw the crumbs, and, with the habitual self-possession of his race, stretched in his head between the sticks, picked out the largest piece of bread, and carried it off in triumph. Immediately afterwards a blackbird flew down, and hopped in among the snares unconsciously. In a moment he was caught, and, with a wild shout of joy, the children rushed out to secure their prize; but when they reached the spot the blackbird had burst his bonds and escaped. Then Beth threw a chunk of wood at her brother, and cut his head open. His cries brought out the household, and Beth was well shaken – she was always being shaken at this time –

and marched off promptly to papa's dressing-room, and made to sit on a little chair in the middle of the floor, where she amused herself by singing at the top of her voice —

"All around Sebastopol,  
All around the ocean,  
Every time a gun goes off,  
Down falls a Russian."

She wondered why her father and mother were laughing when they came to release her. Before they appeared, however, brother Jim, her victim, had come to the door with his head tied up, and peeped in; and she knew that they were friends again, because he shot ripe gooseberries at her across the floor as if they had been marbles. There is a discrepancy here, seeing that snow and ripe gooseberries are not in season at the same time. It is likely, however, that she broke her brother's head more than once, and the occasions became confounded in her recollection.

When the children went to bathe off the beach, Beth would not let Jane dip her if kicking, scratching, and screaming could prevent it. There used to be terrible scenes between them, until at last one day somebody else's old Scotch nurse interfered, and persuaded Beth to go into the water with her and consent to be dipped three times. Beth went like a lamb — instead of having to be dragged in and pushed under, given no time to recover her breath between each dip, half choked with sand and salt water, and finally dragged out, exhausted by the struggle, and certainly suffering more than she had benefited by the immersion. The cold water came up about her and took her breath away as the old Scotch nurse led her in, and Beth clung to her hand and panted "Wait!" as she nerved herself for the dip. Nurse had promised to wait until Beth was ready, and it was Beth's faith in her promise that gave her courage to go bravely through the ordeal. The old Scotch nurse never deceived her as Jane had done, and so Beth learnt that there are people in the world you can depend on.

There was one painful circumstance in connection with those battles on the beach. Beth was such a tiny girl, they did not think it necessary to give her a bathing dress, and consequently she was marched into the water with nothing on; and the agony of shame she suffered is indescribable. But the worst of it was, the shame wore off. Jim teased her about it and called her "a little girl," a dreadful term of reproach in those days, when the boys were taught to consider themselves superior beings. Beth flew at him, and fought him for it, but was beaten; and then she took off her things in the nursery, and scampered up and down before them all, with nothing on, just to show how little she cared.

It is astonishing how small a part Beth's family play in these childish recollections. Her father took very little notice of the children. He was out of health and irritable, and only tried to save himself annoyance; not to disturb him was the object of everybody's life. Probably he only appeared on the scene when Beth was naughty, and the recollection, being painful, was quickly banished. She remembered him coming downstairs when she was standing in the hall one day, when her mother was away from home. He had a letter in his hand, and asked her if she would send her love to mamma. Her heart bounded; it seemed to her such a tremendous thing to be asked; and she was dying to send her love; but such an agony of shyness came upon her, she could not utter a word. She had a little hymn-book in her hand, however, which she held out to her father. No, that would not do. He could not send the book, only her love. Didn't she love mamma? Didn't she! But not a word would come.

All through life she was afflicted with that inability to speak at critical times. Dumb always was she apt to be when her affections were concerned, except occasionally, in moments of strong excitement; and in anger, when she was driven to bay. The intensity of her feelings would probably have made her dumb in any case in moments of emotion; but doubtless the hardness of those about her at this impressionable period strengthened the defect. It is impossible to escape from the hampering influences of our infancy. Among Beth's many recollections of these days, there was not one of a caress given or received, or of any expression of tenderness; and so she never became familiar with

the exquisite language of love, and was long in learning that it is not a thing to be ashamed of and concealed.

Later that day, with a mighty effort, she summoned up courage enough to go down to her father. She was determined to send the message to mamma; but when it came to the point, she was again unable to utter a word on the subject. Her mother had gone to stay with her relations in England. Beth found her father in the dining-room, and several other people were present. He was standing by the sideboard, mixing whisky-and-water, so, instead of sending her love to mamma, Beth exclaimed, confidently and pleasantly, "If you drink whisky, you'll be drunk again."

A smart slap rewarded this sally. Beth turned pale and recoiled. It was her first taste of human injustice. To drink and to be drunk was to her merely the natural sequence of cause and effect, and she could not conceive why she should be slapped and turned out of the room so promptly for uttering such a simple truth.

Beth was present at many discussions between her father and mother, and took much interest in them, all the more perhaps, because most of what was said was a mystery to her. She wondered why any mention of the "moon-faced Bessie" disturbed her mother's countenance. Jane Nettles, too – when her mother was out, her father used to come and talk to Jane, and they laughed a good deal. He admired Jane's white teeth, and the children used to make Jane show them her teeth after that.

"Papa says Jane's got nice white teeth," Beth said to her mother one day, and she never forgot the glance which Mrs. Caldwell threw at her husband. His eyes fell before it.

"What! even the servants, Henry!" Mrs. Caldwell exclaimed, and then she left the room. Beth learned what it all meant in after years, the career of one of her brothers furnishing the clue. Like father, like son.

It was after this that Mrs. Caldwell went to visit her relations in England, accompanied by two of the children. It was in the summer, and Jane took Beth to the Castle Hill that morning to see the steamer, with her mother on board, go by. The sea was iridescent, like molten silver, the sky was high and cloudless, and where sea and sky met and mingled on the horizon it was impossible to determine. Numbers of steamers passed far out. They looked quite small, and Beth did not think there was room in any of them for her mother and brother and sister. They did not, therefore, interest her much, nor did the policeman who came and talked to Jane. But the Castle Hill, and the little winding path up which she had come, the green of the grass, the brambles, the ferns, the ruined masonry against which she leant, the union of sea and sky and shore, the light, the colour, absorbed her, and drew her out of herself. Her soul expanded, it spread its wings, it stretched out spiritual arms to meet and clasp the beloved nature of which it felt itself to be a part. It was her earliest recognition of their kinship, a glimpse of greatness, a moment of ecstasy never to be forgotten, the first stirring in herself of the creative faculty, for in her joy she burst out into a little song —

"Far on the borders of the Arcane."

It was as if the pleasure played upon her, using her as a passive instrument by which it attained to audible expression. For how should a child know a word like Arcane? It came to her as things do which we have known and forgotten – the whole song did in fact; but she held it as a possession sacred to herself, and never recorded it, or told more than that one line, although it stayed with her, lingered on her lips, and in her heart, for the rest of her life. It was a great moment for Beth, the moment when her further faculty first awoke. On looking back to it in after years, she fancied she found in it confirmation of an opinion which she afterwards formed. Genius to her was yet only another word for soul. She could not believe that we all have souls, or that they are at all equally developed even in those who have obtained them. She was a child under six at this time, Jane Nettles was a woman between twenty and thirty, and the policeman – she could not say what age he was; but she was the only one of the three that throbbed responsive to the beauty of the wonderful scene before them, or felt her being flooded with the glory of the hour.

Meanwhile, what her parents would have called her education had begun. She went with Mildred, her elder sister, to a day school. They used to run down the street together without a nurse, and the sense of freedom was delicious to Beth. They had to pass the market where the great mealy specimen potatoes were displayed, and Mary Lynch's shop – she was the vegetable woman, who used to talk to Mrs. Caldwell about the children when they went there, and one or the other always called them "poor little bodies," upon which they commented afterwards among themselves. Mary Lynch was a large red-faced woman, and when the children wanted to describe a stout person they always said, "As fat as Mary Lynch." One house which Beth had to pass on her way to school made a strong impression on her imagination. It was a gloomy abode with a broad doorstep and deep portico, broken windows, and a mud-splashed door, from beneath which she always expected to see a slender stream of blood slowly trickling. For a man called Macgregor had murdered his wife there – beaten her brains out with a poker. Beth never heard the name Macgregor in after life without a shiver of dislike. Much of her time at school was spent in solitary confinement for breaches of the peace. With a face as impassive as a monkey's she would do the most mischievous things, and was always experimenting in naughty tricks, as on one occasion when Miss Deeble left the schoolroom for a minute, but had to come hurrying back, recalled by wild shrieks; and found that Beth had managed in that minute to tip up a form with four children on it, throw their books out of the window, and sprinkle ink all over the floor. Miss Deeble marched her downstairs to an empty kitchen, and left her sitting on a stool in the middle of it with an A B C in her hand. But Beth took no interest in the alphabet in those days, and hunted black-beetles with the bellows instead of learning it. The hearthstone was the place of execution. When she found a beetle, she would blow him along to it with the bellows, and there despatch him. She had no horror of any creature in her childhood, but as she matured, her whole temperament changed in this respect, and when she met a beetle on the stairs she would turn and fly rather than pass it, and she would feel nauseated, and shiver with disgust for hours after if she thought of it. She knew the exact moment that this horror came upon her; it happened when she was ten years old. She found a beetle one day lying on its back, and thinking it was dead, she took it up, and was swinging it by its antennæ when the creature suddenly wriggled itself round, and twined its prickly legs about her finger, giving her a start from which she never recovered.

Beth probably got as far as A B ab, while she was at Miss Deeble's; but if she were backward with her book, her other faculties began to be acute. It was down in that empty kitchen that she first felt the enchantment of music. Some one suddenly played the piano overhead and Beth listened spell-bound. Again and again the player played, and always the same thing, practising it. Beth knew every note. Long afterwards she was trying some waltzes of Chopin's, and came upon one with which she was quite familiar. She knew that she had heard it all, over and over again, but could not think when or where. Presently, however, as she played it, she perceived a smell of black-beetles, and instantly she was back in that disused kitchen of Miss Deeble's, listening to the practising overhead.

All Beth's senses were acute, and from the first her memory helped itself by the involuntary association of incongruous ideas. Many people's recollections are stimulated by the sense of smell, but it is a rarer thing for the sense of taste to be associated with the past in the same way, as it was in Beth's case. There were many circumstances which were recalled by the taste of the food she had been eating at the time they occurred. The children often dined in the garden in those early days, and once a piece of apple-dumpling Beth was eating slid off her plate on to the gravelled walk. Some one picked it up, and put it on her plate again, all covered with stones and grit, and the sight of hot apple-dumpling made her think of gravel ever afterwards, and filled her with disgust; so that she could not eat it. She had a great aversion to bread and butter too for a long time, but that she got over. It would have been too great an inconvenience to have a child dislike its staple food, and in all probability she was forced to conquer her aversion, and afterwards she grew to like bread and butter; but still, if by any chance the circumstances which caused her dislike to it recurred to her when she was eating a piece, she was obliged to stop. The incident which set up the association happened one evening

when her father and mother were out. Beth was alone in the dining-room eating bread and butter, and Towie, the cat, came into the room with a mouse in her mouth. The mouse was alive, and Towie let it run a little way, and then pounced down upon it, then gave it a pat to make it run again. Beth, lying on her stomach on the floor, watching these proceedings, naturally also became a cat with a mouse. At last Towie began to eat her mouse, beginning with its head, which it crushed. Beth, eating her bread and butter in imitation, saw the white brains, but felt no disgust at the moment. The next time she had bread and butter, however, she thought of the mouse's brains and felt sick; and always afterwards the same association of ideas was liable to recur to her with the same result.

But even the description of anything horrifying affected her in this way. One day when she was growing up her mother told her at dinner that she had been on the pier that morning and had seen the body of a man, all discoloured and swollen from being in the water a long time, towed into the harbour by a fishing boat. Beth listened and asked questions, as she always did on these occasions, with the deepest interest. She was taking soup strongly flavoured with catsup at the moment, and the story in no way interfered with her appetite; but the next time she tried catsup, and ever afterwards, she perceived that swollen, discoloured corpse, and immediately felt nauseated. It is curious that all these associations of ideas are disagreeable. She had not a single pleasant one in connection with food.

## CHAPTER III

All of Beth that was not eyes at this time was ears, and her brain was as busy as a squirrel in the autumn, storing observations and registering impressions. It does not do to trust to a child's not understanding. It may not understand at the moment, but it will remember all the same – all the more, perhaps, because it does not understand; and its curiosity will help it to solve the problem. Beth did humorous things at this time, but she had no sense of humour; she was merely experimenting. Her big eyes looked out of an impassive face solemnly; no one suspected the phenomenal receptivity which that stolid mask concealed, and, because the alphabet did not interest her, they formed a poor opinion of her intellect. The truth was that she had no use for letters or figures. The books of nature and of life were spread out before her, and she was conning their contents to more purpose than any one else could have interpreted them to her in those days. And as to arithmetic, as soon as her father began to allow her a penny a week for pocket-money, she discovered that there were two half-pennies in it, which was all she required to know. She also mastered the system of debit and credit, for, when she found herself in receipt of a regular income, and had conquered the first awe of entering a shop and asking for things, she ran into debt. She received the penny on Saturday, and promptly spent it in sweets, but by Monday she wanted more, and the craving was so imperative, that when Miss Deeble sent her down to the empty kitchen in the afternoon, she could not blow black-beetles with any enthusiasm, and began to look about for something else to interest her. It being summer, the window was open, but it was rather out of her reach. She managed, however, with the help of her stool, to climb on to the sill, and there, in front of her, was the sea, and down below was the street – a goodish drop below if she had stopped to think of it; but Beth dropped first and thought afterwards, only realising the height when she had come down plump, and looked up again to see what had happened to her, surprised at the thud which had jarred her stomach and made her feet sting. She picked herself up at once, however, and limped away, not heeding the hurt much, so delightful was it to be out alone without her hat. By the time she got to Mary Lynch's she was Jane Nettles going on an errand, an assumption which enabled her to enter the shop at her ease.

"Good-day," she began. "Give me a ha'porth of pear-drops, and a ha'porth of raspberry-drops, Mary Lynch, please. I'll pay you on Saturday."

"What are you doing out alone without your hat?" Mary Lynch rejoined, beaming upon her. "I'm afraid you're a naughty little body."

"No, I'm not," Beth answered. "It's my own money." Mary Lynch laughed, and helped her liberally, adding some cherries to the sweets; and, to Beth's credit be it stated, the money was duly paid, and without regret, she being her mother at the moment, looking much relieved to be able to settle the debt, which shows that, even by this time, Beth had somehow become aware of money-troubles, and also that she learned to read a countenance long before she learned to read a book.

She straggled home with the sweets in her hand, but did not eat them, for now she was a lady going to give a party, and must await the arrival of her guests. She did not go in by the front door for obvious reasons, but up the entry down which the open wooden gutter-spout ran, at a convenient height, from the house into the street. The wash-house was covered with delicious white roses, which scented the summer afternoon. Beth concealed her sweets in the rose-tree, and then leant against the wall and buried her nose in one of the flowers, loving it. The maids were in the wash-house; she heard them talking; it was all about what he said and she said. Presently a torrent of dirty water came pouring down the spout, mingling its disagreeable soapy smell with that of the flowers. Beth plucked some petals from the rose she was smelling, set them on the soapy water, and ran down the passage beside them, until they disappeared in the drain in the street. This delight over, she wandered into the garden. She was always on excellent terms with all animals, and was treated by them with singular confidence. Towie, the cat, had been missing for some time, but now, to Beth's great joy,

she suddenly appeared from Beth could not tell where, purring loudly, and rubbing herself against Beth's bare legs. The sun poured down upon them, and the sensation of the cat's warm fur above her socks was delicious. Beth tried to lift her up in her arms, but she wriggled herself out of them, and began to run backwards and forwards between her and a gap in the hedge, until Beth understood that she wished her to follow her through it into the next garden. Beth did so, and the cat led her to a little warm nest where, to Beth's wild delight, she showed her a tiny black kitten. Beth picked it up, and carried it, followed by the cat, into the house in a state of breathless excitement, shrieking out the news as she ran. Beth was immediately seized upon. What was she doing at home when she ought to have been at school? and without her hat, too! Beth had no explanation to offer, and was hustled off to the nursery, and there shut up for the rest of the day. She stood in the window most of the time, a captive princess in the witch's palace, waiting for the fairy-prince to release her, and catching flies.

The sky became overcast, and a big gun was fired. Beth's father had something to do with the firing of big guns, and she connected this with the gathering gloom, stories of God striking wicked people down with thunder and lightning for their sins, and her own naughtiness, and felt considerably awed. Presently a little boy was carried down the street on a bed. His face looked yellow against the sheets. He was lying flat on his back, and had a little black cap on, which was right out of doors, but wrong in bed. He smiled up at Beth as they carried him under the window, and she stretched out her arms to him with infinite pity. She knew he was going to die. They all died, that family, or had something dreadful happen to them. Jane Nettles said there was a curse upon them, and Beth never thought of them without a shudder. That boy's sisters both died, and one had something dreadful happen to her, for they dug her up again, and when they opened the coffin the corpse was all in a jelly, and every colour of the rainbow, according to Jane Nettles. Beth believed she had been present upon the occasion, in a grass-grown graveyard, by the wall of an old church, beneath which steps led down into a vault. The stones of the steps were mossy, and the sun was shining. There was a little group of people standing round, with pale, set, solemn faces, and presently something was brought up, and they all pressed forward to look at it. Beth could not see what it was for the grown-up people, and never knew whether or not the whole picture had been conjured up by her imagination; but as there was always a foundation of fact in the impressions of this period of her life, it is not improbable that she really was present at the exhumation, with the curious and indefatigable Jane Nettles.

Opposite the nursery window, on the other side of the road, was the butcher's shop, in front of which the butcher made his shambles. Late in the evening he brought out a board and set it on trestles, then he brought a sheep, lifted it up by its legs and put it on its back on the board, tied its feet, and cut its throat. Beth watched the operation with grave interest, but no other feeling. She had been accustomed to see it all her life.

Presently Beth's father and mother went out together, and then Beth stole downstairs, and out to the wash-house to find the sweets in the white rose-tree. Mildred and Jim were doing their lessons in the dining-room, and she burst in upon them with the sweets; but Mildred was cross, and said:

"Don't make such a noise, Beth, my head aches."

The next day was Sunday. Beth knew it by the big black bonnet which played such a large part in her childish recollections. She had a kind of sensation of having seen herself in it, bobbing along to church, a sort of Kate Greenaway child, with a head out of all proportion to the rest of her body, and feeling singularly satisfied – a feeling, however, which was less a recollection than an experience continually renewed, for a nice gown or bonnet was always a pleasure to her.

In church she sat in a big square pew on one side of the aisle, and on the other side was another pew exactly like it, in which sat a young lady whom Beth believed to be Miss Augusta Noble in the *Fairchild Family*. Augusta Noble was very vain, and got burnt to death for standing on tiptoe before the fire to look at herself in a new frock in the mirror on the mantelpiece. Beth thought it a suitable end for her, and did not pity her at all – perhaps because she went on coming to church regularly all the same.

After the service they climbed the Castle Hill; and there was the grey of stonework against a bright blue sky, and green of grass and trees against the grey, and mountainous clouds of dazzling white hung over a molten sea; and because of the beauty of it all, Beth burst into a passion of tears.

"What is the matter with that child?" her father exclaimed impatiently. "It's very odd other people can bring up their children properly, Caroline, but you never seem to be able to manage yours."

"What's the matter with you, you tiresome child?" Mrs. Caldwell exclaimed, shaking Beth by the arm. Beth only sobbed the more. "Look," said her mother, pointing to a small lake left by the sea on the shore when the tide went out, where the children used to wade knee-deep, or bathe when it was too rough for them to go into the sea; "look, there's the pond, that bright round thing over there. And look below, near the Castle – that great green mound is the giant's grave. When the giant died they buried him there, and he was so big, he reached all that length when they laid him in the ground."

"And when he stood up where did he reach to?" said Beth, interested in a moment.

"Oh, when he sat here, I should think he could make a footstool of his own grave, and when he stood up he could look over the Castle."

Beth, with big dilated eyes and wet cheeks, saw him do both, and was oppressed to tears no more that day by delight and wonder of the beautiful; but she was always liable to these paroxysms, the outcome of an intensity of pleasure which was positive pain. So, from the first, she was keenly susceptible to outdoor influences, and it was now that her memory was stored with impressions which were afterwards of inestimable value to her, for she never lived amongst the same kind of scenery again.

The children had the run of some gentleman's grounds, which they called The Walks. There were banks of flowers, and sidewalks where the London pride grew, and water, and great trees with hollows in them where the water lodged. Beth called these fairy wells, and put her fingers in to see how deep they were, and there were dead leaves in them; and there, on a memorable occasion, she found her first skeleton leaf, and told Jane Nettles she really didn't know before that there were such things. Once there was a wasp's nest hanging from a branch, and they met a young man coming away from it, holding a handkerchief to his face. He stopped to tell Jane Nettles how he had been stung, and the children wandered off unheeded to look at the nest. It was all grey and gossamer, like cobwebs laid in layers. Beth was an Indian scout inspecting it from behind a neighbouring tree; and then she shelled it with sticks, but did not wait to see it surrender.

They picked up horse-chestnuts from under the trees, in the season, and hammered the green rind off with stones for the joy of seeing the beautiful shining, slippery, dark brown, or piebald, polished fruit within; and also, when there were wet leaves on the ground, they gathered walnuts from out of the long tangled grass, and stained their fingers picking off the covering, which was mealy-green when it burst, and smelt nice; but the nut itself, when they came to it, was always surprisingly small. There were horrid mahogany-coloured pieces of liver put about the walks on sticks sometimes. Jane Nettles said they were to poison the dogs because they came in and destroyed the flowers. Beth wondered how it was people could eat liver if it poisoned dogs, and was careful afterwards not to touch it herself. Most children would have worried the reason out of their nurse, but Jane Nettles was not amiable, and Beth could never bring herself to ask a question of any one who was likely either to snub her for asking, or to jeer at her for not knowing. There are unsympathetic people who have a way of making children feel ashamed of their ignorance, and rather than be laughed at, a sensitive child will pretend to know. Beth was extraordinarily sensitive in this respect, and so it happened that, in later life, she sometimes found herself in ignorance of things which less remarkable people had learnt in their infancy for the asking.

These were certainly days of delight to Beth, but the charm of them was due less to people than to things – to some sight or scent of nature, the smell of new-mown hay from a waggon they had stood aside to let pass in a narrow lane, a glimpse of a high bank on the other side of the road – a high grassy bank, covered and crowned with trees, chiefly chestnuts, on which the sun shone; hawthorn

hedgerows from which they used to pick the green buds children call bread-and-butter, and eat them; and one privet-hedge in their own garden, an impenetrable hedge, on the other side of which, as Beth imagined, all kinds of wonderful things took place. The flowers of those early days were crocuses, snowdrops, white roses, a little yellow flower they called ladies' fingers, sea-pinks, and London pride – particularly London pride. In the walks Jane Nettles used to teach her the wonderful rhyme of —

"London Bridge is broken down,  
Grand, said the little Dee,  
London Bridge is broken down,  
Fair-Lade-ee."

And so the rhyme, London pride amongst the rock-work, the ornamental water, a rustic bridge, shining laurel leaves, mahogany-coloured liver, warmth, light, and sweet airs all became mingled in one gracious memory.

People, however, as has been already shown, also came into her consciousness, but with less certainty of pleasing, wherefore she remembered them less, for it was always her habit to banish a disagreeable thought if she could. One day she went into the garden with her spade and an old tin biscuit-box. She put the box on the ground beside her, with the lid off, and began to dig. By-and-by the kitten came crooning and sidling up to her, and hopped into the box. Beth instantly put on the lid, and the kitten was a corpse which must be buried. She hurriedly dug its grave, put in the box, and covered it up with earth. Just as she had finished, a gruff voice exclaimed: "What are ye doing there, ye little divil?" and there was old Krangle the gardener, looking at her over the hedge. "Dig it up again directly," he said, and Beth, much startled, dug it up quicker than she had buried it. The kitten had been but loosely covered, and was not much the worse, but had got some earth in its eye, which was very sore afterwards. People wondered what had hurt it, and Beth looked from one to the other and listened with grave attention to their various suppositions on the subject. She said nothing, however, and Krangle also held his peace, which led to a very good understanding between them. Krangle had a cancer on his lip, and Beth was forbidden to kiss him for fear of catching it. He had a garden of his own too, and a pig, and little boiled potatoes in his cottage. The doctor's brother died of cancer, and Beth supposed he had been naughty and kissed old Krangle, though she wondered he cared to, as Krangle had a very prickly chin. The doctor often came to see papa. He used to talk about the Bible, and then the children were sent out of the room. Once Beth hid under the table to hear what he said. It was all about God, whom it appeared that he did not like. He had a knob at the end of his nose, and Beth laughed at it, in punishment of which, as she used to believe, her own nose developed a little knob at the end. Her mind was very much exercised about the doctor and his household. He and his brother and sister used to live together, but now he lived alone, and on a bed in one of the rooms, according to Jane Nettles, there were furs, and lovely silks, satins, and laces, all being eaten by moths and destroyed because there was no one to look after them. It seemed such a pity, but whose were they? Where was the lady?

Bridget used to come up to the nursery when the children were in bed, to talk to Jane Nettles, and look out of the window. Those gossips in the nursery were a great source of disturbance to Beth when she ought to have been composing herself to sleep. She recollected nothing of the conversations more corrupting than that ghastly account of how the girl was exhumed, so it is likely that the servants exercised some discretion when they dropped their voices to a whisper, as they often did; but these whispered colloquies made her restless and cross, and brought down upon her a smart order to go to sleep, to which she used to answer defiantly, "I will if you'll ask me a riddle." One of the riddles was: "Between two sticks, between two stones, between two old men's shin-bones. What's that?" The answer had something to do with a graveyard, but Beth could not remember what.

She used to suffer a small martyrdom in her little crib on those evenings from what she called "snuff up her nose," a hot, dry, burning sensation which must have been caused by a stuffy room, and the feverish state she tossed herself into when she was kept awake after her regular hour for sleep. Sometimes she sat up in bed suddenly, and cried aloud. Then Jane Nettles would push her down again on her pillow roughly, and threaten to call mamma if she wasn't good directly. Occasionally mamma heard her, and came up of her own accord, and shook her by the shoulder, and scolded her. Then Beth would lie still sobbing silently, and wretched as only a lonely, uncomprehended, and uncomplaining child can be. No one had the faintest conception of what she suffered. Her naughtinesses were remembered against her, but her latent tenderness was never suspected. Once the old Doctor said: "That's a peculiarly sensitive, high-strung, nervous child; you must be gentle with her," and both parents had stared at him. They were matter-of-fact creatures themselves, comparatively speaking, with a notion that such nonsense as nervousness should be shaken out of a child.

At dinner, one day, Beth saw little creatures crawling in a piece of cheese she had on her plate, and uttered an exclamation of disgust.

"Those are only mites, you silly child," her father said, and then to her horror, he took up the piece, and ate it. "Do look at that child, Caroline!" he exclaimed, "she's turned quite pale."

Beth puzzled her head for long afterwards to know what it meant to turn pale.

Little seeds of superstition were sown in her mind at this time, and afterwards flourished. She found a wedding-ring in her first piece of Christmas cake, and was told she would be the first of the party to marry, which made her feel very important.

Being so sensitive herself, she was morbidly careful of the feelings of others, and committed sins of insincerity without compunction in her efforts to spare them. She and Mildred were waiting ready dressed one day to go and pay a call with mamma. Beth had her big bonnet on, and was happy; and Mildred also was in a high state of delight. She said Beth's breath smelt of strawberries, and wanted to know what her own smelt of.

"Raspberries," Beth answered instantly. It was not true, but Beth felt that something of the kind was expected of her, and so responded sympathetically. When they got to the house, they were shown into an immense room, and wandered about it. Beth upset some cushions, and had awful qualms, expecting every moment to be pounced upon, and shaken; but she forgot her fright on approaching her hostess, and discovering to her great surprise that she was busy doing black monkeys on a grey ground in woolwork. She was astonished to find that it was possible to do such wonderful work, and she wanted to be taught immediately; but her mother made her ashamed of herself for supposing that *she* could do it, silly little body. They stayed dinner, and Beth cried with rage because the servant poured white sauce over her fish, and without asking her too. The fish was an island, and Beth was the hungry sea, devouring it bit by bit. Of course if you put white sauce over it, you converted it into a table with a white cloth on, or something of that kind, which you could not eat, so the fish was spoilt. She got into a difficulty, too, about Miss Deeble's drawing-room, which was upstairs, overlooking the bay, and you could only see the water from the window, so there were water-colours on the wall. Her mother smilingly tried to explain, but Beth stamped, and stuck to her point; the water accounted for the water-colours.

On the way home, Beth found a new interest in life. The mill had been burnt down, and they went to see the smouldering embers, and Beth smelt fire for the first time. The miller's family had been burnt out, and were sheltering in a shed. One little boy had his fingers all crumpled up from the fire. Beth's benevolence awoke. She was all sympathetic excitement, and wanted to do something for somebody. The miller's wife was lying on a mattress on the floor. She had a little baby, a new one, a pudgy red-looking thing. Mrs. Caldwell fed the other children with bread-and-milk, and Beth offered to teach them their letters.

Mrs. Caldwell laughed at her: "*You* teach them their letters!" she exclaimed. "You had better learn your own properly." And Mildred also jeered. Beth subsided, crimson with shame at being thus

lowered in everybody's estimation. She was deficient in self-esteem, and required to be encouraged. Praise merely gave her confidence; but her mother never would praise her. She brought all her children up on the same plan, regardless of their different dispositions. It made Mildred vain to praise her, and therefore Beth must not be praised; and so her mother checked her mental growth again and again instead of helping her to develop it. "It's no use your trying to do that, Beth, you can't," she would say, when Beth would have done it easily, if only she had been assured that she could.

Beth had a strange dream that night after the fire, which made a lasting impression upon her. Dorman's Isle was a green expanse, flat as a table, and covered with the short grass that grows by the sea. At high tide it was surrounded by water, but when the tide was low, it rested on great grey, rugged rocks, as the lid of a box rests upon its sides. Between the grey of the rocks and the green of the grass there was a fringe of sea-pinks. That night she dreamt that she was under Dorman's Isle, and it was a great bare cave, not very high, and lighted by torches which people held in their hands. There were a number of people, and they were all members of her own family, ancestors in the dresses of their day, distant relations – numbers of strange people whom she had never heard of; as well as her own father and mother, brothers and sisters. She knew she was under Dorman's Isle, but she knew also that it was the dark space beneath the stage of a theatre. When she entered, the rest of the family were already assembled; but they none of them spoke to each other, and the doors kept opening and shutting, and the people seemed to melt away, until at last only three or four remained, and they were just going. She saw the shine on the paint of the door-posts, and the smoke of the torches, as they let themselves out. Then they had all gone, and left her alone in a cave full of smoke. Vainly she struggled to follow them, the doors were fast, the smoke was smothering her, and in the agony of a last effort to escape she awoke.

In after days, when Beth began to think, she used to wonder how it was she knew those people were her ancestors, and that the place was like any part of a theatre. She had never heard either of ancestors or theatres at that time. Was it recollection? Or is there some more perfect power to know than the intellect – a power lying latent in the whole race, which will eventually come into possession of it; but with which, at present, only some few rare beings are perfectly endowed. Beth had the sensation of having been nearer to something in her infancy than she ever was again – nearer to knowing what it is the trees whisper – what the murmur means, the all-pervading murmur which sounds incessantly when everything is hushed, as at night; nearer to the "arcane" of that evening on the Castle Hill when she first felt her kinship with nature, and burst into song. It may have been hereditary memory, a knowledge of things transmitted to her by her ancestors along with their features, virtues, and vices; but, at any rate, she herself was sure that she possessed a power of some kind in her infancy which gradually lapsed as her intellectual faculties developed. She was conscious that the senses had come between her and some mysterious joy which was not of the senses, but of the spirit. There lingered what seemed to be the recollection of a condition anterior to this, a condition of which no tongue can tell, which is not to be put into words, or made evident to those who have no recollection; but which some will comprehend by the mere allusion to it. All her life long Beth preserved a half-consciousness of this something – something which eluded her – something from which she gradually drifted further away as she grew older – some sort of vision which opened up fresh tracts to her; but whether of country, or whether of thought, she could not say. Only, when it came to her, all was immeasurable about her; and she was above – above in a great calm through which she moved without any sort of effort that is known to us; she just thought it, and was there; while humanity dwindled away into insignificance below.

One other strange vision she had which she never forgot. With her intellect, she believed it to have been a dream, but her further faculty always insisted that it was a recollection. She was with a large company in an indescribable, hollow space, bare of all furnishings because none were required; and into this space there came a great commotion, bright light and smoke, without heat or sense of suffocation. Then she was alone, making for an aperture; struggling and striving with pain

of spirit to gain it; and when she had found it, she shot through, and awoke in the world. She awoke with a terrible sense of desolation upon her, and with the consciousness of having traversed infinite space at infinite speed in an interval of time which her mortal mind could not measure.

All through life, when she was in possession of her further faculty, and perceived by that means – which was only at fitful intervals, doubtless because of unfavourable circumstances and surroundings – she was calm, strong, and confident. She looked upon life as from a height, viewing it both in detail and as a whole. But when she had only her intellect to rely upon, all was uncertain, and she became weak, vacillating, and dependent. So that she appeared to be a singular mixture of weakness and strength, courage and cowardice, faith and distrust; and just what she would do depended very much on what was expected of her, or what influence she was under, and also on some sudden impulse which no one, herself included, could have anticipated.

## CHAPTER IV

Up to this time, Beth's reminiscences jerk along from incident to incident, but now there come the order and sequence of an eventful period, perfectly recollected. The date is fixed by a change of residence. Her father, who was a commander in the coastguard, was transferred on promotion from the north of Ireland to another appointment in the wild west, and Beth was just entering upon her seventh year when they moved. Captain Caldwell went on in advance to take up his appointment, and Jim accompanied him; Mildred, Beth, and Bernadine, the youngest, who had arrived two years after Beth, being left to follow with their mother. The elder children had been sent to England to be educated. In their father's absence Mildred and Bernadine were transferred to their mother's room, Jane Nettles and Bridget, the sulky, had disappeared, and Kitty slept in the nursery with Beth. Beth had grown too long for her crib, but still had to sleep in it, and her legs were cramped at night and often ached because she could not stretch them out, and the pain kept her awake.

"Mamma, my legs do ache in bed," she said one day.

"Beth, you really *are* a whiny child, you always have a grievance," her mother complained.

"But, mamma, they *do* ache."

"Well, it's only growing pains," Mrs. Caldwell replied with a satisfied air, as if to name the trouble were to ease it. And so Beth's legs ached on unrelieved, and, when they kept her awake, Kitty became the object of her contemplation. The sides of the crib were like the seat of a cane-bottomed chair, and Beth had enlarged one of the holes by fidgiting at it with her fingers. This was her look-out station. A night-light had been conceded to her nervousness at the instance of Dr. Gottley, when it became a regular thing for her to wake in the dark out of one of her vivid dreams, and shriek because she could not see where she was. The usual beating and shaking had been tried to cure her of her nonsense, but this sensible treatment only seemed to make her worse, she was such a tiresome child, till at last, when Dr. Gottley threatened serious consequences, the light was allowed, a dim little float that burned on an inch of oil in a glass of water, and made Kitty look so funny when she came up to bed. Kitty began to undress, and at the same time to mutter her prayers, as soon as she got into the room; and sometimes she would go down on her knees and beat her breast, and sigh and groan to the Blessed Virgin, beseeching her to help her. Beth thought at first she was in great distress, and pitied her, but after a time she believed that Kitty was enjoying herself, perhaps because she also had begun to enjoy these exercises. Beth had been taught to say her Protestant prayers, but not made to feel that she was addressing them to any particular personality that appealed to her imagination, as Kitty's Blessed Lady did.

"Kitty, Kitty," she cried one night, sitting up in her crib, with a great dry sob. "Tell *me* how to do it. I want to speak to her too."

Kitty, who was on her knees on the floor, with her rosary clasped in her hands, her arms and shoulders bare, and her dark hair hanging down her back, looked up, considerably startled: "Holy Mother! how you frightened me!" she exclaimed. "Go to sleep."

"But I *want* to speak to her," Beth persisted.

"Arrah, be good now, Miss Beth," Kitty coaxed, still on her knees.

"I'll be good if you'll tell me what to say," Beth bargained.

Kitty rose from her knees, went to the side of the crib, and looked down at the child.

"What do ye want to say to her at all?" she asked.

"I don't know," Beth answered. "I just want to speak to her. I just want to say, 'Holy Mother, come close, I love you. Stay by me all night long, and when the daylight comes don't forget me.' How would you say that, Kitty?"

"Bless your purty eyes, darlint!" said Kitty, "just say it that way every time. It couldn't be better said, not by the praste himself. An' if the Blessed Mother ever hears anything from this world," she

added in an undertone, "she'll hear that. But turn over now, an' go to sleep, honey. See! I'll stand here till ye do, and sing to you!"

Beth turned over on her left side with her face to the wall, and settled herself to sleep contentedly, while Kitty stood beside her, patting her shoulder gently, and crooning in a low sweet voice —

"Look down, O Mother Mary,  
From thy bright throne above;  
Send down upon thy children  
One holy glance of love!  
And if a heart so tender  
With pity flows not o'er,  
Then turn, O Mother Mary,  
And smile on me no more."

As Beth listened her little heart expanded, and presently the Blessed Virgin stood beside her bed, a heavenly vision, like Kitty, with dark hair growing low on her forehead and hanging down her back, blue eyes, and an earnest, guileless face. Beth's little mouth, drooping with dissatisfaction ordinarily, curled up at the corners, and so, thoroughly tranquillised, she fell happily asleep, with a smile on her lips.

Kitty bent low to look at her, and shook her head several times. "Coaxin's better nor bating you, anyway," she muttered. "But what are they going to do wid ye at all?" She stood up, and raised her clasped hands. "Holy Mother, it 'ud be well maybe if ye'd take her to yourself — just now — God forgive me for saying it."

Next morning Mrs. Caldwell was sitting at breakfast with Beth and Mildred. Every moment she glanced at the window, and at last the postman passed. She listened, but there was no knock, and her heart sank.

"Beth, will you stop drumming with your spoon?" she exclaimed irritably. As she spoke, however, Kitty came in with the expected letter in her hand, and Mrs. Caldwell's countenance cleared: "I thought the postman had passed," she exclaimed.

"No, m'em," Kitty rejoined. "I was standin' at the door, an' he gave me the letter."

Mrs. Caldwell had opened it by this time, but it was very short. "How often am I to tell you not to stand at the door, letting in the cold air, Kitty?" she snapped.

"And how'd I sweep the steps, m'em, if you please, when I'm not to stand at the door?"

But Mrs. Caldwell was reading the letter, and again her countenance cleared. "Papa wants us to go to him as soon as ever we can get ready!" was her joyful exclamation. "And, oh, they've had such snow! See, Mildred, here's a sketch of the chapel nearly buried."

"Oh, let me see, too," Beth cried, running round the table to look over Mildred's shoulder.

"Did papa draw that? How *wonderful*!"

"Beth, don't lean on me so," Mildred said crossly, shaking her off.

The sketch, which was done in ink on half a sheet of paper, showed a little chapel with great billows of snow rolling along the sides and up to the roof. After breakfast, Mildred sat down and began to copy it in pencil, to Beth's intense surprise. The possibility of copying it herself would never have occurred to her, but when she saw Mildred doing it of course she must try too. She could make nothing of it, however, till Mildred showed her how to place each stroke, and then she was very soon weary of the effort, and gave it up, yawning. Drawing was not to be one of her accomplishments.

Kitty was to accompany them to the west.

When the day of departure arrived, a great coach and pair came to the door, and the luggage was piled up on it. Beth, with her mouth set, and her eyes twice their normal size from excitement, was

everywhere, watching everybody, afraid to miss anything that happened. Her mother's movements were a source of special interest to her. At the last moment Mrs. Caldwell slipped away alone to take leave of the place which had been the first home of her married life. She was a young girl when she came to it, the daughter of a country gentleman, accustomed to luxury, but right ready to enjoy poverty with the man of her heart; and poverty enough she had had to endure, and sickness and sorrow too – troubles inevitable – besides some of those other troubles, which are the harder to bear because they are not inevitable. But still, she had had her compensations, and it was of these she thought as she took her last leave of the little place. She went to the end of the garden first, closely followed by Beth, and looked through the thin hedge out across the field. She seemed to be seeing things which were farther away than Beth's eyes could reach. Then she went to an old garden seat, touched it tenderly, and stood looking down at it for some seconds. Many a summer evening she had sat there at work while her husband read to her. It was early spring, and the snowdrops and crocuses were out. She gathered a little bunch of them. When she had made the tour of the garden, she returned to the house, and went into every room, Beth following her faithfully, at a safe distance. In the nursery she stood some little time looking round at the bare walls, and seeming to listen expectantly. No doubt she heard ghostly echoes of the patter of children's feet, the ring of children's voices. As she turned to go she pressed her handkerchief to her eyes. In her own room she lingered still longer, going from one piece of furniture to another, and laying her hand on each. It was handsome furniture, such as a lady should have about her, and every piece represented a longer or shorter period of self-denial, both on her own part and on her husband's, and a proportionately keen joy in the acquisition of it. She remembered so well when the wardrobe came home, and the dressing-table too, and the mahogany drawers. The furniture was to follow to the new home, and each piece would still have its own history, but, once it was moved from its accustomed place, new associations would have to be formed, and that was what she dreaded. She could picture the old home deserted, and herself yearning for it, and for the old days; but she could not imagine a new home or a new chapter of life with any great interest or pleasure in it, anything, in fact, but anxiety.

When at last she left the house, she was quite overcome to find that a little crowd of friends of every degree had collected to wish her good speed. She went from one to the other, shaking hands, and answering their words in kindly wise. Mary Lynch gave Beth a currant-cake, and lifted her into the coach, though she could quite well have got in by herself. Then they were off, and Mrs. Caldwell stood at the door, wiping her eyes, and gazing at the little house till they turned the corner of the street, and lost sight of it for ever.

The tide was out, Dorman's green Isle rested on its grey rocks, the pond shone like a mirror on the shore, and the young grass was springing on the giant's grave; but the branches were still bare and brown on the Castle Hill, and the old grey castle stood out whitened by contrast with a background of dark and lowering sky. Beth's highly-strung nerves, already overstrained by excitement, broke down completely under the oppression of those heavy clouds, and she became convulsed with sobs. Kitty took her on her knee, but tried in vain to soothe her before the currant-cake and the motion of the coach had made her deadly sick, after which she dozed off from sheer exhaustion.

The rest of the journey was a nightmare of nausea to her. She was constantly being lifted out of the carriage, and made to lie on a sofa somewhere while the horses were being changed, or put to bed for the night, and dragged up again unrefreshed in the early morning, and consigned once more to misery. Sometimes great dark mountains towered above her, filling her with dread; and sometimes a long lonely level of bare brown bogs was all about her, overwhelming her little soul with such a terrible sense of desolation that she cowered down beside Kitty, and clung to her shivering.

Once her mother shook her for something, and Beth turned faint.

"What's the matter with her, Kitty?" Mrs. Caldwell exclaimed, alarmed by her white face.

"You've jest shook the life out of her, m'em, I think," Kitty answered her tranquilly: "An' ye'll not rare her that way, I'm thinking."

Mrs. Caldwell began to dislike Kitty.

On the third day they drove down a delightful road, with hedges on either hand, footpaths, and trees, among which big country-houses nestled. The mountains were still in the neighbourhood, but not near enough to be awesome. On one side of the road was a broad shallow stream, so clear you could see the brown stones at the bottom, a salmon-stream with weirs and waterfalls.

They were nearing a town, and Kitty began to put the things together. Beth became interested. Mamma looked out of the window every instant, and at last she exclaimed in a tone of relief, which somehow belied the words: "Here's papa! I *knew* he would come!" And there was a horse at the window, and papa was on the horse, looking in at them. Mamma's face became quite rosy, and she laughed a good deal and showed her teeth. Beth had not noticed them before.

"What are you staring at, Beth?" Mildred whispered.

"Mamma's all pink," Beth said.

"That's blushing," said Mildred.

"What's blushing?" said Beth.

"Getting pink."

"What does she do it for?"

"She can't help it."

Beth continued to stare, and at last Mrs. Caldwell noticed it, and asked her what she was looking at.

"You've got nice white teeth," said Beth. Mrs. Caldwell smiled.

"Have you only just discovered that?" papa asked through the window.

"You never told me," Beth protested, thinking herself reproached. "You said Jane Nettles had."

The smile froze on mamma's lips, and papa's horse became unmanageable. Beth saw there was something wrong, and stopped, looking from one to the other intently.

Mrs. Caldwell recovered herself. "What a stolid face she has!" she remarked presently by way of breaking an awkward pause.

Beth wondered what "stolid" meant, and who "she" was.

"She doesn't look well," papa observed.

"She's jest had the life shook out of her, sir," Kitty put in.

"Kitty, how dare you?" Mrs. Caldwell began.

"It's to the journey I'm alludin' now, m'em," Kitty explained with dignity. "The child can't bear the travellin'."

"Well, it won't last much longer now," said papa, and then made some remark to mamma in Italian, which brought back her good-humour. They always spoke Italian to each other, because papa did not know French so well as mamma did. Beth supposed at that time that all grown-up people spoke French or Italian to each other, and she used to wonder which she would speak when she was grown up.

They stopped at an inn for an hour or two, for there was still another stage of this interminable journey. Mildred had a bag with a big doll in it, and some almond-sweets. She left it on a window-seat when they went to have something to eat, and when she thought of it again it was nowhere to be found.

"They would steal the teeth out of your head in this God-forsaken country," Captain Caldwell exclaimed, in a tone of exasperation.

An awful vision of igneous rocks, with mis-shapen creatures prowling about amongst them, instantly appeared to Beth in illustration of a God-forsaken country, but she tried vainly to imagine how stealing teeth out of your head was to be managed.

When they set off again, and had left the grey town with its green trees and clear rivulet behind, the road lay through a wild and desolate region. Great dark mountains rolled away in every direction, and were piled up above the travellers to the very sky. The scene was most melancholy in its grandeur, and Beth, gazing at it fascinated, with big eyes dilated to their full extent, became

exceedingly depressed. At one turn of the way, in a field below, they saw a gentleman carrying a gun, and attended by a party of armed policemen.

"That's Mr. Burke going over his property," Captain Caldwell observed to his wife. "He's unpopular just now, and daren't move without an escort. His life's not worth a moment's purchase a hundred yards from his own gate, and I expect he'll be shot like a dog some day, with all his precautions."

"Oh, why does he stay?" Mrs. Caldwell exclaimed.

"Just pluck," her husband answered; "and he likes it. It certainly does add to the interest of life."

"O Henry! don't speak like that," Mrs. Caldwell remonstrated. "They can't owe you any grudge."

Captain Caldwell flipped a fly from his horse's ear.

Beth gazed down at the doomed gentleman, and fairly quailed for him. She half expected to see the policemen turn on him and shoot him before her eyes, and a strange excitement gradually grew upon her. She seemed to be seeing and hearing and feeling without eyes, or ears, or a body.

The carriage rocked like a ship at sea, and once or twice it seemed to be going right over.

"What a dreadfully bad road!" Mrs. Caldwell exclaimed.

"Yes," her husband rejoined, "the roads about here are the very devil. This is one of the best. Do you see that one over there?" pointing with his whip to a white line that zigzagged across a neighbouring mountain. "It's disused now. That's Gallows Hill, where a man was hanged."

Beth gazed at the spot with horror. "I see him!" she cried.

"See whom?" said her mother.

"I see the man hanging."

"Oh, nonsense!" Mrs. Caldwell exclaimed. "Why, the man was hanged ages ago. He isn't there now."

"You must speak the truth, young lady," papa said severely.

Beth, put to shame by the reproof, shrank into herself. She was keenly sensitive to blame. But all the same her great grey eyes were riveted on the top of the hill, for there, against the sky, she did distinctly see the man dangling from the gibbet.

"Kitty," she whispered, "don't you see him?"

"Whisht, darlint," Kitty said, covering Beth's eyes with her hand. "I don't see him. But I'll not be after calling ye a liar because ye do, for I guess ye see more nor most, Holy Mother purtect us! But whisht now, you mustn't look at him any more."

The carriage came to the brow of the mountain, and down below was their destination, Castletownrock, a mere village, consisting principally of one long, steep street. Some distance below the village again, the great green waves of a tempestuous sea broke on a dangerous coast.

"The two races don't fuse," papa was saying to mamma, "in this part of the country, at all events. There's an Irish and an English side to the street. The English side has a flagged footpath, and the houses are neat and clean, and well-to-do; on the Irish side all is poverty and dirt and confusion."

Just outside the village, a little group of people waited to welcome them – Mr. Macbean the rector, Captain Keene, the three Misses Keene, and Jim.

The carriage was stopped, and they all got out and walked the rest of the distance to the inn, where they were to stay till the furniture arrived. On the way down the street they saw their new home. It made no impression on Beth. But she recognised the Roman Catholic Chapel on the other side of the road from papa's drawing, only it looked different because there was no snow.

The "gentleman and lady" who kept the inn, Mr. and Mrs. Mayne, with their two daughters, met them at the door, and shook hands with mamma, and kissed the children.

Then they went into the inn parlour, and there was wine and plum-cake, and Dr. and Mrs. Macdougall came with their little girl Lucy, who was eleven years old, Mildred's age.

Mr. Macbean, the rector, who was tall and thin, and had a brown beard that waggled when he talked, drew Beth to his side, and began to ask her questions, just when she wanted so much to hear what everybody else was saying, too.

"Well, and what have you been taught?" he began.

Beth gazed at him blankly.

"Do you love God?" he proceeded, putting his hand on her head.

Beth looked round the room, perplexed, then fixed her eyes on his beard, and watched it waggle with interest.

"Ask her if she knows anything about the other gentleman," Captain Keene put in jocosely – "here's to his health!" and he emptied his glass.

Beth's great eyes settled upon him with sudden fixity.

"I suppose you never heard of the devil?" he proceeded.

"Oh yes, I have," was Beth's instant and unexpected rejoinder. "The devil is a bad road."

There was an explosion of laughter at this.

"But you said so, papa," Beth remonstrated indignantly.

"My dear child, I said just the reverse."

"What's the reverse?" said Beth, picturing another personality.

"There now, that will do," Mrs. Caldwell interposed. "Little bodies must be seen and not heard."

Mr. Macbean stroked Beth's head – "There is something in here, I expect," he observed.

"Not much, I'm afraid," Mrs. Caldwell answered. "We've hardly been able to teach her anything."

"Ah!" Mr. Macbean ejaculated, reflecting on the specimen he had heard of the method pursued.

"You must let me see what *I* can do."

## CHAPTER V

In a few days all the bustle of getting into the new house began. The furniture arrived in irregular batches. Some of it came and some of it did not come. When a box was opened there was nothing that was wanted in it, only things that did not go together, and mamma was worried, and papa was cross.

The workpeople were wild and ignorant, and only trustworthy as long as they were watched. They were unaccustomed to the most ordinary comforts of civilised life, particularly in the way of furniture. When the family arrived at the house one morning, they found Mrs. Caldwell's wardrobe, mahogany drawers, and other articles of bedroom furniture, set up in conspicuous positions in the sitting-room, and the carpenter was much ruffled when he was ordered to take them upstairs.

"Shure it's mad they are," he remonstrated to one of the servants, "to have sich foine things put in a bedroom where nobody'll see thim."

The men came up from the coastguard station to scrape the walls, and Ellis, the petty officer, used the bread-knife, and broke it, and papa bawled at him. Beth was sorry for Ellis.

The house was built of stone, and very damp. There was a great deal of space in it, but little accommodation. On the ground-floor were a huge hall, kitchen, pantry and sitting-room, all flagged. The sitting-room was the only one in the house, and had to be used as dining-room and drawing-room, but it was large enough for that and to spare. There was a big yard and a big garden too, and Riley was in the stable, and Biddy and Anne in the kitchen, and Kitty in the nursery. This increase of establishment, which meant so much to the parents, was accepted as a matter of course by the children.

Kitty told Riley and Biddy and Anne about what Beth had seen on Gallows Hill, and they often asked Beth what she saw when she used to sit looking at nothing. Then Beth would think things, and describe them, because it seemed to please the servants. They used to be very serious, and shake their heads and cross themselves, with muttered ejaculations, but all the time they liked it. This encouraged Beth, and she used to think and think of things to tell them.

Beth was exceedingly busy in her own way at this time. Her mind was being rapidly stored with impressions, and nothing escaped her.

The four children and Kitty were put all together in one great nursery, an arrangement of which Kitty, with the fastidious delicacy of a strict Catholic, did not at all approve.

"Indeed, m'em," she said, "I'm thinkin' Master Jim's too sharp to be in the nursery wid his sisters now."

"Nonsense, Kitty," Mrs. Caldwell exclaimed. "How can you be so evil-minded? Master Jim's only a child – a baby of ten!"

"Och, thin, me'm, it's an ould-fashioned baby he is," said Kitty; "and I'm thinkin' it's a bit of a screen or a curtain I'd like for dressin' behind if he's to be wid us."

"I have nothing of the kind to give you," Mrs. Caldwell rejoined. And afterwards she made merry with papa about Kitty's prudishness.

But Kitty was right as it happened. Jim had been left pretty much to his own devices during the time he had been alone with his father at Castletownrock. Captain Caldwell's theory was that boys would look after themselves, "and the sooner you let 'em the sooner you'd make men of 'em. Blood will tell, sir. Your gentleman's son is a match for any ragamuffin" – a theory which Jim justified in many a free fight; but, during the suspension of hostilities he hobnobbed with the ragamuffins, who took a terrible revenge, for by the time Mrs. Caldwell arrived Jim was thoroughly corrupted. Kitty took precautions, however. She arranged the nursery-life so that Master Jim did not associate with his sisters more than was absolutely necessary. She had him up in the morning, bathed, and sent off to school before she disturbed the little girls, and at night she never left the nursery until he was asleep. Out of her slender purse she bought some print, and fixed up a curtain for his sisters to dress behind,

and all else that she had to do for the children was done decently and in order. She had almost entire charge of them, their mother being engrossed with her husband, whose health and spirits had already begun to suffer from overwork and exposure to the climate.

Kitty was teaching her charges dainty ways, mentally as well as physically. When she had washed them at night, she made them purge their little souls of all the sins of the day in prayer, and in the morning she taught them how to fortify themselves with good resolutions. Beth took naturally to the Catholic training, and solemnly dedicated herself to the Blessed Virgin; Mildred conformed, but without enthusiasm; the four-year-old baby Bernadine lisped little *Aves*; but Jim, in the words of Captain Keene, "the old buffalo," as their father called him, sneered at that sort of thing "as only fit for women."

"Men drink whisky," said Jim, puffing out his chest.

"True for ye," said Kitty; "but I've been told that them as drinks whisky here goes dry in the next world."

"Well, I shall drink whisky and kiss the girls all the same," said Jim. "And I wouldn't be a Catholic now, not to save me sowl. I owe the Catholics a grudge. They insulted me."

"How so?" asked Kitty.

"At the midnight Mass last Christmas. Father John got up, and ordered all heretics out of the sacred house of God, and Pat Fagan ses to me, 'Are ye a heretic?' and I ses, 'I am, Pat Fagan.' 'Thin out ye go,' ses he, and, but for that, I'd 'a' bin a Catholic; so see what you lose by insulting a gentleman."

"What's insulting?" Beth asked.

Jim slapped her face. "That's insulting," he explained.

Beth struck him back promptly, and a scuffle ensued.

"Oh, but it's little divils yez are, the lot of ye!" cried Kitty as she separated them.

During fits of nervous irritability Captain Caldwell had a habit of pacing about the house for hours at a time. One evening he happened to be walking up and down on the landing outside the nursery door, which was a little way open, and his attention was attracted by Beth's voice. She was reciting a Catholic hymn softly, but with great feeling, as if every word of it were a pleasure to her.

"What's the meaning of this?" he demanded, breaking in on her devotions. "What papistical abominations have you been teaching the child, Kitty?"

"Shure, sorr, it's jest a bit of a hymn," said Kitty bravely; but her heart sank, and the colour left her lips.

Captain Caldwell was furious.

"Caroline!" he called peremptorily, going to the head of the stairs, "Caroline, come up directly!"

Mrs. Caldwell fussed up in hot haste.

"Do you know," Captain Caldwell demanded, "that this woman is making idolaters of your children? I heard this child just now praying to the Virgin Mary! Do you hear?"

Mrs. Caldwell's pale face flushed with anger.

"How dare you do such a thing, you wicked woman?" she exclaimed. "I shall not keep you another day in the house. Pack up your things at once, and go the first thing in the morning."

"O mamma!" Beth cried, "you're not going to send Kitty away? Kitty, Kitty, you won't go and leave me?"

"There, you see!" Captain Caldwell exclaimed. "You see the influence she's got over the child already! That's the Jesuit all over!"

"An ignorant woman like you, who can hardly read and write, setting up to teach *my* children, indeed – how dare you?" Mrs. Caldwell stormed.

"Well, m'em, I *am* an ignorant woman that can hardly read and write," Kitty answered with dignity; "but I could tell you some things ye'll not find out in all yer books, and may be they'd surprise ye."

"Kitty, ye'll not go and leave me," Beth repeated passionately.

"Troth, an' I'd stay for your sake if I could," said Kitty, "fur it's a bad time I'm afraid ye'll be havin' once I'm gone."

"Do you hear that?" Captain Caldwell exclaimed. "Now you see what comes of getting people of this kind into the house. She's going to make out that the child is ill-treated."

"One of *my* children ill-treated!" Mrs. Caldwell cried scornfully. "Who would believe her?" Then turning to Beth: "If I ever hear you repeat a word that wicked woman has taught you, I'll beat you as long as I can stand over you."

Kitty looked straight into Mrs. Caldwell's face, and smiled sarcastically, but uttered not a word.

"How dare you stand there, grinning at me in that impertinent way, you low woman?" Mrs. Caldwell exclaimed with great exasperation. "I believe you *are* a Jesuit, sent here to corrupt my children. But go you shall to-morrow morning."

"Oh, I'll go, m'em," Kitty answered quietly. She knew the case was hopeless.

"There, now," said Mrs. Caldwell, turning to her husband. "Do you see? That shows you! She doesn't care a bit."

Beth was clinging to Kitty, but her mother seized her by the arm, and flung her half across the room, and was about to follow her, but Captain Caldwell interfered. "That will do," he said significantly. "It's no use venting your rage on the child. In future choose your nurses better."

"Then, in future, give me better advice when I consult you about them," Mrs. Caldwell retorted, following him out of the room.

Beth clung to Kitty the whole night long, and had to be torn from her in the morning, screaming and kicking. She stood in front of her mother, her eyes and cheeks ablaze: —

"I shall pray to the Blessed Virgin — I shall pray to the Blessed Virgin — every *hour* of my life," she gasped, "and you can't prevent me. Beat me as long as you can stand over me if you like, but I'll only pray the harder."

"For God's sake, m'em," Kitty cried, clasping her hands, "let that child alone. Shure she's a sweet lamb if you'd give her a chance. But ye put the divil into her wid yer shakin' an' yer batin', and mischief'll come of it sooner or later, mark my words."

When Kitty had gone, Mrs. Caldwell shut Beth up in the nursery with Baby Bernadine. Beth threw herself on the floor, and sobbed until she had exhausted her tears; then she gathered herself together, and sat on the floor with her hands clasped round her legs, her chin on her knees, looking up dreamily at the sky, through the nursery window. Her pathetic little face was all drawn and haggard and hopeless. But presently she began to sing —

"Ave Maria!  
Mother of the desolate!  
Guide of the unfortunate!  
Hear from thy starry home our prayer:  
If sorrow will await us,  
Tyrants vex and hate us,  
Teach us thine own most patient part to bear!  
Sancta Maria!  
When we are sighing,  
When we are dying,  
Give to us thine aid of prayer!"

As she sang, comfort came to her, and the little voice swelled in volume.

Baby Bernadine also sat on the floor, opposite to Beth, and gazed at her, much impressed. When she had finished singing, Beth became aware of her sister's reverent attention, and put out her tongue at her. Bernadine laughed. Then Beth crisped up her hands till they looked like claws, and began to

make a variety of hideous faces. Bernadine thought it was a game and smiled at first, but finally she ceased to recognise her sister and shrieked aloud in terror. Beth heard her mother hurrying up, and got behind the door so that her mother could not see her as she opened it. Mrs. Caldwell hurried up to the baby – "The darling, then, what have they been doing to you?" – and Beth made her escape. As she crossed the hall, some one knocked at the front door. Beth opened it a crack. Captain Keene was outside. When she saw him, she recollected something she had heard about his religious opinions, and began to question him eagerly. His answers were apparently exciting, for presently she flung the door wide open to let him in, then ran to the foot of the stairs, and shouted at the top of her voice —

"Papa, papa, come down! come directly! Here's old Keene, the old Buffalo, and he says there is no God!"

Captain Caldwell descended the stairs hurriedly, but, on catching a glimpse of his countenance, Beth did not wait to receive him.

She had to pass through the kitchen to get into the yard. It was the busy time of the day, and Biddy and Anne and Riley, all without shoes or stockings, were playing football with a bladder.

Biddy tried to detain Beth.

"Arrah, bad luck to ye, Biddy," Beth cried, imitating the brogue. "Let me go, d'ye hear?"

"Holy Mother, preserve us!" Biddy exclaimed, crossing herself. "Don't ye ever be after wishin' anybody bad luck, Miss Beth; shure ye'll bring it if ye do."

"Thin don't ye ever be after stoppin' me when I want to be going, Biddy," Beth rejoined, stamping her foot, "or I'll *blast* ye," she added as she passed out into the sunlight.

Fowls and ducks and Jim's pet pigeons were the only creatures moving in the yard. Beth stood among them, watching them for a little, then went to the cornbin in the stable, and got some oats. There was a shallow tub of water for the birds to drink; Beth hunkered down beside it, and held out her hand, full of corn. The pigeons were very tame, and presently a beautiful blue-rock came up confidently, and began to eat. His eyes were a deep rich orange colour. Beth caught him, and stroked his glossy plumage, delighting in the exquisite metallic sheen on his neck and breast. The colour gave her an almost painful sensation of pleasure, which changed on a sudden into a fit of blind exasperation. Her grief for the loss of Kitty had gripped her again with a horrid twinge. She clenched her teeth in her pain, her fingers closed convulsively round the pigeon's throat, and she held him out at arm's length, and shook him viciously till the nictitating membrane dropped over his eyes, his head sank back, his bill opened, and he hung from her hand, an inert heap of ruffled feathers. Then the tension of her nerves relaxed; it was a relief to have crushed the life out of something. She let the bird drop, and stood looking at him, as an animal might have looked, with an impassive face which betrays no shade of emotion. As she did so, however, the bird showed signs of life; and, suddenly, quickening into interest, she stooped down, turned him over, and examined him; then sprinkled him with water, and made him drink. He rapidly revived, and when he was able to stand, she let him go; and he was soon feeding among his companions as if nothing had happened.

Beth watched them for a little with the same animal-like expressionless gravity of countenance, then moved off unconcernedly.

She never mentioned the incident to any one, and never forgot it; but her only feeling about it was that the pigeon had had a narrow escape.

## CHAPTER VI

Beth was a fine instrument, sensitive to a touch, and, considering the way she was handled, it would have been a wonder if discordant effects had not been constantly produced upon her. Hers was a nature with a wide range. It is probable that every conceivable impulse was latent in her, every possibility of good or evil. Exactly which would predominate depended upon the influences of these early years; and almost all the influences she came under were haphazard. There was no intelligent direction of her thoughts, no systematic training to form good habits. Her brothers were sent to school as soon as they were old enough, and so had the advantage of regular routine and strict discipline from the first; but a couple of hours a day for lessons was considered enough for the little girls; and, for the rest of the time, so long as they were on the premises and not naughty, that is to say, gave no trouble, it was taken for granted that they were safe, morally and physically. Neither of their parents seem to have suspected their extreme precocity; and there is no doubt that Beth suffered seriously in after life from the mistakes of those in authority over her at this period. People admired her bright eyes without realising that she could see with them, and not only that she could see, but that she could not help seeing. But even if they had realised it, they would merely have scolded her for learning anything in that way which they preferred that she should not know. They were not sufficiently intelligent themselves to perceive that it is not what we know of things, but what we think of them, which makes for good or evil. Beth was accordingly allowed to run wild, and expected to see nothing; but all the time her mind was being involuntarily stored with observations from which, in time to come, for want of instruction, she would be forced to draw her own – often erroneous – conclusions.

Kitty's departure was Beth's first great grief, and she suffered terribly. The prop and stay of her little life had gone, the comfort and kindness, the order and discipline, which were essential to her nature. Mrs. Caldwell was a good woman, who would certainly do what she thought best for her children; but she was exhausted by the unconscionable production of a too numerous family, a family which she had neither the means nor the strength to bring up properly. Her husband's health, too, grew ever more precarious, and she found herself obliged to do all in her power to help him with his duties, which were arduous. There was a good deal that she could do in the way of writing official letters and managing money-matters, tasks for which she was much better fitted than for the management of children; but the children, meanwhile, had to be left to the care of others – not that that would have been a bad thing for them had their mother had sufficient discrimination to enable her to choose the proper kind of people to be with them. Unfortunately for everybody, however, Mrs. Caldwell had been brought up on the old-fashioned principle that absolute ignorance of human nature is the best qualification for a wife and mother, and she was consequently quite unprepared for any possibility which had not formed part of her own simple and limited personal experience. She never suspected, for one thing, that a servant's conversation could be undesirable if her appearance and her character from her last mistress were satisfactory; and, therefore, when Kitty had gone, she put Anne in her place without misgiving, Anne's principal recommendation being that she was a nice-looking girl, and had pretty deferential manners.

Anne came from one of the cabins on the Irish side of the road, where people, pigs, poultry, with an occasional cow, goat, or donkey herded together indiscriminately. The windows were about a foot square, and were not made to open. Sometimes they had glass in them, but were oftener stopped up with rags. Before the doors were heaps of manure and pools of stagnant water. There was no regular footway, but a mere beaten track in front of the cabins, and this, on wet days, was ankle-deep in mud. The women hung about the doors all day long, knitting the men's blue stockings, and did little else apparently. Both men and women were usually in a torpid state, the result, doubtless, of breathing a poisoned atmosphere, and of insufficient food. It took strong stimulants to rouse them: love, hate, jealousy, whisky, battle, murder, and sudden death. Their conversation was gross, and they were very

immoral; but it is hardly necessary to say so, for with men, women, children, and animals all crowded together in such surroundings, and the morbid craving for excitement to which people who have no comfort or wholesome interest in life fall a prey, immorality is inevitable. It was the boast of the place that there were no illegitimate children; it would have been a better sign if there had been.

Mrs. Caldwell, true to her training, lived opposite to all this vice and squalor, serenely indifferent to it. Anne, therefore, who knew nothing about the management of children, and was not in any respect a proper person to have the charge of them, had it all her own way in the nursery: and her way was to do nothing that she could help. She used to call the children in the morning, and then leave them to their own devices. The moment they were awake, which was pretty soon, for they were full of life, they began to batter each other with pillows, dance about the room in their night-dresses, pitch tents with the bed-clothes on the floor, and make noise enough to bring their mother down upon them. Then Anne would be summoned and come hurrying up, and help them to huddle on their clothes somehow. She never washed them, but encouraged them to perform their own ablutions, which they did with the end of a towel dipped in a jug. The consequence was they were generally in a very dirty state. They took their meals with their parents, and papa would notice the dirt eventually, and storm at mamma in Italian, when words would ensue in a tone which made the children quake. Then mamma would storm at Anne, for whom the children felt sorry, and the result would be a bath, which they bore with fortitude, for fear of getting Anne into further trouble. They even made good resolutions about washing themselves, which they kept for a few days; then, however, they began to shirk again, and had again to be scrubbed. The resolutions of a child must be shored up by kindly supervision, otherwise it is hardly likely that they will cement into good habits.

Beth suffered from a continual sense of discomfort in those days for want of proper attention. All her clothing fitted badly, and were fastened on with anything that came to hand in the way of tape and buttons; her hair was ill brushed, and she was so continually found fault with that her sense of self-respect was checked in its development, and she lost all faith in her own power to do anything right or well. The consequence was the most profound disheartenment, endured in silence, with the exquisite uncomplaining fortitude of a little child. It made its mark on her countenance, however, in a settled expression of discontent, which, being mistaken for a bad disposition, repelled people, and made her many enemies. People generally said that Mildred was a dear, but Beth did not look pleasant; and for many a long day to come, very few troubled themselves to try and make her look so.

It cannot be said that Beth's parents neglected their children. On the contrary, her father thought much of their education, and of their future; it was the all-importance of the present that did not strike him, and so with her mother. Neither parent was careless, but their care stopped short too soon; and it is astonishing the amount of liberty the children had. They were sent out of doors as soon as they were dressed in the morning, because sunshine and air are so essential to children. If they went for a walk, Anne accompanied them; but very often Anne was wanted, and then the children were left to loiter about the garden or stable-yard, where, doubtless with the help of reasoning powers much in advance of her age, Beth had soon heard and seen enough to make her feel a certain contempt for her father's veracity when he told her that she had originally been brought to the house in the doctor's black bag.

After Kitty's departure Beth had many a lonely hour, and the time hung heavy on her hands. Mildred, her senior by four years, was of a simpler disposition, and always able to amuse herself, playing with the Baby Bernadine, or with toys which were no distraction to Beth. Mildred, besides, was fond of reading; but books to be deciphered remained a wonder and a mystery to Beth.

Jim went to the national school, the only one in the place, with all the other little boys. The master was a young curate who gave Mildred and Beth their lessons also, when school-hours were over. Beth used to yearn for lesson-time, just for the sake of being obliged to do something; but lessons were disappointing, for the curate devoted himself to Mildred, who was docile and studious, and took no special pains to interest Beth, and consequently she soon wearied of the dull restraint, and became troublesome. Sometimes she was boisterous, and then the tutor had to spend half his

time in chasing her to rescue his hat, a book, an ink-bottle, or some other article which she threatened to destroy; and, sometimes she was so depressed that he had to give up trying to teach her, and just do his best to distract her. In her eighth year she was able to follow the church-service in the prayer-book, and make out the hymns, but that was all.

Sunday-school was held in the church, and was attended by all the unmarried parishioners. Mildred taught some of the tiny mites, and Beth was put into her class at first; but Beth had no respect for Mildred, and had consequently to be removed. She was expected to learn the collect for the day and the verse of a hymn every Sunday, but never by any chance knew either. No one ever thought of reading the thing over to her, and fixing her attention on it by some little explanation; and learning by heart from a book did not come naturally to her. She learned by ear easily enough, but not by sight. The hymns and prayers which Kitty had repeated to her, she very soon picked up; but Kitty had true sympathetic insight to inform her of what the child required, and all her little lessons were proper to some occasion, and had comfort in them. What Beth learned now, on the contrary, often filled her with gloom. Some of the hymns, such as, made her especially miserable. It was always a dark day to her when she repeated it, with heavy clouds collecting overhead, and herself, a solitary little speck on the mountain side wandering alone.

"When gathering clouds around I view,  
And days are dark, and friends are few,"

## CHAPTER VII

It is significant to note that church figures largely in Beth's recollection of this time, but religion not at all. There was, in fact, no connection between the two in her mind.

Both Captain and Mrs. Caldwell protested strongly against what they called cant; and they seemed to have called everything cant except an occasional cold reading aloud of the Bible on Sundays, and the bald observance of the church service. The Bible they read aloud to the children without expounding it, and the services they attended without comment. Displays of religious emotion in everyday life they regarded as symptoms of insanity; and if they heard people discuss religion with enthusiasm, and profess to love the Lord, they were genuinely shocked. All that kind of thing they thought "such cant," "and so like those horrid dissenters;" which made them extra careful that the children should hear nothing of the sort. This, from their point of view, was right and wise; in Beth's case especially; for her unsatisfied soul was of the quality which soon yearns for the fine fulness of faith; her little heart would have filled to bursting with her first glad conception of the love divine, and her whole being would have stirred to speak her emotion, even though speech meant martyrdom. Thanks to the precautions of her parents, however, she heard nothing to stimulate her natural tendency to religious fervour after Kitty's departure; and gradually the image of our Blessed Lady faded from her mind, and was succeeded by that of the God of her parents, a death-dealing deity, delighting in blood, whom she was warned to fear, and from whom she did accordingly shrink with such holy horror that, when she went to church, she tried to think of anything but Him. This was how it happened that church, instead of being the threshold of the next world to her mind, became the centre of this, where she made many interesting observations of men and manners; for in spite of her backwardness in the schoolroom, Beth's intellect advanced with a bound at this period. She had left her native place an infant, on whose mind some chance impressions had been made and lingered; she arrived at Castletownrock with the power to observe for herself, and even to reflect upon what she saw – of course to a certain extent only; but still the power had come, and was far in advance of her years. So far, it was circumstances that had impressed her; she knew one person from another, but that was all. Now, however, she began to be interested in people for themselves, apart from any incident in which they figured; and most of her time was spent in a curiously close, but quite involuntary study of those about her, and of their relations to each other.

Church was often a sore penance to the children, it was so long, and cold, and dull; but they set off on Sunday happy in the consciousness of their best hats and jackets, nevertheless; and the first part of the time was not so bad, for then they had Sunday-school, and the three Misses Keene – Mary, Sophia, and Lenore – and the two Misses Mayne, Honor and Kathleen, and Mr. and Mrs. Small, the Vicar and his wife, and the curate, were all there talking and teaching. Beth remembered nothing about the teaching except that, on one occasion, Mr. Macbean, the rector, tried to explain the meaning of the trefoil on the ends of the pews to Mildred and herself; but she could think of nothing but the way his beard wagged as he spoke, and was disconcerted when he questioned her. He had promised to be a friend to Beth; but he was a delicate man, and not able to live much at Castletownrock, where the climate was rigorous; so that she seldom saw him.

When Sunday-school was over, the children went up to the gallery; their pew and the Keenes', roomy boxes, took up the whole front of it. Mrs. Caldwell always sat up in the gallery with the children, but Captain Caldwell often sat downstairs in the rectory-pew to be near the fire; when he sat in the gallery he wore a little black cap to keep off the draught. He and Mr. O'Halloran the Squire, and Captain Keene, stood and talked in the aisle sometimes before the service commenced. One Sunday they kept looking up at the children in the gallery.

"I'll bet Mildred will be the handsomest woman," Mr. O'Halloran was saying.

"I'll back Beth," Captain Keene observed. "If all the men in the place are not after her soon, I'm no judge of her sex, eh?"

"Oh, don't look at me!" said Captain Caldwell complacently. "I can't pretend to say. But let's hope that they'll go off well, at all events. They'll have every chance I can give them of making good matches."

Beth heard her father repeat this conversation to her mother afterwards, but was too busy wondering what a handsome woman was to understand that it was her own charms which had been appraised; but Mildred understood, and was elated.

Mr. O'Halloran, the squire, had a red beard, which was an offence to Beth. His wife wore bonnets about which everybody used to make remarks to Mrs. Caldwell. Beth understood that Mrs. O'Halloran was young and pretty, and had three charming children, but was not happy because of Sophia Keene.

"Just fancy," she heard Mrs. Small, the Vicar's wife, say to her mother once. "Just fancy, he was in a carriage with them at the races, and stayed with Sophia the whole time; and poor Mrs. O'Halloran left at home alone. I call it scandalous. But you know what Sophia is!" Mrs. Small concluded significantly.

Mrs. Caldwell drew herself up, and looked at Mrs. Small, but said nothing; yet somehow Beth knew that she too was unhappy because of Sophia Keene. Beth was not on familiar terms with her mother, and would not have dared to embrace her spontaneously, or make any other demonstration of affection; but she was loyally devoted to her all the same, and would gladly have stabbed Sophia Keene, and have done battle with the whole of the rest of the family on her mother's behalf had occasion offered.

She was curled up among the fuchsias on the window-seat of the sitting-room one day, unobserved by her parents, who entered the room together after she had settled herself there, and began to discuss the Keenes.

"You did not tell me, Henry, you spent all your time with them before we came," Mrs. Caldwell said reproachfully.

"Why should I?" he answered, with a jaunty affectation of ease.

"It is not why you should," his wife said with studied gentleness, "but why you should not. It seems so strange, making a mystery of it."

"I described old Keene to you – the old buffalo!" he replied; "and I'll describe the girls now if you like. Mary is a gawk, Sophia is as yellow as a duck's foot, and Lenore is half-witted."

The Keenes were ignorant, idle, good-tempered young women, and kind to the children, whom they often took to bathe with them. They were seldom able to go into the sea itself, for it was a wild, tempestuous coast; but there were lovely clear pools on the rocky shore, natural stone baths left full of water when the tide went out, sheltered from the wind by tall, dark, precipitous cliffs, and warmed by the sun; and there they used to dabble by the hour together. Anne went with them, and it was a pretty sight, the four young women in white chemises that clung to them when wet, and the three lovely children – little white nudities with bright brown hair – scampering over the rocks, splashing each other in the pools, or lying about on warm sunny slabs, resting and chattering. One day Beth found some queer things in a pool, and Sophia told her they were barnacles.

"They stick to the bottom of a ship," she said, "and grow heavier and heavier till at last the ship can make no more way, and comes to a standstill in a shining sea, where the water is as smooth as a mirror; you would think it was a mirror, in fact, if it did not heave gently up and down like your breast when you breathe; and every time it heaves it flushes some colour, blue, or green, or pink, or purple. And the barnacles swell and swell at the bottom of the ship, till at last they burst in two with a loud report; and then the sailors rush to the side of the ship and look over, and there they see a flock of beautiful big white geese coming up out of the water; and sometimes they shoot the geese, but if they do a great storm comes on and engulfs the ship, and they are all drowned; but sometimes

they stand stockstill, amazed, and then the birds rise up out of the air on their great white wings, up, up, drifting along, together, till they look like the clouds over there. Then a gentle breeze springs up, and the ship sails away safely into port."

"And where do the geese go?" Beth demanded, with breathless interest.

"They make for the shore too, and in the dead of winter, on stormy nights, they fly over the land, uttering strange cries, and if you wake and hear them, it means somebody is going to die."

Beth's eyes were staring far out beyond the great green Atlantic rollers that came bursting in round the sheltering headland, white-crested with foam, flying up the beach with a crash, and scattering showers of spray that sparkled in the sunshine. She could see the ships and the barnacles, and the silent sea, heaving great sighs and flushing with fine colour in the act; and the geese, and the sailors peering over the side and shooting at them and sinking immediately in a storm, but also sailing into a safe haven triumphantly, where the sun shone on white houses, although, at the same time, it was dark night, and overhead there were strange cries that made her cower – "Beth!" cried Sophia, "what's the matter with you, child?"

Beth returned with a start, and stared at her – "I know who it will be," she said.

"Who what'll be, Miss Beth?" Anne asked in awe.

"Who'll die," said Beth.

"You mustn't say, Beth; you'll bring bad luck if you do," Miss Keene interposed hastily.

"I'm not going to say," Beth answered dreamily; "but I know."

"You shouldn't have told the child that story, miss," Anne said. "Shure, ye know what she is – she sees." Anne nodded her head several times significantly.

"I forgot," said Sophia.

"She'll forget too," said Mary philosophically. "I say, Beth," she went on, raising herself on her elbow – she was lying prone on a slab of rock in the sun – "what does your mother think of us?"

Beth roused herself. "I don't know," she answered earnestly; "she never says. But I know what papa thinks of you. He says Mary's a gawk, Sophia is as yellow as a duck's foot, and Lenore is only half-witted."

The effect of this announcement astonished Beth. The Misses Keene, instead of being interested, all looked at her as if they did not like her, and Anne burst out laughing. When they got in, Anne told Mrs. Caldwell, who flushed suddenly, and covered her mouth with her handkerchief.

"Yes, mamma," Mildred exclaimed with importance, "Beth did say so. And Mary tossed her head, and Sophia sneered."

"What is sneered?" Beth demanded importunately. "What is sneered?"

"O Beth! don't bother so," Mildred exclaimed irritably. "It's when you curl up your lip."

"Beth, how could you be so naughty?" Mrs. Caldwell said at last from behind her handkerchief. "Don't you know you should never repeat things you hear said? A lady never repeats a private conversation."

"What's a private conversation?" said Beth.

Mrs. Caldwell gave her a broad definition, during which she lowered her handkerchief, and Beth discovered that she was trying not to smile.

This was Beth's first lesson in honour, which was her mother's god, and she felt the influence of it all her life.

Later in the day, Beth was curled up on the window-seat among the fuchsias, looking out. Behind the thatched cabins opposite, the sombre mountains rolled up, dark and distinct, to the sky; but Beth would not look at them if she could help it, they oppressed her. It was a close afternoon, and the window was wide open. A bare-legged woman, in a short petticoat, stood in an indolent attitude leaning against a door-post opposite; a young man in low shoes, light blue stockings, buff knee-breeches, a blue-tailed coat with brass buttons, and a soft high-crowned felt hat, came strolling up the street with his hands in his pockets.

"Hallo, Biddy," he remarked, as he passed the woman, "you're all swelled."

"Yes," she answered tranquilly, "I've been drinking buttermilk."

"Well, let's hope it'll be a boy," he rejoined.

The woman looked up and down the street complacently.

Presently Beth saw Honor and Kathleen Mayne come out of the inn. The Maynes used to pet the children and play the piano to them when they were at the inn, and had been very good to Jim also when he was there alone with his father before the family arrived. Their manners were gentle and caressing, and they did their best to win their way into Mrs. Caldwell's good graces, but at first she coldly repulsed them, which hurt Beth very much. The Maynes, however, did not at all understand that they were being repulsed. A kindly feeling existed among all classes in those remote Irish villages. The squire's family, the doctor's, clergyman's, draper's, and innkeeper's visited each other, and shook hands when they met. There was no feeling of condescension on the one hand, or of pretension on the other; but Mrs. Caldwell had the strong class prejudice which makes such stupid snobs of the English. It was not *what* people were, but *who* they were, that was all important to her; and she would have bowed down cheerfully, as whole neighbourhoods do, and felt exhilarated by the notice of some stupid county magnate, who had not heart enough to be loved, head enough to distinguish himself, or soul enough to get him into heaven. She was a lady, and Mayne was an innkeeper. His daughters might amuse the children, but as to associating with Mrs. Caldwell, that was absurd!

The girls were not to be rebuffed, however. They persevered in their kindly attentions, making excuses to each other for Mrs. Caldwell's manner; explaining her coldness by the fact that she was English, and flattering her, until finally they won their way into her good graces, and so effectually too, that when they brought a young magpie in a basket for Beth one day, her mother graciously allowed her to accept it.

Beth liked the Maynes, but now as they came up the road she slid from the window-seat. She knew they would stop and talk if she waited, and she did not want to talk. She was thinking about something, and it irritated her to be interrupted. So she tore across the hall and through the kitchen out into the yard, impelled by an imperative desire to be alone.

The magpie was the first pet of her own she had ever had, and she loved it. At night it was chained to a perch stuck in the wall of the stable-yard. On the other side of that wall was the yard of Murphy the farrier. The magpie soon became tame enough to be let loose by day, and Beth always went to release it the first thing in the morning and give it its breakfast. It came hopping to meet her now, and followed her into the garden. The garden was entered by an archway under the outbuildings, which divided it from the stable-yard. It was very long, but narrow for its length. On the right was a high wall, but on the left was a low one – at least one half of it was low – and Beth could look over it into the farrier's garden next door. The other half had been raised by Captain Caldwell on the understanding that if he raised one half the farrier would raise the other, but the farrier had proved perfidious. The wall was built without mortar, of rough, uncut stones. Captain Caldwell had his half neatly finished off at the top with sods, but Murphy's piece was still all broken down. The children used to climb up by it on to the raised half, and dance there at the risk of life and limb, and jeer at Murphy as he dug his potatoes, calling his attention to the difference between the Irish and English half of the wall, till he lost his temper and pelted them. This was the signal for a battle. The children returned his potatoes with stones by way of interest, and hit him as often as he hit them. (Needless to say, their parents were not in the garden at the time.) They had a great contempt for the farrier because he fought them, and he used to go about the village complaining of them and their "tratement" of him, "the little divils, spoilin' the pace of the whole neighbourhood."

There was a high wall at the end of the garden, and Beth liked to sit on the top of it. She went there now, picked up her magpie, and climbed up with difficulty by way of Pat Murphy's broken bit. Immediately below her was a muddy lane, beyond which the land sloped down to the sea, and as she

sat there, the sound of the waves, that dreamy, soft murmur for which we have no word, filled the interstices of her consciousness with something that satisfied.

She was not left long in peace to enjoy it that afternoon, however, for the farrier was at work in his garden below, and presently he looked up and saw the magpie.

"There ye are agin, Miss Beth, wi' yer baste of a burrd; bad luck to it!" he exclaimed, crossing himself. "Shure, don't I tell ye ivery day uf your life it's wan fur sorrow."

"Bad luck to yerself, Pat Murphy," Beth rejoined promptly. "It's a foine cheek ye have to be spakin' to a gentleman's daughter, an' you not a man uv yer wurrd."

"Not a man o' me wurrd! what d'ye mane?" said Murphy, firing.

"Look at that wall," Beth answered; "didn't ye promise ye'd build it?"

"An' so I will when yer father gives me the stones he promised me," Murphy replied. "It's a moighty foine mon uv his wurrd he is."

"Is it my father yer maning, Pat Murphy?" Beth asked.

"It is," he said, sticking his spade in the ground emphatically.

"Ye know yer lying," said Beth. "My father promised you no stones. He's not a fool."

"I niver met a knave that was," Pat observed, turning over a huge spadeful of earth, and then straightening himself to look up at her.

Beth's instinct was always to fight when she was in a rage; words break no bones, and she preferred to break bones at such times. It was some seconds before she saw the full force of Pat's taunt, but the moment she did, she seized the largest loose stone within reach on the top of the wall, and shied it at him. It struck him full in the face, and cut his cheek open.

"That'll teach ye," said Beth, blazing.

The man turned on her with a very ugly look.

"Put yer spade down," she said. "I'm not afraid of you."

"Miss Beth! Miss Beth!" some one called from the end of the garden.

Murphy stuck his spade in the ground, and wiped his jaw. "Ye'll pay for this, ye divil's limb," he muttered, "yew an' yours."

"Miss Beth! Miss Beth!"

"I'm coming!" Beth rejoined irritably, and slid from the wall to the ground regardless of the rough loose stones she scattered in her descent. "Ye'll foind me ready to pay when ye send in yer bill, Pat," she called out as she ran down the garden.

The children were to have tea at the vicarage that day, and Anne had been sent to fetch her.

In the drawing-room at the vicarage there was a big bay-window which looked out across a desolate stretch of bog to a wild headland, against which the waves beat tempestuously in almost all weathers. The headland itself was high, but the giant breakers often dashed up far above it, and fell in showers of spray on the grass at the top. There was a telescope in the window at the vicarage, and people used to come to see the sight, and went into raptures over it. Beth, standing out of the way, unnoticed, would gaze too, fascinated; but it was the attraction of repulsion. The cruel force of the great waves agitated her, and at the same time made her unutterably sad. Her heart beat painfully when she watched them, her breath became laboured, and it was only with an effort that she could keep back her sobs. It was not fear that oppressed her, but a horrible sort of excitement, which so gained upon her on that afternoon in particular that she felt she must shriek aloud, or make her escape. If she showed any emotion she would be laughed at, if she made her escape she would probably be whipped; she preferred to be whipped; so, watching her opportunity, she quietly slipped away.

At home the window of the sitting-room was still wide open, and as she ran down the street she noticed some country people peeping in curiously, and apparently astonished by the luxury they beheld. Beth, who was picking up Irish rapidly, understood some exclamations she overheard as she approached, and felt flattered for the furniture.

She ran up the steps and opened the front door: "Good day to ye all," she said sociably; "will ye not come in and have a look round? now do!"

She led the way as she spoke, and the country people followed her, all agape. In the hall they paused to wonder at the cocoanut matting; but when they stood on the soft pile carpet, so grateful to their bare feet, in the sitting-room, and looked round, they lowered their voices respectfully, and this gave Beth a sudden sensation of superiority. She began to show them the things: the pictures on the walls, the subjects of which she explained to them; the egg-shell china, which she held up to the light that they might see how thin it was; and some Eastern and Western curios her father had brought home from various voyages. She told them of tropical heat and Canadian cold, and began to be elated herself when she found all that she had ever heard on the subject flowing fluently from her lips.

The front door had been left open, and the passers-by looked in to see what was going on, and then entered uninvited. Neighbours, too, came over from the Irish side of the road, so that the room gradually filled, and as her audience increased, Beth grew excited and talked away eloquently.

"Lord," one man exclaimed with a sigh, on looking round the room, "it's aisy to see why the likes of these looks down on the likes of us."

"Eh, dear, yes!" a woman with a petticoat over her head solemnly responded.

"The durrrty heretics," a slouching fellow, with a flat white face, muttered under his breath. "But if they benefit here, they'll burn hereafter, holy Jasus be praised."

"Will they?" said Beth, turning on him. "Will they burrn hereafter, Bap-faced Flanagan? No, they won't! They'll hunt ye out of heaven as they hunted ye out o' Maclone."

"Oh, the Orange militia walked into Maclone,  
And hunted the Catholics out of the town.  
Ri' turen nuren nuren naddio,  
Right tur nuren nee."

She sang it out at the top of her shrill little voice, executing a war-dance of defiance to the tune, and concluding with an elaborate curtsy.

As she recovered herself, she became aware of her father standing in the doorway. His lips were white, and there was a queer look in his face.

"Oh! So this is *your* party, is it, Miss Beth?" he said. "You ask your friends in, and then you insult them, I see."

Beth was still effervescing. She put her hands behind her back and answered boldly —

"Deed, thin, he insulted me, papa. It was Bap-faced Flanagan. He said we were durrrty heretics, and — and — I'll not stand that! It's a free country!"

Captain Caldwell looked round, and the people melted from the room under his eye. Then Anne appeared from somewhere.

"Anne, do you teach the children party-songs?" he demanded.

"Shure, they don't need taching, yer honour," said Anne, disconcerted. "Miss Beth knows 'em all, and she shouts 'em at the top of her voice down the street till the men shake their fists at her."

"Why do you do that, Beth?" her father demanded.

"I like to feel," Beth began, gasping out each word with a mighty effort to express herself — "I like to feel — that I can *make* them shake their fists."

Her father looked at her again very queerly.

"Will I take her to the nursery, sir?" Anne asked.

Beth turned on her impatiently, and said something in Irish which made Anne grin. Beth did not understand her father in this mood, and she wanted to see more of him.

"What's that she's saying to you, Anne?" he asked.

"Oh — sure, she's just blessin' me, yer honour," Anne answered unabashed.

"I believe you!" Captain Caldwell said dryly, as he stretched himself on the sofa. "Go and fetch a hair-brush."

While Anne was out of the room he turned to Beth. "I'll give you a penny," he said, "if you'll tell me what you said to Anne."

"I'll tell you for nothing," Beth answered. "I said, 'Yer soul to the devil for an interfering hussy.'"

Captain Caldwell burst out laughing, and laughed till Anne returned with the brush. "Now, brush my hair," he said to Beth; and Beth went and stood beside the sofa, and brushed, and brushed, now with one hand, and now with the other, till she ached all over with the effort. Her father suffered from atrocious headaches, and this was the one thing that relieved him.

"There, that's punishment enough for to-day," he said at last.

Beth retired to the foot of the couch, and leant there, looking at him solemnly, with the hair-brush still in her hand. "That's no punishment," she observed.

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"I mean I like it," she said. "I'd brush till I dropped if it did you any good."

Captain Caldwell looked up at her, and it was as if he had seen the child for the first time.

"Beth," he said, after a while, "would you like to come out with me on the car to-morrow?"

"Deed, then, I would, papa," Beth answered eagerly.

Then there was a pause, during which Beth rubbed her back against the end of the couch thoughtfully, and looked at the wall opposite as if she could see through it. Her father watched her for a little time with a frown upon his forehead from the pain in his head.

"What are you thinking of, Beth?" he said at last.

"I've got to be whipped to-night," she answered drearily; "and I wish I hadn't. I do get so tired of being whipped and shaken."

Her little face looked pinched and pathetic as she spoke, and for the first time her father had a suspicion of what punishment was to this child – a thing as inevitable as disease, a continually recurring torture, but quite without effect upon her conduct – and his heart contracted with a qualm of pity.

"What are you going to be whipped for now?" he asked.

"We went to tea at the vicarage, and I ran away home."

"Why?"

"Because of the great green waves. They rush up the rocks – wish – st – st!" (she took a step forward, and threw up her little arms in illustration) – "then fall, and roll back, and gather, and come rushing on again; and I feel every time – every time – that they are coming right at me!" – she clutched her throat as if she were suffocating; "and if I had stayed I should have shrieked, and then I should have been whipped. So I came away."

"But you expect to be whipped for coming away?"

"Yes. But you see I don't have the waves as well. And mamma won't say I was afraid."

"Were you afraid, Beth?" her father asked.

"No!" Beth retorted, stamping her foot indignantly. "If the waves did come at me, I could stand it. It's the coming – coming – coming – I can't bear. It makes me ache here." She clutched at her throat and chest again.

Captain Caldwell closed his eyes. He felt that he was beginning to make this child's acquaintance, and wished he had tried to cultivate it sooner.

"You shall not be whipped to-night, Beth," he said presently, looking at her with a kindly smile.

Instantly an answering smile gleamed on the child's face, transfiguring her; and, by the light of it, her father realised how seldom he had seen her smile.

Unfortunately for Beth, however, while her countenance was still irradiated, her mother swooped down upon her. Mrs. Caldwell had come hurrying home in a rage in search of Beth; and now, mistaking that smile for a sign of defiance, she seized upon her, and had beaten her severely

before it was possible to interfere. Beth, dazed by this sudden onslaught, staggered when she let her go, and stretched out her little hands as if groping for some support.

"It wasn't your fault! – it wasn't your fault!" she gasped, her first instinct being to exonerate her father.

Captain Caldwell had started up and caught his wife by the arm.

"That's enough," he said harshly. "You are going altogether the wrong way to work with the child. Let this be the last time, do you understand? Beth, go to the nursery, and ask Anne to get you some tea." A sharp pain shot through his head. He had jumped up too quickly, and now fell back on the sofa with a groan.

"Oh, let me brush it again," Beth cried, in an agony of sympathy.

Her father opened his haggard eyes and smiled.

"Go to the nursery, like a good child," he said, "and get some tea."

Beth went without another word. But all that evening her mind was with her parents in the sitting-room, wondering – wondering what they were saying to each other.

## CHAPTER VIII

Next day Beth jumped out of bed early, and washed herself all over, in an excess of grateful zeal, because she was to be taken out on the car. As soon as she had had her breakfast, she ran into the yard to feed her magpie. Its perch was in a comfortable corner sheltered by the great turf-stack which had been built up against the wall that divided the Caldwells' yard from that of Pat Murphy, the farrier. Beth, in wild spirits, ran round the stack, calling "Mag, Mag!" as she went. But Mag, alas! was never more to respond to her call. He was hanging by the leg from his perch, head downward, wings outstretched, and glossy feathers ruffled; and below him, on the ground, some stones were scattered which told the tale of cruelty and petty spite.

Beth stood for a moment transfixed; but in that moment the whole thing became clear to her – the way in which the deed was done, the man that did it, and his motive. She glanced up to the top of the high wall, and then, breathing thick through her clenched teeth, in her rage she climbed up the turf-stack with the agility of a cat, and looked over into the farrier's yard.

"Come out of that, Pat Murphy, ye black-hearted, murdering villain," she shrieked. "I see ye skulking there behind the stable-door. Come out, I tell ye, and bad luck to you for killing my bird."

"Is it me, miss?" Pat Murphy exclaimed, appearing with an injured and innocent look on his face. "Me kill yer burrd! Shure, thin, ye never thought such a thing uv me!"

"Didn't I, thin! and I think it still," Beth cried. "Say, 'May I never see heaven if I kilt it' – or I'll curse ye."

"Ah, thin, it isn't such bad language ye'd hev me be using, and you a young lady, Miss Beth," said Pat in a wheedling tone.

"Deed, thin, it is, Pat Murphy; but I know ye daresn't say it," said Beth. "Oh, bad luck to ye! bad luck to ye every day ye see a wooden milestone, and twice every day ye don't. And if ye killed my bird, may the devil attend ye, to rob ye of what ye like best wherever ye are."

She slid down the stack when she had spoken, and found her father standing at the bottom, looking at the dead bird with a heavy frown on his dark face. He must have heard Beth's altercation with Murphy, but he made no remark until Mrs. Caldwell came out, when he said something in Italian, to which she responded, "The cowardly brute!"

Beth took her bird, and buried it deep in her little garden, by which time the car was ready. She had not shed a tear, nor did she ever mention the incident afterwards; which was characteristic, for she was always shy of showing any feeling but anger.

Captain Caldwell had a wild horse called Artless, which few men would have cared to ride, and fewer still have driven. People wondered that he took his children out on the car behind such an animal, and perhaps he would not have done so if he had had his own way, but Mrs. Caldwell insisted on it.

"They've no base blood in them," she said; "and I'll not have them allowed to acquire any affectation of timidity."

Artless was particularly fresh that morning. He was a red chestnut, with a white star on his forehead, and one white stocking.

When Beth returned to the stable-yard she found him fidgeting between the shafts, with his ears laid back, and the whites of his wicked eyes showing, and Riley struggling with his head in a hard endeavour to keep him quiet enough for the family to mount the car. Captain and Mrs. Caldwell and Mildred were already in their seats, and Beth scrambled up to hers unconcernedly, although Artless was springing about in a lively manner at the moment. Beth sat next her father, who drove from the side of the car, and then they were ready to be off as soon as Artless would go; but Artless objected to leave the yard, and Riley had to lead him round and round, running at his head, and coaxing him, while Captain Caldwell gathered up the reins and held the whip in suspense, watching his opportunity

each time they passed the gate to give Artless a start that would make him bound through it. Round and round they went, however, several times, with Artless rearing, backing, and plunging; but at last the whip came down at the right moment, just the slightest flick, Riley let go his head, and out he dashed in his indignation, the battle ending in a wild gallop up the street, with the car swinging behind him, and the whole of the Irish side of the road out cheering and encouraging, to the children's great delight. But their ebullition of glee was a little too much for their father's nerves.

"These children of yours are perfect little devils, Caroline!" he exclaimed irritably. Mrs. Caldwell smiled as at a compliment. She had been brought up on horseback herself, and insisted on teaching the children to regard danger as a diversion – not that that was difficult, for they were naturally daring. She would have punished them promptly on the slightest suspicion of timidity. "Only base-born people were cowardly," she scornfully maintained. "No lady ever shows a sign of fear."

Once, when they were crossing Achen sands, a wide waste, innocent of any obstacle, Artless came down without warning, and Mildred uttered an exclamation.

"Who was it made that ridiculous noise?" Mrs. Caldwell asked, looking hard at Beth.

Beth could not clear herself without accusing her sister, so she said nothing, but sat, consumed with fiery indignation; and for long afterwards she would wake up at night, and clench her little fists, and burn again, remembering how her mother had supposed she was afraid.

Artless went at breakneck speed that day, shied at the most unexpected moments, bolted right round, and stopped short occasionally; but Beth sat tight mechanically, following her own fancies. Captain Caldwell was going to inspect one of the outlying coastguard stations; and they went by the glen road, memorable to Beth because it was there she first felt the charm of running water, and found her first wild violets and tuft of primroses. The pale purple of the violets and the scent of primroses, warm with the sun, were among the happy associations of that time. But her delight was in the mountain-streams, with their mimic waterfalls and fairy wells. She loved to loiter by them, to watch them bubbling and sparkling over the rocks, to dabble her hands and feet in them, or to lie her length upon the turf beside them, in keen consciousness of the incessant, delicate, delicious murmur of the water, a sound which conveyed to her much more than can be expressed in articulate speech. At times too, when she was tired of loitering, she would look up and see the mountain-top just above her, and begin to climb; but always when she came to the spot, there was the mountain-top just as far above her as before; so she used to think that the mountain really reached the sky.

When they returned, late that afternoon, Riley met them with a very serious face, and told Captain Caldwell mysteriously that Pat Murphy's horse was ill.

"What a d – d unfortunate coincidence," Captain Caldwell muttered to his wife; and Beth noticed that her mother's face, which had looked fresh and bright from the drive, settled suddenly into its habitual anxious, careworn expression.

Beth loitered about the yard till her parents had gone in; then she climbed the turf-stack, and looked over. The sick horse was tied to the stable-door, and stood, hanging his head with a very woebegone expression, and groaning monotonously. Murphy was trying to persuade him to take something hot out of a bucket, while Bap-faced Flanagan and another man, known as Tony-kill-the-cow, looked on and gave good advice.

Beth's fury revived when she saw Murphy, and she laughed aloud derisively. All three men started and looked up, then crossed themselves.

"Didn't I tell ye, Pat!" Beth exclaimed. "Ye may save yourself the trouble of doctoring him. He's as dead as my magpie."

Murphy looked much depressed. "Shure, Miss Beth, the poor baste done ye no harm," he pleaded.

"No," said Beth, "nor my bird hadn't done you any harm, nor the cow Tony cut the tail off hadn't done him any harm."

"I didn't kill yer burrd," Murphy asserted doggedly.

"We'll see," said Beth. "When the horse dies we'll know who killed the bird. Then one of you skunks can try and kill me. But I'd advise you to use a silver bullet; and if you miss, you'll be damned. – Blast ye, Riley, will ye let me alone!"

Riley, hearing what was going on, and having called to her vainly to hold her tongue, had climbed the stack himself, and now laid hold of her. Beth struck him in the face promptly, whereupon he shook her, and loosening her hold of the wall, began to carry her down – a perilous proceeding, for the stack was steep, and Beth, enraged at the indignity, doubled herself up and scratched and bit and kicked the whole way to the ground.

"Ye little devil," said Riley, setting her on her feet, "ye'll get us all into trouble wid that blasted tongue o' yours."

"Who's afraid?" said Beth, shaking her tousled head, and standing up to Riley with her little fists clenched.

"If the devil didn't put ye out when he gave up housekeeping, I dunno where you come from," Riley muttered as he turned away and stumped off stolidly.

During the night the horse died, and Beth found when she went out next day that the carcass had been dragged down Murphy's garden and put in the lane outside. She climbed the wall, and discovered the farrier skinning the horse, and was much disgusted to see him using his hands without gloves on in such an operation. Her anger of the day before was all over now, and she was ready to be on the usual terms of scornful intimacy with Murphy.

"Ye'll never be able to touch anything to eat again with those hands," she said.

"Won't I, thin!" he answered sulkily, and without looking up. He was as inconsequent as a child that resents an injury, but can be diverted from the recollection of it by anything interesting, only to return to its grievance, however, the moment the interest fails. "Won't I, thin! Just you try me wid a bit o' bread-an'-butter this instant, an' see what I'll do wid it."

Beth, always anxious to experiment, tore indoors to get some bread-and-butter, and never did she forget the horror with which she watched the dirty man eat it, with unwashed hands, sitting on the horse's carcass.

That carcass was a source of interest to her for many a long day to come. She used to climb on the wall to see how it was getting on, till the crows had picked the bones clean, and the weather had bleached them white; and she would wonder how a creature once so full of life could become a silent, senseless thing, not feeling, not caring, not knowing, no more to itself than a stone – strange mystery; and some day *she* would be like that, just white bones. She held her breath and suspended all sensation and thought, time after time, to see what it felt like; but always immediately there began a great rushing sound in her ears as of a terrific storm, and that, she concluded, was death coming. When he arrived then all would be blotted out.

The country was in a very disturbed state, and it was impossible to keep all hints of danger from the children's sharp ears. Beth knew a great deal of what was going on and what might be expected, but then a few chance phrases were already enough for her to construct a whole story upon, and with wonderful accuracy generally. Her fine faculty of observation developed apace at this time, and nothing she noticed now was ever forgotten. She would curl up in the window-seat among the fuchsias, and watch the people in the street by the hour together, especially on Sundays and market-days, when a great many came in from the mountains, women in close white caps with goffered frills, short petticoats, and long blue cloaks; and men in tail-coats and knee-breeches, with shillalahs under their arms, which they used very dexterously. They talked Irish at the top of their voices, and gesticulated a great deal, and were childishly quarrelsome. One market-day, when Beth was looking out of the sitting-room window, her mother came and looked out too, and they saw half-a-dozen countrymen set upon a young Castletownrock man. In a moment their shillalahs were whirling about his head, and he was driven round the corner of the house. Presently he came staggering back across the road, blubbering like a child, with his head broken, and the blood streaming down over his face,

which was white and distorted with pain. They had knocked him down, and kicked him when he was on the ground.

"Oh! the cowards! the cowards!" Mrs. Caldwell exclaimed. Beth felt sick, but it was not so much what she saw as what she heard that affected her – the man's crying, and the graphic description of the nature and depth of the wound which another man, who had been present while the doctor dressed it, stopping at the window, kindly insisted on giving them, Mrs. Caldwell being obliged to listen courteously for fear of making herself unpopular. The man's manner impressed Beth – there was such a solemn joy in it, as of one who had just witnessed something refreshing.

There were two priests in the place, Father Madden and Father John. Captain Caldwell said Father Madden was a gentleman. He shook hands with everybody, even with the curate and Mr. Macbean; but Father John would not speak to a protestant, and used to scowl at the children when he met them, and then Mildred would seize Bernadine's hand and drag her past him quickly, because she hated to be scowled at; but Beth always stopped and made a face at him. He used to carry a long whip, and crack it at the people, and on Sunday mornings, if they did not go to mass, he would patrol the streets in a fury, rating the idlers at the top of his voice, and driving them on before him. Beth used to glance stealthily at the chapel as she went to church; it had the attraction of forbidden fruit for her, and of Father John's exciting antics – nothing ever happened in church. Chapel she associated with the papists, and not at all with Kitty, whose tender teaching occupied a separate compartment of her consciousness altogether. There she kept the "Blessed Mother" and the "Dear Lord" for her comfort, although she seldom visited them now. Terms of endearment meant a great deal to Beth, because no one used them habitually in her family; in fact, she could not remember ever being called dear in her life by either father or mother.

Since the day when she had run away from the great green waves, however, her father had taken an interest in her. He often asked her to brush his hair, and laughed very much sometimes at things she said. He used to lie on the couch reading to himself while she brushed.

"Read some to me, papa," she said one day. He smiled and read a little, not in the least expecting her to understand it, but she soon showed him that she did, and entreated him to go on; so he gradually fell into the habit of reading aloud to her, particularly the "Ingoldsby Legends." She liked to hear them again and again, and would clamour for her favourites. On one occasion when he had stopped, and she had been sitting some time at the foot of the couch, with the brush in her hand, she suddenly burst out with a long passage from "The Execution" – the passage that begins: —

"God! 'tis a fearsome thing to see  
That pale wan man's mute agony."

Captain Caldwell raised his eyebrows as she proceeded, and looked at his wife.

"I thought a friend of ours was considered stupid," he said.

"People can do very well when they like," Mrs. Caldwell answered tartly; "but they're too lazy to try. When did you learn that, Beth?"

"I didn't learn it," Beth answered.

"Then how do you know it?"

"It just came to me," Beth said.

"Then I wish your lessons would *just come* to you."

"I wish they would," said Beth sincerely.

Mrs. Caldwell snapped out something about idleness and obstinacy, and left the room. The day was darkening down, and presently Captain Caldwell got up, lit a lamp at the sideboard, and set it on the dining-table. When he had done so, he took Beth, and set her on the table too. Beth stood up on it, laughing, and put her arm round his neck.

"Look at us, papa!" she exclaimed, pointing at the window opposite. The blinds were up, and it was dark enough outside for them to see themselves reflected in the glass.

"I think we make a pretty picture, Beth," her father said, putting his arm round her.

He had scarcely spoken, when there came a terrific report and a crash; something whizzed close to Beth's head; and a shower of glass fell on the floor. In a moment Beth had wriggled out of her father's arm, slid from the table, and scrambled up on to the window-seat, scattering the flower-pots, and slapping at her father's hand in her excitement, when he tried to stop her.

"It's Bap-faced Flanagan – or Tony-kill-the-cow," she cried. "I can see – O papa! why did you pull me back? Now I shall never know!"

The servants had rushed in from the kitchen, and Mrs. Caldwell came flying downstairs.

"What is it, Henry?" she cried.

"The d – d scoundrels shot at me with the child in my arms," he answered, looking in his indignation singularly like Beth herself in a stormy mood. As he spoke he turned to the hall door, and walked out into the street bareheaded.

"For the love of the Lord, sir," Riley remonstrated, keeping well out of the way himself.

But Captain Caldwell walked off down the middle of the road alone deliberately to the police station, his wife standing meanwhile on the doorstep, with the light behind her, coolly awaiting his return.

"Pull down the blind in the sitting-room, Riley, and keep Miss Beth there," was all she said.

Presently Captain Caldwell returned with a police-officer and two men. They immediately began to search the room. The glass of a picture had been shattered at the far end. Riley pulled the picture to one side, and discovered something imbedded in the wall behind, which he picked out with his pocket-knife and brought to the light. It looked like a disc all bent out of shape. He turned it every way, examining it, then tried it with his teeth.

"I thought so," he said significantly. "It wouldn't be yer honour they'd be afther wid a silver bullet. I heard her tell 'em herself to try one."

"And I said if they missed they'd be damned," Beth exclaimed triumphantly.

"Beth!" cried her mother, seizing her by the arm to shake her, "how dare you use such a word?"

"I heard it in church," said Beth, in an injured tone.

"Look here, Beth," said her father, rescuing her from her mother's clutches, and setting her on the table – he had been talking aside with the police officer – "I want you to promise something on your word of honour as a lady, just to please me."

Beth's countenance dropped: "O papa!" she exclaimed, "it's something I don't want to promise."

"Well, never mind that, Beth," he answered. "Just promise this one thing to please me. If you don't, the people will try and kill you."

"I don't mind that," said Beth.

"But I do – and your mother does."

Beth gave her mother a look of such utter astonishment, that the poor lady turned crimson.

"And perhaps they'll kill me too," Captain Caldwell resumed. "You see they nearly did to-night."

This was a veritable inspiration. Beth turned pale, and gasped: "I promise!"

"Not so fast," her father said. "Never promise anything till you hear what it is. But now, promise you won't say bad luck to any of the people again."

"I promise," Beth repeated; "but" – she slid from the table, and nodded emphatically – "but when I shake my fist and stamp my foot at them it'll mean the same thing."

It was found next morning that Bap-faced Flanagan and Tony-kill-the-cow had disappeared from the township; but Murphy remained; and Beth was not allowed to go out alone again for a long time, not even into the garden. All she knew about it herself, however, was, that she had always either

a policeman or a coastguardsman to talk to, which added very much to her pleasure in life, and also to Anne's.

## CHAPTER IX

One of the interests of Captain Caldwell's life was his garden. He spent long hours in cultivating it, and that summer his vegetables, fruits, and flowers had been the wonder of the neighbourhood. But now autumn had come, vegetables were dug, fruits gathered, flowers bedraggled; and there was little to be done but clear the beds, plant them with bulbs, and prepare them for the spring.

Now that Captain Caldwell had made Beth's acquaintance, he liked to have her with him to help him when he was at work in the garden, and there was nothing that she loved so much.

One day they were at work together on a large flower-bed. Her father was trimming some rose-bushes, and she was kneeling beside him on a little mat, weeding.

"I'm glad I'm not a flower," she suddenly exclaimed, after a long silence.

"Why, Beth, flowers are very beautiful."

"Yes, but they last so short a time. I'd rather be less beautiful, and live longer. What's your favourite flower, papa?"

She had stopped weeding for the moment, but still sat on the mat, looking up at him. Captain Caldwell clipped a little more, then stopped too, and looked down at her.

"I don't get a separate pleasure from any particular flower, Beth; they all delight me," he answered.

Beth pondered upon this for a little, then she asked, "Do you know which I like best? Hot primroses." Captain Caldwell raised his eyebrows interrogatively. "When you pick them in the sun, and put them against your cheek, they're all warm, you know," Beth explained; "and then they *are* good! And fuchsias are good too, but it isn't the same good. You know that one in the sitting-room window, white outside and salmon-coloured inside, and such a nice shape – the flowers – and the way they hang down; you have to lift them to look into them. When I look at them long, they make me feel – oh – feel, you know – feel that I could take the whole plant in my arms and hug it. But fuchsias don't scent sweet like hot primroses."

"And therefore they are not so good?" her father suggested, greatly interested in the child's attempt to express herself. "They say that the scent is the soul of the flower."

"The scent is the soul of the flower," Beth repeated several times; then heaved a deep sigh of satisfaction. "I want to sing it," she said. "I always want to sing things like that."

"What other 'things like that' do you know, Beth?"

"The song of the sea in the shell,  
The swish of the grass in the breeze,  
The sound of a far-away bell,  
The whispering leaves on the trees,"

Beth burst out instantly.

"Who taught you that, Beth?" her father asked.

"Oh, no one taught me, papa," she answered. "It just came to me – like this, you know. I used to listen to the sea in that shell in the sitting-room, and I tried and tried to find a name for the sound, and all at once *song* came into my head — *The song of the sea in the shell*. Then I was lying out here on the grass when it was long, before you cut it to make hay, and you came out and said, 'There's a stiff breeze blowing.' And it blew hard and then stopped, and then it came again; and every time it came the grass went – swish-h-h! *The swish of the grass in the breeze*. Then you know that bell that rings a long way off, you can only just hear it out here — *The sound of a far-away bell*. Then the leaves – it *was* a long time before anything came that I could sing about them. I used to try and think it, but you can't sing a thing you think. It's when a thing comes, you can sing it. I was always listening

to the leaves, and I always felt they were doing something; then all at once it came one day. Of course they were whispering — *The whispering leaves on the trees*. That was how they came, papa. At first I used to sing them by themselves; but now I sing them all together. You can sing them three different ways – the way I did first, you know, then you can put *breeze* first —

The swish of the grass in the breeze,  
The whispering leaves on the trees,  
The song of the sea in the shell,  
The sound of a far-away bell.

Or you can sing —

The sound of a far-away bell,  
The whispering leaves on the trees,  
The swish of the grass in the breeze,  
The song of the sea in the shell.

Which way do you think the nicest?" She had rattled all this off as fast as she could speak, looking and pointing towards the various things she mentioned as she proceeded, the sea, the grass, the trees, the distance; now she looked up to her father for an answer. He was looking at her so queerly, she was filled with alarm. "Am I naughty, papa?" she exclaimed.

"Oh no," he said, with a smile that reassured her. "I was just thinking. I like to hear how 'things come' to you. You must always tell me – when new things come. By the way, who told you that fuchsia was salmon-coloured?"

"I *saw* it was," she said, surprised that he needed to ask such a question. "I saw it one day when we had boiled salmon for dinner. Isn't it nice when you see that one thing's like another? I have a pebble, and it's just the shape of a pear – now you know what shape it is, don't you?" He nodded. "But if I said it's thick at one end and thin at another, you wouldn't know what shape it is a bit, would you?"

"No, I should not," he answered, beginning to prune again, thoughtfully. "Beth," he said presently, "I should like to see you grow up."

"Shan't I grow up?" said Beth in dismay.

"Oh yes – at least I should hope so. But – it's not likely that *I* shall be – looking on. But, Beth, I want you to remember this. When you grow up, I think you will want to do something that only a few other people can do well – paint a picture, write a book, act in a theatre, make music – it doesn't matter what; if it comes to you, if you feel you can do it, just do it. You'll not do it well all at once; but try and try until you *can* do it well. And don't ask anybody if they think you can do it; they'll be sure to say no; and then you'll be disheartened – What's disheartened? It's the miserable feeling you would get if I said you would never be able to learn to play the piano. You'd try to do it all the same, perhaps, but you'd do it doubtfully instead of with confidence."

"What's confidence?" said Beth.

"You are listening to me now with confidence. It is as if you said, I believe you."

"But I can't say 'I believe you' to arithmetic, if I want to do it."

"No, but you can say, I believe I can do it – I believe in myself."

"Is that confidence in myself?" Beth asked, light breaking in upon her.

"That's it. You're getting quite a vocabulary, Beth. A vocabulary is all the words you know," he added hastily, anticipating the inevitable question.

Beth went on with her weeding for a little.

"And there is another thing, Beth, I want to tell you," her father recommenced. "Never do anything unless you are quite sure it is the right thing to do. It doesn't matter how much you may want to do it, you mustn't, if you are not quite, quite sure it is right."

"Not even if I am just half sure?"

"No, certainly not. You must be quite, quite sure."

Beth picked some more weeds, then looked up at him again: "But, papa, I shall never want to do anything I don't think right when I'm grown up, shall I?"

"I'm afraid you will. Everybody does."

"Did *you* want to, papa?" Beth asked in amazement.

"Yes," he answered.

"And did you do it?"

"Yes," he repeated.

"And what happened?"

"Much misery."

"Were you miserable?"

"Yes, very. But that wasn't the worst of it."

"What was the worst of it?"

"The worst of it was that I made other people miserable."

"Ah, that's bad," said Beth, with perfect comprehension. "That makes you feel so horrid inside yourself."

"Well, Beth, just you remember that. You can't do wrong without making somebody else miserable. Be loyal, be loyal to yourself, loyal to the best that is in you; that means, be as good as your friends think you, and better if you can. Tell the truth, live openly, and stick to your friends; that's the whole of the best code of morality in the world. Now we must go in."

As they walked down the garden together, Beth slipped her dirty little hand into his, and looked up at him: "Papa," she said solemnly, "when you want to be with somebody always, more than with anybody else; and want to look at him, and want to talk to him, and you find you can tell him lots of things you couldn't tell anybody else if you tried, you know; what does it mean?"

"It means you love him very much."

"Then I love you, papa, very much," she said, nestling her head against his arm. "And it does make me feel so nice inside. But it makes me miserable too," she added, sighing.

"How so?"

"When you have a headache, you know. I used only to be afraid you'd be angry if I made a noise. But now I'm always thinking how much it hurts you. I wake up often and often at night, and you are in my mind, and I try and see you say, 'It's better,' or 'It's quite well.'"

"And what then, Beth?" her father asked, in a queer voice.

"Then I don't cry any more, you know."

She looked up at her father as she spoke, and saw that his eyes were full of tears.

## CHAPTER X

That was almost the last of those happy autumn days. Winter fell upon the country suddenly with nipping cold. The mountains, always sombre, lowered in great tumbled masses from under the heavy clouds that seldom rose from their summits. Terrible gales kept the sea in torment, and the voice of its rage and pain filled Castletownrock without ceasing. Torrents of rain tore up the roads, and rendered them almost impassable. There was stolid endurance and suffering written on every face out of doors, while within the people cowered over their peat fires, a prey to hunger, cold, and depression. Draughts made merry through the large rooms and passages in Captain Caldwell's house; the wind howled in the chimneys, rattled at the windows, and whistled at the keyholes, especially at night, when Beth would hide her head under the bed-clothes to keep out the racket, or, in another mood, lie and listen to it, and imagine herself out in the storm, till her nerves were strung to a state of ecstatic tension, and her mind fairly revelled in the sense of danger. When her father was at home in the evening, she would sit still beside the fire in the sitting-room, listening in breathless awe, and excitement wholly pleasurable, to the gale raging without; but if Captain Caldwell had not returned, as frequently happened now that the days were short, and the roads so bad, well knowing the risks he ran, she would see the car upset a hundred times, and hear the rattle of musketry in every blast that shook the house, and so share silently, but to the full, the terrible anxiety which kept her mother pacing up and down, up and down, unable to settle to anything until he entered and sank into a seat, often so exhausted that it was hard to rouse him to change his dripping clothes. His duties, always honourably performed whatever the risk to himself, were far too severe for him, and he was rapidly becoming a wreck; – nervous, liverish, a martyr to headache, and a slave to stimulants, although not a drunkard – he only took enough to whip him up to his work. His digestion too had become seriously impaired, and he had no natural appetite for anything. He was fond of his children, and proud of them, but had hitherto been too irritable to contribute anything to their happiness; on the contrary, his name was a terror to them, and "Hush, papa has come in!" was enough at any time to damp their wildest spirits. Now, however, he suffered more from depression than from irritability, and would cower over the fire on stormy days in a state of despondency which was reflected in every face, taking no notice of any of them. The children would watch him furtively in close silent sympathy, sitting still and whispering for fear of disturbing him; and if perchance they saw him smile, and a look of relief came into their mother's anxious face, their own spirits went up on the instant. But everything was against him. The damp came up from the flags in the sitting-room through the cocoanut matting and the thick carpet that covered it, which it defaced in great patches. Close to the fire the wires of the piano rusted, and had to be rubbed and rubbed every day, or half the notes went dumb. The paper, a rare luxury in those parts, began to drop from the walls. Great turf-fires were constantly kept up, but the damp stole a march on them when they smouldered in the night, and made mildew-marks upon everything.

Good food and cooking would have helped Captain Caldwell, but the food was indifferent, and there were no cooks to be had in the country. Biddy had never seen such a thing as a kitchen-range before she took the situation, and when she first had to use the oven, she put the turf on the bottom shelf in order to heat the top one. Mrs. Caldwell made what were superhuman efforts to a woman of her training and constitution, to keep the servants up to the mark, and grew grey in the endeavour; but Mrs. Caldwell in the kitchen was like a racehorse at the plough; and even if she had been a born housewife, she could have done little with servants who would do nothing themselves except under her eyes, and stole everything they could lay their hands on, including the salt out of the salt-cellars between meals, if it were not locked up.

Towards the end of January, Captain Caldwell was ill in bed; he had wet cloths on his head, and seemed as if he could hardly speak. Beth hung about his door all day, watching for opportunities

to steal in. Mamma always sent her away if she could, but if papa heard her, he would whisper, "Let the child come in," and then mamma would let her in, but would still look cross. And Beth sat at one side of the bed, and mamma sat on the other, and no one spoke except papa sometimes; only you could seldom understand what he said. And mamma cried, but Beth did not. She ached too much inside for that. You can't cry when you ache so much.

Beth day after day sat with her hands folded on her lap, and her feet dangling from a chair that was much too high for her, watching her father with an intensity of silent anxiety that was terrible to witness in so young a child. Her mother might have beaten her to death, but she could never have dislodged her from the room once she had her father's leave to stay there. Mrs. Caldwell rarely beat her now, however; she generally ignored her; so Beth came and went as she chose. She would climb up on to the bed when there was nobody in the room, and kiss the curls of papa's thick glossy black hair so softly that he never knew, except once, when he caught her, and smiled. His dark face grew grey in bed, and his blue eyes sunken and haggard; but he battled it out that time, and slowly began to recover.

Beth was sitting in her usual place beside her father's bed one day when the doctor came and discovered her. He was standing on the other side of the bed, and exclaimed, "Why, it's all eyes!"

"Yes, it's a queer pixie," her father said. "But it's going to do something some day, or *I'm* much mistaken."

"It's going to make a nuisance of itself if you put such nonsense into its head, or I'm much mistaken," Mrs. Caldwell observed.

"I shall *not* make a nuisance of myself," Beth indignantly protested.

"I shall never be able to make you understand, Caroline," Captain Caldwell exclaimed. "Little pitchers are generally bad enough, but when there is large intelligence added to the long ears, they're the devil."

Before the doctor left he said to Mrs. Caldwell, "We must keep our patient amused, you know."

"O doctor!" Beth exclaimed, clasping her hands in her earnestness, "do you think if Sophie Keene came?"

The doctor burst into a shout of laughter, in which Captain Caldwell also joined. "Just stay here yourself, Beth," he said, when he had recovered himself. "For amusement, neither Sophie Keene nor any one else I ever knew could hold a candle to you."

"What's 'hold a candle to you'?" Beth instantly demanded.

And then there was more laughter, in which even Mrs. Caldwell joined; and afterwards, when the doctor had gone, she actually patted Beth on the back, and stroked her hair, which was the first caress Beth ever remembered to have received from her mother.

"Now, mamma," she exclaimed, with great feeling, in the fulness of her surprise and delight, "now I shall forget that you ever beat me."

Her mother coloured painfully.

Her father muttered something about a noble nature.

"And that was the child you never wanted at all!" slipped, with a ring of triumph, from Mrs. Caldwell unawares – an interesting example of the complexity of human feelings.

Captain Caldwell soon went back to his duty – all too soon for his strength. The dreadful weather continued. Day after day he returned soaking from some distant station to the damp and discomfort of the house, and the ill-cooked, unappetising food, which he could hardly swallow. And to all this was added great anxiety about the future of his family. His boys were doing well at school by this time; but he was not satisfied with the way in which the little girls were being brought up. There was no order in their lives, no special time for anything; and he knew the importance of early discipline. He tried to discuss the subject with his wife, but she met his suggestions irritably.

"There's time enough for that," she said. "*I* had no regular lessons till I was in my teens."

"But what answered with you may be disastrous to these children," he ventured. "They are all unlike you in disposition, more especially Beth."

"You spoil that child," Mrs. Caldwell protested. "And at any rate I can do no more. I am run off my feet."

This was true, and Captain Caldwell let the subject drop. His patience was exemplary in those days. He suffered severely both mentally and physically, but never complained. The shadow was upon him, and he knew it, but he met his fate with fortitude. Whatever his faults, they were expiated in the estimation of all who saw him suffer now.

Mrs. Caldwell never realised how ill he was, but still she was uneasy, and it was with intense relief that she welcomed a case of soups and other nourishing delicacies calculated to tempt the appetite, which arrived for him one day from one of his sisters in England.

"This is just what you want, Henry," she said, with a brighter look in her face than he had seen there for months. "I shall soon have you yourself again now."

Captain Caldwell's spirits also went up.

In the evening they were all together in the sitting-room. Mrs. Caldwell was playing little songs for Mildred to sing, Baby Bernadine was playing with her bricks upon the floor, and Beth as usual was hanging about her father. He had shaken off his despondency, and was quite lively for the moment, walking up and down the room, and making merry remarks to his wife in Italian, at which she laughed a good deal.

"Come, Beth, fetch 'Ingoldsby.' We shall just come to my favourite, and finish the book before you go to bed," he said.

Beth brought the book, and then climbed up on his knee, and settled there happily, with her head on his shoulder.

"As I laye a-thynkyng, the golden sun was sinking,  
O merrie sang that Bird as it glitter'd on her breast,  
With a thousand gorgeous dyes,  
While soaring to the skies,  
'Mid the stars she seem'd to rise,  
As to her nest;

As I laye a-thynkyng, her meaning was exprest: —  
'Follow, follow me away,  
It boots not to delay,' —  
'Twas so she seemed to saye,  
'HERE IS REST!'"

After he had read those last lines, there was a moment's silence, and then Beth burst into a tempest of tears. "O papa – papa! No, no, no!" she sobbed. "I couldn't bear it."

"What is the matter with the child?" Mrs. Caldwell exclaimed, starting up.

"The vision and the faculty divine," I think," her father answered. "Leave her to me."

Beth was awake when Anne entered the nursery next morning to call the children.

"Get up, and be good," Anne said. "Your pa's ill."

Mrs. Caldwell came into the nursery immediately afterwards, very much agitated. She kissed Beth, and from that moment the child was calm; but there settled upon her pathetic little face a terrible look of age and anxiety.

When she was dressed, she ran right into her father's room before any one could stop her. He was moaning – "O my head, my head! O my head, my head!" over and over again.

"You mustn't stay here, little woman – not to-day," the doctor said. "It will make your father worse if you do."

Beth stole from the room, and returned to the nursery. There, however, she could still hear her father moaning, and she could not bear it, so she took her prayer-book, by way of life-saving apparatus, and went down to the kitchen to "see" what the servants were thinking – her own significant expression. They were all strangely subdued. "Sit down, Miss Beth," Biddy said kindly. "Sit down in the window there wid your book if you want company. It's a sore heart you'll be having, or I'm much mistaken."

Beth sat in the window the whole morning, reading prayers to herself, while she watched and waited. The doctor sent Riley down from the sick-room several times to fetch things, and each time Beth consulted his countenance anxiously for news, but asked no questions. Biddy tried to persuade her to eat, but the child could not touch anything.

Late in the afternoon Riley came down in a hurry.

"Is the master better, Pat?" Biddy demanded.

"Deed, thin, he isn't," Riley replied; "and the doctor's sending me off on the horse as hard as I can go for Dr. Jamieson."

"Och, thin, if the doctor's sending you for Dr. Jamieson it's all up. He's niver sent for till the last. The Lord himself won't save him now."

Beth shuffled over the leaves of her prayer-book hurriedly. She had been crying piteously to God in her heart for hours to save her father, and He had not heard; now she remembered that the servants said if you read the Lord's Prayer backwards it would raise the devil. Beth tried; but the invocation was unavailing. Before Riley could saddle the horse, a message was sent down to stop him; and then Anne came for Beth, and took her up to her father's room. The dreadful sounds had ceased at last, and there was a strange silence in the house. Mrs. Caldwell was sitting beside her husband's bed, rocking herself a little as if in pain, but shedding no tears. Mildred was standing with her arm round her mother's neck crying bitterly, while Baby Bernadine gazed at her father wonderingly.

He was lying on his side with his arms folded. His eyes were shut, and there was a lovely look of relief upon his face.

"I sent for you children," their mother said, "to see your father just as he died. You must never forget him."

Ellis and Rickards, two of papa's men, were in the room, and Mrs. Ellis too, and the doctor, and Riley, and Biddy, and Anne; and there was a foot-bath, with steaming hot water in it, on the floor; some mustard on the table; and the fire burnt brightly. These details impressed themselves on Beth's mind involuntarily, as indeed did everything else connected with that time. It seemed to her afterwards as if she had seen everything and felt nothing for the moment – nothing but breathless excitement and interest. Her grief was entirely suspended.

Mrs. Ellis and the doctor led mamma down to the sitting-room; they didn't seem to think that she could walk. And then Mrs. Ellis made her some tea, and stood there, and coaxed her to drink it, just as if mamma had been a child. Mrs. Caldwell sat on the big couch with her back to the window, and Mildred sat beside her, with her arm round her, crying all the time. Bernadine cried too, but it was because she was hungry, and no one thought of giving her anything to eat. Beth fetched her some bread-and-butter, and then she was good. People began to arrive – Mr. Macbean, Captain and Mrs. Keene, the Smalls, the curate – Father Madden even. He had heard the news out in the country, and came hurrying back to pay his respects, and offer his condolences to Mrs. Caldwell, and see if there was anything he could do. He hoped it was not taking a liberty to come; but indeed he came in the fulness of his heart, and because he couldn't help it, for he had known him well, and a better man and truer gentleman never breathed. The widow held out her hand to the priest, and looked up at him gratefully.

Beth opened the door for Mrs. Small, who exclaimed at once: "Oh, my dear child, how is your poor mother? Does she cry at all? I do hope she has been crying."

"No," Beth answered, "nobody cries but Mildred."

When Mrs. Small went in, Mrs. Caldwell spoke to her quite collectedly. "He was taken ill at eight o'clock this morning with a dreadful pain in his head," she told her. "He had suffered fearfully from his head of late. I sent for the doctor at once. But nothing relieved him. From ten o'clock he got worse and worse, and at four he was gone. He always wished to die suddenly, and be spared a lingering illness. He has been depressed of late, but this morning, early, he woke up quite brightly; and last night he was wonderfully better. After the children had gone to bed, he read aloud to me as he used to do in the old days; and he looked so much more like his old self again that I thought a happier time was coming. And so it was. But not for me."

"Poor lady!" Mrs. Small whispered. "It has been a fearful shock."

Mrs. Caldwell showed strength of character in the midst of the overwhelming calamity which had fallen upon her with such awful suddenness. She had a nice sense of honour, and her love was great; and by the help of these she was enabled to carry out every wish of her dead husband with regard to himself. He had had a fastidious horror of being handled after death by the kind of old women who are accustomed to lay out bodies, and therefore Mrs. Caldwell begged Ellis and Rickards to perform that last duty for him themselves.

When the children went to bed, she took them to kiss their father. The stillness of the chamber struck a chill through Beth, but she thought it beautiful. The men had draped it in white, and decorated it with evergreens, there being no flowers in season. Papa was smiling, and looked serenely happy.

"Years ago he was like that," mamma said softly, as if she were speaking to herself; "but latterly there has been a look of pain. I am glad to see him so once more. You are at peace now – dearest." She stroked his dark hair, and as she did so her hand showed white against it.

The children kissed him; and then Mrs. Ellis persuaded mamma to come and help her to put them to bed; and mamma taught them to say: "*Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for Thou art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me.*" She told them to remember they had learnt it on the day their father died, and asked them to say it always in memory of him. Beth believed for a long time that it was he who would walk with her through the valley of the shadow, and in after years she felt sure that her mother had thought so too.

Mrs. Ellis stayed all night, and slept with the children.

When their mother left them, Beth could not sleep. She had noticed how cold her father was when she kissed him, and was distressed to think he had only a sheet to cover him. The longer she thought of it, the more wretched she became, especially when she contrasted the warmth and softness of her own little bed with the hardness and coldness of the one they had made up for him; and at last she could bear it no longer. She sat up in bed and listened. She could hear by their breathing that the other children were asleep, but she was not sure about Mrs. Ellis. Very stealthily, therefore, she slipped out of bed, and pulled off the clothes. She could only just clasp them in both arms, but the nursery door was ajar, and she managed to open it with her foot. It creaked noisily, and Beth waited, listening in suspense; but nobody moved; so she slipped out into the passage. It was quite dark there, and the floor felt very cold to her bare feet. She stumbled down the passage, tripping over the bed-clothes as she went, and dreading to be caught and stopped, but not afraid of anything else. The door was open when she reached it, and there was a dim light in the room. This was unexpected, and she paused to peep in before she entered. Two candles were burning on a table at the foot of the bed. Their flames flickered in a draught, and cast shadows on her father's face, so that it seemed as if he moved and breathed again. Her mother was kneeling beside the bed, with her face hidden on her husband's breast, her left arm round him, while with the fingers of her right hand she incessantly toyed with his hair. "Only last night," she was saying, "only last night; oh, I cannot believe it! – perhaps I ought to be glad – there will be no more pain for you – oh, my darling, I would have given my life to save you a moment's pain – and I could do so little – so little. Oh, if only you could come back to tell me that your life had ever been the better for me, that I had not spoiled it utterly, that I brought you some happiness." She raised her head and looked into the tranquil face. The flickering shadows

flitted across it, but did not deceive her. She must ache on always for an answer now – always, for ever. With a convulsive sob, she crawled up closer on her knees, and laid her cheek beside his, but no tears came. She had not wept at all that day.

Beth stood for a long time in the doorway, listening to her mother's rambling talk, and watching her white fingers straying through her father's hair. She hugged the bed-clothes close, but she had forgotten why she came. She felt no cold; she held no thought; her whole being was absorbed in the scene before her.

Presently, however, something that her mother said aroused her – "Cold," she was murmuring, "so cold. How you dreaded it too! You were always delicate and suffering, yet you did more than the strongest men, for our sakes. You never spared yourself. What you undertook to do, you did like an honourable gentleman, neglecting nothing. You have died doing your duty, as you wished to die. You have been dying all these months – and I never suspected – I did not know – dying – killed by exposure – and anxiety – and bad food. You came home hungry, and you could not eat what I had to give you – cold, and I could not warm you – oh, the cruel, bitter cold!"

Beth slipped up to her noiselessly.

"Mamma!"

Mrs. Caldwell started.

Beth held out the blankets – "to cover him."

Her mother caught her in her arms. "O my poor little child! my poor little child!" she cried; and then at last she burst into tears.

During the days that preceded her father's funeral, Beth did not miss him. It was as if he were somewhere else, that was all – away in the mountains – and was himself thinking, as Beth did continually, about the still, cold, smiling figure that reposed, serenely indifferent to them all, in his room upstairs. One day, what he had said about being laid out by old women came into her head, and she wondered what he would have looked like when they laid him out that he should have objected so strongly to their seeing him. She was near the death-chamber at the moment, and went in. No one was there, and she stood a long time looking at the figure on the bed. It was entirely covered, but she had only to lift the sheet and learn the secret. She turned it back from the placid face, then stopped, and whispered half in awe, half in interrogation, "Papa!" As she pronounced the word, the inhuman impulse passed and was forgotten.

Hours later, Mrs. Ellis found her sitting beside him as she had so often done during his illness, on that same chair which was too high for her, her feet dangling, and her little hands folded in her lap, gazing at him with a face as placidly set, save for the eyes, as his own.

The next day they had all to bid him the long farewell. Mrs. Caldwell stood looking down upon him, not wiping the great tears that welled up painfully into her eyes, lest in the act she should blot out the dear image and so lose sight of it for one last precious moment. She was an undemonstrative woman, but the lingering way in which she touched him, his hair, his face, his waxen hands, was all the more impressive for that in its restrained tenderness.

Suddenly she uncovered his feet. They were white as marble, and beautifully formed. "Ah, I feared so!" she exclaimed. "They put them into hot water that day. I knew it was too hot, and I said so; he seemed insensible, but I felt him wince – and see!" The scar of a scald proved that she had been right. This last act, due to the fear that he had been made to suffer an unnecessary pang, struck Beth in after years as singularly pathetic.

It was not until after the funeral that Beth herself realised that she had lost her father. When they returned, the house had been set in order, and made to look as usual – yet something was missing. The blinds were up, the sun was streaming in, the "Ingoldsby Legends" lay on the sofa in the sitting-room. When Beth saw the book her eyes dilated with a pang. It lay there, just as he had left it; but he was in the ground. He would never come back again.

Suddenly the child threw herself on the floor in an agony of grief, sobbing, moaning, writhing, tearing her hair, and calling aloud, "Papa! papa! Come back! come back! come back!"

Mrs. Caldwell in her fright would have tried her old remedy of shaking and beating; but Mrs. Ellis snatched the child up and carried her off to the nursery, where she kept her for the rest of that terrible day, rocking her on her knee most of the time, and talking to her about her father in heaven, living the life eternal, yet watching over her still, and waiting for her, until she fired Beth's imagination, and the terrible grave was forgotten.

That night, however, and for many nights to come, the child started up out of her sleep, and wept, and wailed, and tore her hair, and had again to be nursed and comforted.

## CHAPTER XI

Just like the mountains, all jumbled up together when you view them from a distance, had Beth's impulses and emotions already begun to be in their extraordinary complexity at this period; and even more like the mountains when you are close to them, for then, losing sight of the whole, you become aware of the details, and are surprised at their wonderful diversity, at the heights and hollows, the barren wastes, fertile valleys, gentle slopes, and giddy precipices – heights and hollows of hope and despair, barren wastes of mis-spent time, fertile valleys of intellectual accomplishment, gentle slopes of aspiration undefined, and giddy precipices of passionate impulse and desperate revolt. Genius is sympathetic insight made perfect; and it must have this diversity if it is ever to be effectual – must touch on every human experience, must suffer, and must also enjoy; great, therefore, are its compensations. It feels the sorrows of all mankind, and is elevated by them; whereas the pain of an individual bereavement is rather acute than prolonged. Genius is spared the continuous gnawing ache of the grief which stultifies; instead of an ever-present wearing sense of loss that would dim its power, it retains only those hallowed memories, those vivid recollections, which foster the joy of a great yearning tenderness; and all its pains are transmuted into something subtle, mysterious, invisible, neither to be named nor ignored – a fertilising essence which is the source of its own heaven, and may also contain the salvation of earth. So genius has no lasting griefs.

Beth utterly rejected all thought of her father in his grave, and even of her father in heaven. When her first wild grief subsided, he returned to her, to be with her, as those we love are with us always in their absence, enshrined in our happy consciousness. She never mentioned him in these days, but his presence, warm in her heart, kept her little being aglow; and it was only when people spoke to her, and distracted her attention from the thought of him, that she felt disconsolate. While she could walk with him in dreams, she cared for no other companionship.

It was a dreadful position for poor Mrs. Caldwell, left a widow – not without friends, certainly, for the people were kind – but with none of her own kith and kin, in that wild district, embarrassed for want of money, and broken in health. But, as is usual in times of great calamity, many things happened, showing both the best and the worst side of human nature.

After Captain Caldwell's death, old Captain Keene, who had once held the appointment himself, and was indebted to Captain Caldwell for much kindly hospitality, went about the countryside telling people that Captain Caldwell had died of drink. Some officious person immediately brought the story to Mrs. Caldwell.

Mrs. Caldwell had the house on her hands, but the officer who was sent to succeed Captain Caldwell would be obliged to take it, as there was no other. He arrived one day with a very fastidious wife, who did not like the house at all. There was no accommodation in it, no china cupboard, nothing fit for a lady. She must have it all altered. From the way she spoke, it seemed to Beth that she blamed her mother for everything that was wrong.

Mrs. Caldwell said very little. She was suffering from a great swelling at the back of her neck – an anthrax, the doctor called it – and was not fit to be about at all, but her indomitable fortitude kept her up. Mrs. Ellis had stayed to nurse her, and help with the children. She and Mrs. Caldwell looked at each other and smiled when the new officer's wife had gone.

"She's a very fine lady indeed, Mrs. Ellis," Mrs. Caldwell said, sighing wearily.

"Yes, ma'am," Mrs. Ellis answered; "but people who have been used to things all their lives think less about them."

Mrs. Ellis was very kind to the children, and when wet days kept Beth indoors, she would stay with her, and study her with interest. She was thin, precise, low-voiced, quiet in her movements, passionless, loyal; and every time she took a mouthful at table, she wiped her mouth.

The doctor came every day to dress the abscess on Mrs. Caldwell's neck, and every day he said that if it had not burst of itself he should have been obliged to make a deep incision in it in the form of a cross. Mildred and Beth were always present on these occasions, fighting to be allowed to hold the basin. Mrs. Ellis wanted to turn them out, but Mrs. Caldwell said: "Let them stay, poor little bodies; they like to be with me."

The poor lady, ill as she was, had neither peace nor quiet. The yard was full of great stones now, and stone-masons hammered at them from early morning till late at night, chipping them into shape for the alterations and additions to be made to the house; the loft was full of carpenters preparing boards for flooring; the yard-gates were always open, and people came and went as they liked, so that there was no more privacy for the family. Mildred stayed indoors with her mother a good deal; but Beth, followed by Bernadine, who had become her shadow, was continually in the yard among the men, listening, questioning, and observing. To Beth, at this time, the grown-up people of her race were creatures with a natural history other than her own, which she studied with great intelligence and interest, and sometimes also with disgust; for, although she was so much more with the common people, as she had been taught to call them, than with her own class, she did not adopt their standards, and shrank always with innate refinement from everything gross. No one thought of shooting her now. She had not only lived down her unpopularity, but, by dint of her natural fearlessness, her cheerful audacity of speech, and quick comprehension, had won back the fickle hearts of the people, who weighed her words again superstitiously, and made much of her. The workmen, with the indolent, inconsequent Irish temperament which makes it irksome to follow up a task continuously, and easier to do anything than the work in hand, would break off to amuse her at any time. One young carpenter – lean, sallow, and sulky – who was working for her mother, interested her greatly. He was making packing-cases, and the first one was all wrong, and had to be pulled to pieces; and the way he swore as he demolished it, ripping out oaths as he ripped up the boards, impressed Beth as singularly silly.

There was another carpenter at work in the loft, a little wizened old man. He always brought a peculiar kind of yellow bread, and shared it with the children, who loved it, and took as much as they wanted without scruple, so that the poor old man must have had short-commons himself sometimes. He could draw all kinds of things – fish with scales, ships in full sail, horses, coaches, people – and Beth often made him get out his big broad pencil and do designs for her on the new white boards. When he was within earshot, the people in the yard were particular about what they said before the children; if they forgot themselves he called them to order, and silenced them instantly, which surprised Beth, because he was the smallest man there. There was one man, however, whom the old carpenter could never suppress. Beth did not know how this man got his living. He came from the village to gossip, wore a tweed suit, not like a workman's, nor was it the national Irish dress. He had a red nose and a wooden leg, and, after she knew him, for a long time she always expected a man with a wooden leg to have a red nose, but, somehow, she never expected a man with a red nose to have a wooden leg. This man was always cheery, and very voluble. He used the worst language possible in the pleasantest way, and his impervious good-humour was proof against all remonstrance. What he said was either blasphemous or obscene as a rule, but in effect it was not at all like the same thing from the other men, because, with them, such language was the expression of anger and evil moods, while with him it was the vehicle of thought from a mind habitually serene.

Mrs. Caldwell was being hurried out of the house with indecent haste, considering the state of her health and all the arrangements she had to make; but she bore up bravely. She was touched one day by an offer of help from Beth, and begged her to take charge of Bernadine and be a little mother to her. Beth promised to do her best. Accordingly, when Bernadine was naughty, Beth beat her, in dutiful imitation. Bernadine, however, invariably struck back. When other interests palled, Beth would encourage Bernadine to risk her neck by persuading her to jump down after her from high places. She was nearly as good a jumper as Beth, the great difference being that Beth always

lit on her feet, while Bernadine was apt to come down on her head; but it was this peculiarity that made her attempts so interesting.

The yard very soon became a sociable centre for the whole idle place. Any one who chose came into it in a friendly way, and lounged about, gossiping, and inspecting the works in progress. Women brought their babies, and sat about on the stones suckling them and talking to the men – a proceeding which filled Beth with disgust, she thought it so peculiarly indelicate.

Beth stood with her mother at the sitting-room window one day to see the last of poor Artless, as he was led away on a halter by a strange man, his glossy chestnut coat showing dappled in the sunshine, but his wild spirit much subdued for want of corn. The first time they had seen him was on the day of their arrival, when Captain Caldwell had ridden out on him to meet them. Mrs. Caldwell burst into tears at the recollection.

"He was the first evidence of promotion and prosperity," she said. "But the promotion has been to a higher sphere, and I much fear that the prosperity, like Artless himself, has departed for ever."

Mrs. Caldwell had decided to return to her own people in England, and a few days later they started. She took the children to see their father's grave the last thing before they left Castletownrock, and stood beside it for a long time in silence, her gloveless hand resting caressingly on the cold tombstone, her eyes full of tears, and a pained expression in her face. It was the real moment of separation for her. She had to tear herself away from her beloved dead, to leave him lonely, and to go out alone herself, unprotected, unloved, un comforted, into the cold world with her helpless children. Poverty was in store for her; that she knew; and doubtless she foresaw many another trouble, and, could she have chosen, would gladly have taken her place there beside the one who, with all his faults, had been her best friend on earth.

Her cold, formal religion was no comfort to her in moments like these. She was a pagan at heart, and where she had laid her dead, there, to her mind, he would rest for ever, far from her. The lonely grave on the wild west coast was the shrine towards which her poor heart would yearn thereafter at all times, always. She had erected a handsome tombstone on the hallowed spot, and was going away in her shabby clothes, the more at ease for the self-denial she had had to exercise in order to beautify it. The radical difference between herself and Beth, which was to keep them apart for ever, was never more apparent than at this moment of farewell. The other children cried, but Beth remained an unmoved spectator of her mother's emotion. She hated the delay in that painful place; and what was the use of it when her father would be with them just the same when they got into the yellow coach which was waiting at the gate to take them away? Beth's beloved was a spirit, near at hand always; her mother's was a corpse in a coffin, buried in the ground.

A little way out of Castletownrock the coach was stopped, and Honor and Kathleen Mayne from the inn came up to the window.

"We walked out to be the last to say good-bye to you, Mrs. Caldwell, and to wish you good luck," Kathleen said. "We were among the first to welcome you when you came. And we've brought a piece of music for Miss Mildred, if she will accept it for a keepsake."

Mrs. Caldwell shook hands with them, but she could not speak; and the coach drove on. The days when she had thought the two Miss Maynes presumptuous for young women in their position seemed a long way off to her as she sat there, sobbing, but grateful for this last act of kindly feeling.

Beth had been eager to be off in the yellow coach, but they had not long started before she began to suffer. The moving panorama of desolate landscape, rocky coast, rough sea, moor and mountain, with the motion of the coach, and the smell of stale tobacco and beer in inn-parlours where they waited to change horses, nauseated her to faintness. Her sensitive nervous system received too many vivid impressions at once; the intense melancholy of the scenes they passed through, the wretched hovels, the half-clad people, the lean cattle, and all the evidences of abject poverty, amid dreadful bogs under a gloomy sky, got hold of her and weighed upon her spirits, until at last she shrunk into her corner, pale and still, and sat with her eyes closed, and great tears running slowly down her cheeks.

These were her last impressions of Ireland, and they afterwards coloured all her recollections of the country and the people.

But the travellers came to a railway station at last, and left the coach. There was a long crowded train just about to start; and Mrs. Caldwell, dragging Beth after her by the hand, because she knew she would stand still and stare about her the moment she let her go, hurried from carriage to carriage, trying to find seats.

"I saw some," Beth said. "You've passed them."

Mrs. Caldwell turned, and, some distance back, found a carriage with only two people in it, a gentleman whom Beth did not notice particularly, and a lady, doubtless a bride, dressed in light garments, and a white bonnet, very high in front, the space between the forehead and the top being filled with roses. She sat upright in the middle of the compartment, and looked superciliously at the weary, worried widow, and her helpless children, in their shabby black, when they stopped at the carriage door. It was her cold indifference that impressed Beth. She could not understand why, seeing how worn they all were and the fix they were in, she did not jump up instantly and open the door, overjoyed to be able to help them. There were just four seats in the carriage, but she never moved. Beth had looked up confidently into her face, expecting sympathy and help, but was repelled by a disdainful glance. It was Beth's first experience of the wealthy world that does not care, and she never forgot it.

"That carriage is engaged," her mother exclaimed, and dragged her impatiently away.

In the hotel in Dublin where they slept a night, they had the use of a long narrow sitting-room, with one large window at the end, hung with handsome, heavy, dark green curtains, quite new. The valance at the top ended in a deep fringe of thick cords, and at the end of each cord there was a bright ornamental thing made of wood covered with silks of various colours. Beth had never seen anything so lovely, and on the instant she determined to have one. They were high out of her reach; but that was nothing if only she could get a table and chair under them, and the coast clear. Fortune favoured her during the evening, and she managed to secure one, and carried it off in triumph; and so great was her joy in the colour, that she took it out of her pocket whenever she had a chance next day, and gazed at it enraptured. On their way to the boat Mildred caught her looking at it, and asked her where she got it.

Beth explained exactly.

"But it's stealing!" Mildred exclaimed.

"Is it?" said Beth, in pleased surprise. She had never stolen anything before, and it was a new sensation.

"But don't you know stealing is very wicked?" Mildred asked impressively.

Beth looked disconcerted: "I never thought of that. I'll put it back."

"How can you? You'll never be there again," Mildred rejoined. "You've done it now. You've committed a sin."

Beth slipped the bright thing into her pocket. "I'll repent," she said, and seemed satisfied.

It was a lovely day, and the passage from Kingstown to Holyhead was so smooth that everybody lounged about the deck, and no one was ill. Beth was very much interested, first in the receding shore, then in the people about her. There was one group in particular, evidently of affluent people, dressed in a way that made her feel ashamed of her own clothes for the first time in her life. But what particularly attracted her attention were some bunches of green and purple grapes which the papa of the party took out of a basket and began to divide. Beth had never seen grapes before except in pictures, and thought they looked lovely. The old gentleman gave the grapes to his family, but in handing them, one little bunch fell on the deck. He picked it up, looked at it, blew some dust off it; then decided that it was not good enough for his own children, and handed it to Bernadine, who was gazing greedily.

Beth dashed forward, snatched it out of her hand, and threw it into the sea.

"We are not beggars!" she cried.

"Well done, little one," a gentleman who was sitting near exclaimed. "Won't pick up the crumbs that fall from the rich man's table, eh? That's a very proper spirit. And who may you be?"

"My father was a gentleman," Beth answered hotly.

## CHAPTER XII

Uncle James Patten sent a landau to meet his sister and her family at the station, on their arrival from Ireland. Mildred was the first to jump in. She took the best seat, and sat up stiff and straight.

"I do love carriages and horses, mamma," she said, as they drove through Rainharbour, the little north-country seaside place which was henceforth to be their home. "I wonder which is to be our house. There are several empty. Do you think it is that one?" She had singled out one of the largest in the place.

"No," said Mrs. Caldwell rather bitterly, "more likely this," and she indicated a tiny two-storied tenement, wedged in between tall houses, and looking as if it had either got itself there by mistake, or had been put in in a hurry, just to fill up.

"That *is* the one," Beth said.

"How do you know?" Mildred snapped.

"Because we're going to live in Orchard Street, opposite the orchard; and this is Orchard Street, and there's the orchard, and that's the only house empty."

"I'm afraid the child is right," Mrs. Caldwell said with a sigh. "However," she added, pulling herself up, "it is exceedingly kind of Uncle James to give us a house at all."

"He might have given us something nicer," Mildred remarked disdainfully.

"Oh!" Beth exclaimed, "he's given us the best he has, I expect. And it's a dear little place, with a little bow-window on either side of a little front door – just like the one where Snowdrop found the empty beds when the bears were out."

"Don't talk nonsense, Beth," Mildred cried crossly.

But Beth hardly heard. She was busy peopling the quaint little town with the friends of her fancy, and sat smiling serenely as she looked about her.

They had to drive right through Rainharbour, and about a mile out into the country on the other side, to arrive at Fairholm, Uncle James Patten's place. The sun had set, and the quaintly irregular red-brick houses, mellowed by age, shone warm in tint against the gathering grey of the sky, which rose like a leaden dome above them. At one part of the road the sea came in sight. Great dark mountainous masses of cloud, with flame-coloured fringes, hung suspended over its shining surface, in which they were reflected with what was to Beth terrible effect. She sat and shivered with awe so long as the lurid scene was in sight, and was greatly relieved when the carriage turned into a country lane, and sea and sombre sky were blotted out.

It was early spring. Buds were bursting in the hedgerows, birds were building, songsters sang among the branches, and the air was sweet and mild. Fairholm lay all among fertile fields, well wooded and watered. It was a typical English home, with surroundings as unlike the great, bare, bald mountains and wild Atlantic seas Beth had hitherto shuddered amongst, as peace is unlike war. Certain natures are stimulated by the grandeur of such scenes; but Beth was too delicate an instrument to be played upon so roughly. Storms within reflected the storms without only too readily. She was tempest-tossed by temperament, and, in nature, all her yearning was for repose; so that now, as they drove up the well-ordered avenue to the house, the tender tone of colour, green against quiet grey, and the easy air of affluence, so soothing after the sorrowful signs of a hard struggle for life by which her feelings had hitherto been harrowed, drew from her a deep sigh of satisfaction.

The hall-door stood open, but no one was looking out for them. They could hear the tinkle of a piano in the distance. Then a servant appeared, followed by a stout lady, who came forward to greet them in a hurried, nervous way.

"I'm glad to see you," she said, kissing Mrs. Caldwell. She spoke in a breathless undertone, as if she were saying something wrong, and was afraid of being caught and stopped before she had finished the sentence. "I should like to have gone to meet you, but James said there were too many for the

carriage as it was. He says more than two in the carriage makes it look like an excursion-party. But I was listening for you, only I don't hear very well, you know. You remember me, Mildred? This is Beth, I suppose, and this is Bernadine. You don't know who I am? I am your Aunt Grace Mary. James begs you to excuse him for a little, Caroline. It is his half-hour for exercises. So unfortunate. If you had only come a little later! But, however, the sooner the better for me. Come into the dining-room and see Aunt Victoria. We must stay there until Uncle James has finished practising his exercises in the drawing-room."

Great-Aunt Victoria Bench was sitting bolt upright on a high chair in the dining-room, tating. Family portraits, hung far too high all round the room, seemed to have been watching her complacently until the travellers entered, when they all turned instantly and looked hard at Beth.

Aunt Victoria was a tall thin old lady, with a beautiful delicate complexion, an auburn front and white cap, and a severely simple black dress. She rose stiffly to receive Mrs. Caldwell, and kissed her on both cheeks with restrained emotion. Then she shook hands with each of the children.

"I hope you had a pleasant journey," she was beginning formally, when Mrs. Caldwell suddenly burst into tears. "What is the matter, Caroline?" Aunt Victoria asked.

"Oh, nothing," the poor lady answered in a broken voice. "Only it does seem a sad home-returning – alone – without *him* – you know."

Aunt Grace Mary furtively patted Mrs. Caldwell on the back, keeping an eye on Aunt Victoria the while, however, as if she were afraid of being caught.

All this time the tinkle-tinkle-tinkle of "Hamilton's Exercises for Beginners" on the piano had been going on; now it stopped. Aunt Grace Mary slipped into a chair, and sat with a smile on her face; Aunt Victoria became a trifle more rigid over her tating; and Mrs. Caldwell hurriedly wiped her eyes. Then the door opened deliberately, and there entered a great stout man, with red hair sprinkled with grey, large prominent light-coloured eyes, a nondescript nose, a wide shapeless gash of a mouth, and a red moustache with straight bristly hairs, like the bristles of a broom.

"How do you do, Caroline?" he said, holding out his big, fat, white hand, and kissing her coldly on the forehead. He drawled his words out with a decided lisp, and in a very soft voice, which contrasted oddly with his huge bulk. Having greeted his sister, he turned and looked at the children. Mildred went up and shook hands with him.

"Your sisters, I perceive, have no manners," he observed.

Beth had been beaming round blandly on the group; but upon that last remark of Uncle James's the pleased smile faded from her face, and she coloured painfully, and offered him a small reluctant hand.

"You are Elizabeth, I suppose?" he said.

"I am Beth," she answered emphatically.

She and Uncle James looked into each other's eyes for an instant, and in that instant she made a most disagreeable impression of fearlessness on the big man's brain.

"I hope, Caroline," he said precisely, "that you will not continue to call your daughter by such an absurd abbreviation. That sort of thing was all very well in the wilds of Ireland, but here we must have something rational, ladylike, and recognised."

Mrs. Caldwell looked distressed. "It would be so difficult to call her Elizabeth," she pleaded. "She is not at all – Elizabeth."

"You may call me what you like, mamma," Beth put in with decision; "but I shall only answer to Beth. That was the name my father gave me, and I shall stick to it."

Uncle James stared at her in amazement, but Beth, unabashed, stared back obstinately; and so they continued staring until Aunt Grace Mary made a diversion.

"James," she hurriedly interposed, "wouldn't they like some refreshment?"

Uncle James pulled the bell-rope. "Bring wine and cake," he lisped, when the servant answered.

Then he returned to his seat, crossed one great leg over the other, folded his fat hands on his knee, and inspected his sister.

"You certainly do not grow younger, Caroline," he observed.

Mrs. Caldwell did not look cheered by the remark; and there was a painful pause, broken, happily, by the arrival of the cake and wine.

"You will not take more than half a glass, I suppose, Caroline, at *this* time of the day," Uncle James said playfully, as he took up the decanter; "and marsala, *not* port. I know what ladies are."

Poor Mrs. Caldwell was exhausted, and would have been the better for a good glass of port; but she meekly held her peace.

Then Uncle James cut the cake, and gave each of the children a very small slice. Beth held hers suspended half-way to her mouth, and gazed at her uncle.

"What *is* that child staring at?" he asked her mother at last.

"I think she is admiring you," was Mrs. Caldwell's happy rejoinder.

"No, mamma, I am not," Beth contradicted. "I was just thinking I had never seen anything so big in my life."

"*Anything!*" Uncle James protested. "What does she mean, Caroline?"

"I don't mean this slice of cake," Beth chuckled.

"Come, dear – come, dear," Aunt Grace Mary hurriedly interposed. "Come upstairs, and see – and see – the pretty room you're to have. Come and take your things off, like a good child."

Beth rose obediently, but before she followed her aunt out of the room she said: "Here, Bernadine; you'd better have my slice. You'll howl if you don't get enough. Cakes are scarce and dear here, I suppose."

Aunt Victoria had tatted diligently during this little scene. Now she looked up over her spectacles and inspected Uncle James.

"I like that child," she said decidedly.

"In which respect I should think you would probably find yourself in a very small minority," Uncle James lisped, spreading his mouth into what would have been a smile in any other countenance, but was merely an elongation of the lips in his.

Mrs. Caldwell rocked herself forlornly. Mildred nestled close to her mother; while Baby Bernadine, with a slice of cake in each hand, took a mouthful first from the right and then from the left, impartially.

Uncle James gazed at her. "I suppose that is an Irish custom," he said at length.

"Bernadine! what are you doing?" Mrs. Caldwell snapped; and Bernadine, startled, let both slices fall on the floor, and set up a howl with her mouth full.

"Ah!" Uncle James murmured tenderly. "Little children are such darling things! They make the sense of their presence felt the moment they enter a house. It becomes visible also in the crumbs on the floor. There is evidently nothing the matter with her lungs. But I should have thought it would be dangerous to practise her voice like that with the mouth full. Perhaps she would be more at her ease upstairs." Mrs. Caldwell took the hint.

When the child had gone, Uncle James rang for a servant to sweep up the cake and crumbs, and carefully stood over her, superintending.

"That will do," he said at length, "so far as the cake and crumbs are concerned, but I beg you to observe that you have brushed the pile of the carpet the wrong way."

Meanwhile Aunt Grace Mary had taken Beth up a polished staircase, through a softly carpeted, airy corridor, at the end of which was a large room with two great mahogany four-post beds, hung with brown damask, the rest of the heavy old-fashioned furniture being to match. All over the house there was a delicious odour of fresh air and lavender, everything shone resplendent, and all was orderly to the point of stiffness; nothing looked as if it had ever been used.

"This was your mamma's room when she was a girl," Aunt Grace Mary confided to Beth. "She used to fill the house with her girl-friends, and that was why she had such big beds. She used to be a very high-spirited girl, your dear mamma was. You are all to sleep here."

"How good it smells," said Beth.

"Ah, that's the lavender. I often burn lavender. Would you like to see me burn some lavender? Come to my room, then, and I'll show you. But take your things off first."

Beth dragged off her hat and jacket and threw them aside. They happened to fall on the floor.

"My dear child!" Aunt Grace Mary exclaimed, "look at your things!"

Beth looked at them, but nothing occurred to her; so she looked at her aunt inquiringly.

"I always put mine away – at least I should, you know, if I hadn't a maid," said Aunt Grace Mary.

"Oh, let your maid put mine away too," Beth answered casually.

"But, my dear child, you must learn," Aunt Grace Mary insisted, picking up Beth's things and putting them in a drawer as she spoke. "Who puts your things away at home?"

"Mamma," Beth answered laconically. "She says it's less trouble to do things herself."

"Oh, but you must save your mother the trouble, dear," said Aunt Grace Mary in a shocked tone.

"Well, I will next time – if I remember," Beth rejoined. "Come and burn lavender."

For the next few days, which happened to be very fine, Beth revelled out of doors. Everything was a wonder and a joy to her in this fertile land, the trees especially, after the bleak, wild wastes to which she had been accustomed in the one stormy corner of Ireland she knew. Leaves and blossoms were just bursting out, and one day, wandering alone in the grounds, she happened unawares upon an orchard in full bloom, and fairly gasped, utterly overcome by the first shock of its beauty. For a while she stood and gazed in silent awe at the white froth of flowers on the pear-trees, the tinted almond blossom, and the pink-tipped apple. She had never dreamed of such heavenly loveliness. But enthusiasm succeeded to awe at last, and, in a wild burst of delight, she suddenly threw her arms around a gnarled tree-trunk and clasped it close.

There was a large piece of artificial water in the grounds, in which were three green islands covered with trees and shrubs. Beth was standing on the bank one morning in a contemplative mood, admiring the water, and yearning for a boat to get to the islands, when round one of them, unexpectedly, a white wonder of a swan came gliding towards her in the sunshine.

"Oh, oh! Mildred! Mildred! Oh, the beautiful, beautiful thing!" she cried. Mildred came running up.

"Why, Beth, you idiot," she exclaimed in derision, "it's only a swan. I really thought it *was* something."

"Is that a swan?" Beth said slowly; then, after a moment, she added, in sorrowful reproach: "O Mildred! you had seen it and you never told me."

Alas, poor Mildred! she had not seen it, and never would see it, in Beth's sense of the word.

On wet days, when they had to be indoors, Aunt Grace Mary waylaid Beth continually, and trotted her off somewhere out of Uncle James's way. She would take her to her own room sometimes, a large, bright apartment, spick-and-span like the rest of the house; and show her the pictures – pastels and water-colours chiefly – with which it was stiffly decorated.

"That was your uncle when he was a little boy," she said, pointing to a pretty pastel.

"Why, he was quite a nice little boy," Beth exclaimed.

"Yes, nice and plump," Aunt Grace Mary rattled off breathlessly. "And your grandmamma did those water-colours and those screens. That lovely printing too; can you guess how she did it? With a camel's hair brush. She did indeed. And she used to compose music. She was a very clever woman. You are very like her."

"But I am not very clever," said Beth.

"No, dear; no, dear," Aunt Grace Mary rejoined, pulling herself up hurriedly from this indiscretion. "But in the face. You are very like her in appearance. And you must try. You must try

to improve yourself. Your uncle is always trying to improve himself. He reads 'Doctor Syntax' aloud to us. In the evening it is our custom to read aloud and converse."

An occasional phrase of Uncle James's would flow from Aunt Grace Mary in this way, with incongruous effect.

"Do you try to improve yourself?" Beth asked.

"Yes, dear."

"How?"

"Oh, well – that reminds me. I must write a letter. You shall stay and see me if you like. But you mustn't move or speak."

Beth, deeply interested, watched her aunt, who began by locking the door. Then she slipped a pair of spectacles out of her pocket, and put them on, after glancing round apprehensively as if she were going to do something wrong. Then she sat down at a small bureau, unlocked a drawer, and took out a little dictionary, unlocked another drawer and took out a sheet of notepaper, in which she inserted a page of black lines. Then she proceeded to write a letter in lead-pencil, stopping often to consult the dictionary. When she had done, she took out another sheet of a better quality, put the lines in it, and proceeded to copy the letter in ink. She blotted the first attempt, but the next she finished. She destroyed several envelopes also before she was satisfied. But at last the letter was folded and sealed, and then she carefully burnt every scrap of paper she had spoiled.

"I was educated in a convent in France," she said to Beth. "If you were older you would know that by my handwriting. It is called an Italian hand, but I learnt it in France. I was there five years."

"What else did you learn?" said Beth.

"Oh – reading. No – I could read before I went. But music, you know, and French."

"Say some French," said Beth.

"Oh, I can't," Aunt Grace Mary answered. "But I can read it a little, you know."

"I should like to hear you play," said Beth.

"But I don't play," Aunt Grace Mary rejoined.

"I thought you said you learnt music."

"Oh yes. I had to learn music; and I practised for hours every day; but I never played."

Aunt Grace Mary smiled complacently as she spoke, took off her spectacles, and locked up her writing materials – Beth, the while, thoughtfully observing her. Aunt Grace Mary's hair was a wonderful colour, neither red, yellow, brown, nor white, but a mixture of all four. It was parted straight in the middle, where it was thin, and brought down in two large rolls over her ears. She wore a black velvet band across her head like a coronet, which ended in a large black velvet bow at the back. Long heavy gold ear-rings pulled down the lobes of her ears. All her dresses were of rustling silk, and she had a variety of deep lace-collars, each one of which she fastened with a different brooch at the throat. She also wore a heavy gold watch-chain round her neck, the watch being concealed in her bosom; and jet bracelets by day, but gold ones in the evening.

Beth was deeply interested in her own family history, and intelligently pieced together such fragments of it as she could collect from the conversations of the people about her. She was sitting in one of the deep window-seats in the drawing-room looking out one day, concealed by a curtain, when her mother and Great-Aunt Victoria Bench came into the room, and settled themselves to chat and sew without observing her.

"Where is Grace Mary?" Aunt Victoria asked.

"Locked up in her own room writing a letter, I believe," Mrs. Caldwell replied, "a long and mysterious proceeding. We shall not see her again this morning, I suppose."

"Ah, well," said Aunt Victoria considerably, "she writes a very beautiful hand."

"James thought he was doing so well for himself, too!" Mrs. Caldwell interjected. "He'd better have married the mother."

"There was the making of a fine woman in Grace Mary if she had had a chance," Aunt Victoria answered, pursing up her mouth judicially. "It was the mother made the match. When he came across them in Switzerland, Lady Benyon got hold of him, and flattered him, made him believe Grace Mary was only thirty-eight, not too old for a son-and-heir, but much too old for a large family. She was really about fifty; but he never thought of looking up her age until after they were married. However, James got one thing he likes, and more than he deserved; for Grace Mary is amiable if she's ignorant; and I should say had tact, though some people might call it cunning. But, at any rate, she's the daughter of one baronet and the sister of another."

"What's a baronet?" Beth demanded, tumbling off the window-seat on to the floor with a crash as she spoke, having lost her balance in peering round the curtain.

Both ladies jumped, quite contrary to their principles.

"You naughty child, how dare you?" Mrs. Caldwell began.

Beth picked herself up. "I want to know," she interrupted.

"You've been listening."

"No, I've not. I was here first, and you came and talked. But that doesn't matter. I shan't tell. What's a baronet?"

Aunt Victoria explained, and then turned her out of the room. Uncle James was crossing the hall at the moment; he had a large bunch of keys in his hand, and went through the double-doors which led to the kitchen and offices. Beth followed him into the kitchen. The cook, an old servant, came forward curtsying. The remains of yesterday's dinner, cold roast beef, tongue, chicken, and plum-pudding, were spread out on the table. Uncle James inspected everything.

"For luncheon," he said, "the beef can remain cold on the sideboard, also the tongue. The chicken you will grill for one hot dish, and do not forget to garnish with rolls of bacon. The pudding you can cut into slices, fry, and sprinkle with a little sifted sugar. Mind, I say a little; for, as the pudding is sweet enough already, the sugar is merely an ornament to make it agreeable to the eye. For the rest, as usual."

"Yes, sir. And dinner, sir?"

"Here is the *menu*." He handed her a paper. "I will give you out what is necessary."

He led the way down a stone passage to the store-room door, which he unlocked.

"I am out of sifted sugar, sir," the cook said nervously.

"What, again?" Uncle James sternly demanded. "This is only Thursday, and I gave you some out on Saturday."

"Yes, sir, but only a quarter of a pound, sir, and I had to use it for the top of the rice-pudding, and the pancakes, and the Charlotte Russe, and the plum-pudding –"

"How?" said Uncle James – "the plum-pudding, which is not yet fried?"

"Beg pardon, sir. I'm all confused. But, however," she added desperately, "the sugar is done."

"Well, I suppose I must give you some more this time. But do not let it occur again. You may weigh out a quarter of a pound."

When that was done, Uncle James consulted a huge cookery-book which lay on a shelf in the window. "We shall require another cake for tea," he said, and then proceeded to read the recipe aloud, keeping an observant eye upon the cook as she weighed out the various ingredients.

"And the kitchen meals, sir?" she asked, as he locked up the store-room.

"Make what you have do," he said, "make what you have do."

"But there is hardly meat enough to go round once, sir."

"You must make it do. People are much healthier and happier when they do not eat too much."

This ceremony over, he went to the poultry-yard, followed by Beth (who carefully kept in the background), the yard-boy, and the poultry-maid who carried some corn in a sieve, which she handed to her master when he stopped. Uncle James scattered a little corn on the ground, calling "chuck! chuck! chuck!" at the same time, in a dignified manner. Chickens, ducks, turkeys and guinea-fowl

collected about him, and he stood gazing at them with large light prominent eyes, blandly, as if he loved them – as indeed he did when they appeared like ladies at table, dressed to perfection.

"That guinea-fowl!" he decided, after due consideration.

The yard-boy caught it and gave it to the poultry-maid, who held it while Uncle James carefully felt its breast.

"That will do," he said. "Quite a beauty."

The yard-boy took it from the poultry-maid, tied its legs together, cut its throat, and hung it on a nail.

"That drake!" Uncle James proceeded. The same ceremony followed, Uncle James bearing his part in it without any relaxation of his grand manner.

When a turkey-poult had also been executed, he requested the yard-boy to fetch him his gun from the harness-room.

"We must have a pigeon-pie," he observed as he took it.

Beth, in great excitement, stalked him to the orchard, where there was a big pigeon-house covered with ivy. In front of it the pigeons had a good run, enclosed with wire netting when they were shut in; but they were often let out to feed in the fields. The yard-boy now reached up and opened a little door in the side of the house. As he did so he glanced at Uncle James somewhat apprehensively. Uncle James, with a benign countenance, suddenly lifted his gun and fired. The yard-boy dropped.

"What is the matter?" said Uncle James.

The yard-boy gathered himself up with a very red face. "I thought you meant to shoot me, sir."

Uncle James smiled gently. "May I ask when it became customary for gentlemen to shoot yard-boys?" he said.

"Beg pardon, sir," the boy rejoined sheepishly. "There's accidents sometimes."

The pigeons were wary after the shot, and would not come out, so the yard-boy had to go into the house and drive them. There was a shelf in front of the little door, on which they generally rested a moment, bewildered, before they flew. Uncle James knew them all by sight, and let several go, as being too old for his purpose. Then, standing pretty close, he shot two, one after the other, as they stood hesitating to take flight. While loading again, he discovered Beth; but as he liked an audience when he was performing an exploit, he was quite gracious.

"Nothing distinguishes a gentleman more certainly than a love of sport," he observed blandly, as he shot another pigeon sitting.

This entertainment over, he looked at his watch. He had the whole day divided into hours and half-hours, each with its separate occupation or recreation; and nothing short of a visit from some personage of importance was ever allowed to interrupt him in any of his pursuits. For recreation he sometimes did a little knitting or a piece of Berlin woolwork, because, he said, a gentleman should learn to do everything, so as not to be at a loss if he were ever wrecked on a desert island. For the same reason, he had also trained himself to sleep at odd times, and in all sorts of odd places, choosing by preference some corner where Aunt Grace Mary and the maids would least expect to find him, the consequence being wild shrieks and shocks to their nerves, such as, to use his own bland explanation, might be expected from undisciplined females. Beth found him one day spread out on a large oak chest in the main corridor upstairs, with two great china vases, one at his head and one at his feet, filled with reeds and bulrushes, which appeared to be waving over him, and looking in his sleep, with his cadaverous countenance, like a self-satisfied corpse. She had been on her way downstairs to dispose of the core of an apple she had eaten; but, as Uncle James's mouth was open, she left it there.

Uncle James was wont to deliver little lectures to the children, for the improvement of their minds, during luncheon, which was their dinner-hour.

"With regularity and practice you may accomplish great things," he said on one occasion. "I myself always practise 'Hamilton's Exercises' on the pianoforte for one hour every day, from half-past ten till eleven, and from half-past three till four. I have done so now for many years."

Beth sat with her spoon suspended half-way up to her mouth, drinking in these words of wisdom. "And when will you be able to play?" she asked.

Uncle James fixed his large, light, ineffectual eyes upon her; but, as usual, this gaze direct only excited Beth's interest, and she returned it unabashed in simple expectation of what was to follow. So Uncle James gave in, and to cover his retreat he said: "Culture. Cultivate the mind. There is nothing that elevates the mind like general cultivation. It is cultivation that makes us great, good, and generous."

"Then, I suppose, when your mind is cultivated, Uncle James, you will give mamma more money," Beth burst out hopefully.

Uncle James blinked his eyes several times running, rapidly, as if something had gone wrong with them.

"Beth, you are talking too much; go to your room *at once*, and stay there for a punishment," her mother exclaimed nervously.

Beth, innocent of any intent to offend, looked surprised, put down her spoon deliberately, got off her chair, took up her plate of pudding, and was making off with it. As she was passing Uncle James, however, he stretched out his big hand suddenly, and snatched the plate from her; but Beth in an instant doubled her little fist, and struck the plate from underneath, the concussion scattering the pudding all over the front of Uncle James.

In the confusion which followed, Beth made her escape to the kitchen, where she was already popular.

"I say, cook," she coaxed, "give me something good to eat. My pudding's got upset all over Uncle James."

The cook sat down suddenly, and twinkled a glance of intelligence at Horner, the old coachman, who happened to be in the kitchen.

"Give me a cheesecake – I won't tell," Beth pleaded.

"That's doubtful, I should think," Horner said aside to the cook.

"Oh, bless you, she never do, not she!" cook answered, and then she fetched Beth a big cheesecake from a secret store. Beth took it smiling, and retired to the brown bedroom, where she was left in solitary confinement until Uncle James drove out with mamma in Aunt Grace Mary's pony-carriage to pay a call in the afternoon. When they had gone, Aunt Grace Mary peeped in at Beth, and said, with an unconvincing affectation of anger: "Beth, you are a naughty little girl, and deserve to be punished. Say you're sorry. Then you shall come to my room, and see me write a letter."

"All right," Beth answered, and Aunt Grace Mary took her off without more ado.

It was a great encouragement to Beth to find that Aunt Grace Mary was obliged to take pains with her writing. All the other grown-up people Beth knew, seemed to do everything with such ease, it was quite disheartening. Beth was allowed a pencil, a sheet of paper, and some lines herself now, and Aunt Grace Mary was taking great pains to teach her to write an Italian hand. Beth was also trying to learn: "because there are such lots of things I want to write down," she explained; "and I want to do it small like you, because it won't take so much paper, you know."

"What kind of things do you want to write down, Beth?" Aunt Grace Mary asked. Beth treated her quite as an equal, so they chatted the whole time they were together, unconstrainedly.

"Oh, you know – things like – well, the day we came here there were great grey clouds with crimson caps hanging over the sea, and you could see them in the water."

"See their reflection, you mean, I suppose."

Beth looked puzzled. "When you think of things, isn't that reflection?" she asked.

"Yes; and when you see yourself in the looking-glass, that's your reflection too," Aunt Grace Mary answered.

"Oh, then I suppose it was the sea's thought of the sky I saw in the water – that makes it nicer than I had it before," Beth said, trying to turn the phrase as a young bird practises to round its notes

in the spring. "The sea shows its thoughts, the thought of the sea is the sky – no, that isn't right. It never does come right all at once, you know. But that's the kind of thing."

"What kind of thing?" Aunt Grace Mary asked, bewildered.

"The kind of thing I am always wanting to write down. You generally forget what we're talking about, don't you? – I say, don't you want to drive your own ponies yourself sometimes?"

"No, not when your dear uncle wants them."

"Dear uncle wants them almost always, doesn't he? Horner ses as 'ow – "

"Beth, don't speak like that!"

"That's Horner, not me," Beth snapped, impatient of the interruption. "How am I to tell you what he said if I don't say what he said? Horner ses as 'ow, when Lady Benyon gev them there white ponies to 'er darter fur 'er own use, squire 'e sells two on 'is 'orses, an' 'as used them ponies ever since. Squire's a near un, my word!" Beth perceived that Aunt Grace Mary looked very funny in the face. "You're frightened to death of Uncle James, arn't you?" she asked, after sucking her pencil meditatively for a little.

"No, dear, of course not. I am not afraid of any one but the dear Lord."

"But Uncle James *is* the lord."

"Nonsense, child."

"Mildred says so. She says he's lord of the manor. Mildred says it's fine to be lord of the manor. But it doesn't make me care a button about Uncle James."

"Don't speak like that, Beth. It's disrespectful. It was the Lord in heaven I alluded to," said Aunt Grace Mary in her breathless way.

"Ah, that *is* different," Beth allowed. "But I'm not afraid of Him either. I don't think I'm afraid of any one really, not even of mamma, though she does beat me. I'd rather she didn't, you know. But one gets used to it. The worst of it is," Beth added, after sucking the point of her pencil a little – "The worst of it is, you never know what will make her waxy. To-day, at luncheon, you know – now, what did I say?"

"Oh," said Aunt Grace Mary vaguely; "you oughtn't to have said it, you know."

"Now, that's just like mamma! She says 'Don't!' and 'How dare you!' and 'Naughty girl!' at the top of her voice, and half the time I don't know what she's talking about. When I grow up, I shall explain to children. Do you know, sometimes I quite want to be good" – this with a sigh. "But when I'm bad without having a notion what I've done, why, it's difficult. Aunt Grace Mary, do you know what Neptune would say if the sea dried up?" Aunt Grace Mary smiled and shook her head. "I haven't an ocean," Beth proceeded. "You don't see it? Well, I didn't at first. You see *an ocean* and *a notion* sound the same if you say them sharp. Now, do you see? They call that a pun."

"Who told you that?"

"A gentleman in the train."

Beth put her pencil in her mouth, and gazed up at the sky. "I don't suppose he'd be such a black-hearted villain as to break his word," she said at last.

"Who?" Aunt Grace Mary asked, in a startled tone.

"Uncle James – about leaving Jim the place, you know. Why, don't you know? Mamma is the eldest, and ought to have had Fairholm, but she was away in Ireland, busy having me, when grandpapa died, and couldn't come; so Uncle James frightened the old man into leaving the place to him, and mamma only got fifty pounds a year, which wasn't fair."

"Who told you this, Beth?"

"Mildred. Mamma told her. And Horner said the other day to cook – I'll have to say it the way Horner says it. If I said it my way, you know, then it wouldn't be Horner – Horner said to cook as 'ow Captain Caldwell 'ud 'a' gone to law about it, but squire 'e swore if 'e'd let the matter drop, 'e'd make 'is nevee, Master Jim, as is also 'is godson, 'is heir, an' so square it; and Captain Caldwell, as

was a real gen'lmon, an' fond of the ladies, tuk 'im at 'is word, an' furgiv' 'im. But, lardie! don't us know the worth o' Mr. James Patten's word!"

Aunt Grace Mary had turned very pale.

"Beth," she gasped, "promise me you will never, never, *never* say a word about this to your uncle."

"Not likely," said Beth.

"How do you remember these things you hear?"

"Oh, I just think them over again when I go to bed, and then they stay," Beth answered. "I wouldn't tell you half I hear, though – only things everybody knows. If you tell secrets, you know, you're a tell-pie. And I'm not a tell-pie. Now, Bernadine is. She's a regular tell-pie. It seems as if she couldn't help it; but then she's young," Beth added tolerantly.

"Were you ever young, I wonder?" Aunt Grace Mary muttered to herself.

## CHAPTER XIII

Meanwhile the English spring advanced in the beautiful gardens of Fairholm, and was a joy to Beth. Blossoms showered from the fruit-trees, green leaves unfurled, the birds were in full song, and the swans curved their long necks in the sunshine, and breasted the waters of the lake, as if their own grace were a pleasure to them. Beth was enchanted. Every day she discovered some new wonder – nests in the hedgerows, lambs in the fields, a foal and its mother in the paddock, a calf in the byre – more living interests in one week than she had dreamt of in the whole of her little life. For a happy interval the scenes which had oppressed her – the desolation, the sombre colours of the great melancholy mountains, the incessant sound of the turbulent sea, the shock and roar of angry breakers warring with the rocks, which had kept her little being all a-throb, braced to the expectation of calamity – lapsed now into the background of her recollection, and under the benign influence of these lovelier surroundings her mind began to expand in the most extraordinary way, while her further faculty awoke, and gave her glimpses of more delights than mortal mind could have shown her. "Such nice things," as she expressed it, "keep coming into my head, and I want to write them down." Books she flung away impatiently; but the woods and streams, and the wild flowers, the rooks returning to roost in the trees at sunset, the horses playing in the paddocks, the cows dawdling back from their pastures, all sweet country scents and cheerful country sounds she became alive to and began to love. There would be trouble enough in Beth herself at times, wherever she was; it was hard that she could not have been kept in some such paradise always, to ease the burden of her being.

One morning her mother told her that Uncle James was extremely displeased with her because he had seen her pelting the swans.

"He didn't see me pelting the swans," Beth asseverated. "I was feeding them with crusts. And how did he see me, any way? He wasn't there."

"He sees everything that's going on," Mrs. Caldwell assured her.

"He's only pretending," Beth argued, "or else he must be God."

But she kept her eyes about her the next time she was in the grounds, and at last she discovered him, sitting in the little window of his dressing-room with a book before him, and completely blocking the aperture. She had never noticed him there before, because the panes were small and bright, and the shine on them made it difficult to see through them from below. After this discovery she always felt that his eyes were upon her wherever she went within range of that window. Not that that would have deterred her had she wanted to do anything particularly; but even a child feels it intolerable to be spied upon; and as for a spy! Beth scorned the creature.

That day at luncheon Uncle James made an announcement.

"Lady Benyon is going to honour us with a visit," he began in his most impressive manner. There is no snob so inveterate as your snob of good birth; and Uncle James said "Lady" as if it were a privilege just to pronounce the word. "She will arrive this afternoon at a quarter to four."

"But you will be practising," Beth exclaimed.

"The rites of hospitality must be observed," he condescended to inform her.

"Lady Benyon is my mother, Beth," Aunt Grace Mary put in irrelevantly.

"I know," Beth answered. "Your papa was a baronet; Uncle James loves baronets; that was why he married you." Having thus disposed of Aunt Grace Mary, Beth turned to the other end of the table, and resumed: "But you went on practising when *we* arrived, Uncle James."

Uncle James gazed at her blandly, then looked at his sister with an agreeable smile. "Lady Benyon will probably like to see the children. You do not dress them in the latest fashion, I observe."

"They *are* shabby," Mrs. Caldwell acknowledged with a sigh, apologetically.

Beth shovelled some spoonfuls of pudding into her mouth very quickly. "That's the money bother again," she said, and then she sang out at the top of her voice —

"Bryan O'Lynn had no breeches to wear,  
He bought a sheepskin for to make him a pair,  
With the skinny side out, and the woolly side in,  
'They're warm in the winter,' said Bryan O'Lynn."

"I suppose it would be quite impossible to suppress this child?" Uncle James lisped with deceptive mildness. "I observe that she joins in the conversation always, with great intelligence and her mouth full. It might be better, perhaps, if she emptied her mouth. However, I suppose it would be impossible to teach her."

"Not at all," Beth answered for herself, cheerfully. "I'm not too stupid to empty my mouth! Only just you tell me what it is you want. Don't bottle things up. I expect I've been speaking with my mouth full ever since I came, and you've been hating me for it; but you never told me."

"May I ask," said Uncle James politely, "by whom you were informed that I 'bottled things up'?"

"Ah, that would be telling," said Beth, and recommenced gobbling her pudding, to the intense relief of some of the party.

Great-Aunt Victoria Bench, sitting upright opposite, looked across the table at the child, and a faint smile flickered over her wrinkled rose-leaf cheek.

Beth finished her pudding, dropped her spoon on her plate with a clatter, leant back in her chair, and sighed with satisfaction. She possessed a horrid fascination for Uncle James. Almost everything she did was an offence to him, yet he could not keep his eyes off her or let her alone.

"Pudding seems to be a weakness of hers," he now observed. "I hope her voracity is satisfied. I should say that it resembles the voracity of the caterpillar."

"What's voracity, Aunt Victoria?" Beth asked.

"Greediness," Aunt Victoria rejoined sententiously.

"He means I'm greedy for pudding? I just *am*! I'd like to be a caterpillar for pudding. Caterpillars eat all day. But then God's good to them. He puts them on a tree with lots of leaves. I wish He'd put me in a pantry with lots of puddings! My vorass – vor – what is it? Any way, it's satisfied now, Uncle James, and if you'll let me go, I'll wash myself, and get ready for Lady Benyon."

Rather than let her go when she wanted to, however, Uncle James sat some time longer at table than he had intended. It was he who always gave the signal to rise; before he did so on this occasion, he formally requested his sister to request Beth to be silent during Lady Benyon's visit.

Lady Benyon was a shrewd, active little old woman, with four dark curls laid horizontally on either side of her forehead. She had bright black sparkling eyes that glanced about quickly and seemed to see everything. Before she arrived, Uncle James assembled his family in the drawing-room, and set the scene, as it were, for her reception.

"Sit here, facing the window, Caroline," he said. "It will interest Lady Benyon to see how you have aged. And, Aunt Victoria, this Chippendale chair, so stiff and straight, is just like you, I think; so oblige me by sitting on it. Grace Mary, take this easy lounge; it suits your yielding nature. Elizabeth" – Beth, who was perched on the piano-stool, looked up calmly at the clouds through the window opposite. "Elizabeth," he repeated sharply. Beth made no sign.

"Beth, answer your uncle directly," Mrs. Caldwell exclaimed.

"He has not yet addressed me," Beth rejoined, in the manner of Uncle James.

"Don't call your uncle 'he,' you naughty girl. You know your name is Elizabeth."

"Yes, and I know I said I wouldn't answer to it, and I'm not going to break me oath."

"Me oath!" Uncle James ejaculated.

Beth looked disconcerted. It irked her horribly to be jeered at for making a mistake in speaking, and Uncle James, seeing she was hurt, rested satisfied for the moment, and arranged Mildred and Bernadine together in a group, leaving Beth huddled up on the piano-stool, frowning.

When Lady Benyon's carriage stopped at the door, Uncle James stood bareheaded on the steps, ready to receive her.

"So glad to see you, mamma," he lisped, as he handed her out. "*Do* take my arm."

But the little old lady waved him aside unceremoniously, and hobbled in with the brisk stiffness of age.

"Gracious!" she exclaimed when she saw the party arranged in the drawing-room. "You all look as if you were having your likeness taken – all except Puck there, on the piano-stool."

When Uncle James had manœuvred Lady Benyon into the seat of honour he intended her to take in order to complete the picture, she frankly inspected each member of the group, ending with Beth.

"And who may you be?" she asked.

Beth smiled and shrugged her shoulders.

"Why don't you speak?"

Beth made another gesture.

"Goodness!" Lady Benyon cried; "is the child an idiot?"

"Beth, answer Lady Benyon directly," Mrs. Caldwell angrily commanded.

"Uncle James requested mamma to request me not to speak when you were present," Beth explained suavely.

The old lady burst out laughing. "Well, that's droll," she said – "requested mamma to request me – why, it's James Patten all over. And who may you be, you monkey?"

"I am Elizabeth Caldwell, but I only answer to Beth. Papa called me Beth."

"Good!" said the little old lady. "And what's Ireland like?"

"Great dark mountains," Beth rattled off, with big eyes dilated and fixed on space, as if she saw what she described. "Long, long, long, black bogs; all the poor people starving; and the sea rough – just like hell, you know, but without the fire."

"Oh, now, this *is* delightful!" the old lady chuckled. "I'm to enjoy myself to-day, it seems. You didn't prepare me for this treat, James Patten!"

Uncle James simpered, as though taking to himself the credit of the whole entertainment.

"So you hate Ireland?" said Lady Benyon.

"No, I love it," said Beth. "It's me native country; and they don't give you little bits of cake there the size of sixpence. What they have you're welcome to. Long live Ireland!"

"Good!" Lady Benyon ejaculated; then turned to Mildred. "And are you another naughty little patriot?" she asked.

"No, *I'm* not naughty," Mildred answered piously.

"Beth's naughty," said Bernadine.

"I'm sure I don't know *what* Beth is not," the old lady declared, turning to Beth again.

"Riley said I was one of the little girls the devil put out when he gave up housekeeping," Beth remarked casually.

"Beth!" Mrs. Caldwell remonstrated.

"He did, mamma. He said it the day that perjured villain Pat Murphy killed my magpie. And Riley's a good man. You said so yourself."

"You can hear that the young lady has been in Ireland, I suppose, mamma," Uncle James observed.

"I hear she can imitate the Irish," Lady Benyon rejoined bluntly; "and not the Irish only," she added with a chuckle.

Beth was still sitting on the music-stool opposite the window, and presently she saw some one cross the lawn. "Oh, do look at the lovely lady," she cried enthusiastically. "She's just like the Princess Blue-eyes-and-golden-hair."

Lady Benyon glanced over her shoulder. "Why, it's my maid," she said.

Beth's countenance dropped, then cleared again. Even a maid might be a princess in disguise.

Lady Benyon was going to stay all night, and at her special request Mildred and Beth were allowed to sit up to late dinner and prayers. She expected Beth to amuse her, but Beth was busy the whole time weaving a romance about the lovely lady's-maid, and scarcely spoke a word. When the servants came in to prayers, she sat and gazed at her heroine, and forgot to stand or kneel. She noticed, however, that Uncle James read the evening prayers with peculiar fervour.

When Beth went to bed, she found Bernadine, who slept with her, fast asleep. Beth was not at all sleepy. Her intellect had been on the alert all day, and would not let her rest now; she must do something to keep up the excitement. She pulled the blind aside, and, looking out of the window, discovered an enchanted land, all soft shadow and silver sheen, and above it an exquisite moon, in an empty sky, floated serenely. "Oh, to be out in the moonlight!" she sighed to herself. "The fairy-folk – the fairy-folk." For a little her mind was a blank as she gazed; then words came tripping a measure —

"The fairy-folk are calling me,  
Are calling me, are calling me;  
They come across the stormy sea,  
To play with me, to play with me."

Beth's vague longing crisped itself into a resolution. She looked at the big four-post bed. The curtains were drawn on one side of it. Should she draw them on the other, on the chance of her mother not looking in? No, she must wait, because of Mildred. Mildred was undressing, and would say her prayers presently. Beth waited until she knelt down, then slipped her night-dress on over her clothes, and got into bed, without disturbing Bernadine. Now she must wait for her mother; but Mrs. Caldwell came up very soon, Uncle James having hurried every one off to bed unusually early that evening. Mrs. Caldwell was a long time undressing, as it seemed to Beth; but in the meantime Mildred had fallen asleep, and very soon after her mother got into bed she too began to breathe with reassuring regularity.

Then Beth got up, opened the door very gently, and slipped out into the dark passage.

"The fairy-folk are calling me,  
Are calling me, are calling me;  
They come across the stormy sea,  
To play with me, to play with me."

The words set themselves to a merry tune, and carried Beth on with them.

All was dark in the hall. The front door was locked and bolted, and the shutters were up in all the rooms; how was she to get out? She felt for the green baize double-door which shut off the kitchen from the other parts of the house, opened it, and groped her way down the passage. As she did so, she saw a faint glimmer of light at the far end – not candlelight, moonlight – and at the same moment she became aware of some one else moving. At the end of the passage she was in, there was a little door leading out into a garden. If that were open all would be easy. She had stopped to listen. Certainly some one else was moving quite close to her. What was she near? Oh, the store-room. Something grated like a key in a lock – a door was opened, a match struck, a candle lighted; and there was Mrs. Cook in the store-room itself, hurriedly filling paper-bags with tea, sugar, raisins, currants, and other groceries from Uncle James's carefully guarded treasure, and packing them into a small hamper with a lid. When the hamper was full she blew out the candle, came out of the store-room, locked the door after her, and went into the kitchen, without discovering Beth. She left the kitchen door open; the blind was up; and Beth could see a man, whom she recognised as the cook's son, standing in the moonlight.

"Is there much this time, mother?" he asked.

"A goodish bit," cook replied, handing him the hamper.

"'E 'asn't 'ad 'is eyes about 'im much o' late, then?"

"Oh, 'e allus 'as 'is eyes about 'im, but 'e doan't see much. You'll get me what ye can?"

"I will so," her son replied, and kissed cook as she let him out of the back-door, which she fastened after him. Then she went off herself up the back-stairs to bed.

When all was quiet again, Beth thought of the garden-door at the end of the passage. To her relief she found it ajar; the gleam of light she had seen in that direction was the moonlight streaming through the crevice. She slipped out cautiously; but the moment she found herself in the garden she became a wild creature, revelling in her freedom. She ran, jumped, waved her arms about, threw herself down on the ground, and rolled over and over for yards, walked on all fours, turned head over heels, embraced the trunks of trees, and hailed them with the Eastern invocation, "O tree, give me of thy strength!"

For a good hour she rioted about the place in this way, working off her superfluous energy. By that time she had come to the stackyard. There, among the great stacks, she played hide-and-seek with the fairy-folk for a little. Very cautiously she would steal round in the black shadows, stalking her imaginary play-fellows, and then would go flying out into the moonlight, pursued by them in turn; and looking herself, with her white night-dress over her clothes, and her tousled hair, the weirdest little elfin figure in the world. Finally, to escape capture, she ran up a ladder that had been left against a haystack. Blocks of hay had been cut out, leaving a square shelf half way down the stack, on to which Beth scrambled from the ladder. There was room enough for her to lie at her ease up there and recover her breath. The hay and the night-air smelt deliciously sweet. The stack she was on was one of the outer row. Beneath was the road along which the waggons brought their loads in harvest time; and this was flanked by a low wall, on the other side of which was a meadow, bordered with elms. Beth pulled up the hay about her, covered herself with it, and nestled amongst it luxuriously. The moon shone full upon her, but she had quite concealed herself, and would probably have fallen asleep after her exertions had it not been that just when drowsiness was coming upon her she was startled by the sound of a hurried footstep, and a girl in a light dress, with a shawl about her shoulders, came round the stack, and stood still, looking about her, as if she expected some one. Beth recognised her as Harriet Elvidge, the kitchen-maid; and presently Russell, one of the grooms, came hurrying to meet her from the other direction. They rushed into each other's arms.

"Thou'st laäte," the girl grumbled.

"Ah bin waatin' ower yon'er this good bit," he answered, putting his arm round her, and drawing her to the wall, on which they sat, leaning against each other, and whispering happily. The moon was low, and her great golden disk illumined the sky, against which the two dark figures stood out, silhouetted distinctly. The effect gave Beth a sensation of pleasure, and she racked her brains for words in which to express it. Presently the lovers rose and strolled away together. Then for a little it was lonely, and Beth thought of getting down; but before she had made up her mind, two other people appeared, strolling in the moonlight, whom Beth instantly recognised as Uncle James and the beautiful princess Blue-eyes-and-golden-hair. The princess had both her hands clasped round Uncle James's arm, and every now and then she nestled her face against his shoulder lovingly.

"What will Jimmie-wimmie give his Jenny-penny?" she was saying as they approached.

"First what will Jenny-penny give her Jimmie-wimmie?" Uncle James cooed.

"First, a nice – sweet – kiss!"

"Duckie-dearie!" Jimmie-wimmie gurgled ecstatically, taking the kiss with the playful grace of an elephant gambolling.

Beth on the haystack writhed with suppressed merriment until her sides ached.

But Jimmie-wimmie and Jenny-penny passed out of sight like Harriet and Russell before them. The moon was sinking rapidly. A sudden gust of air blew chill upon Beth. She was extremely sensitive to sudden changes of temperature, and as the night grew dull and heavy, so did her mood, and she

began to be as anxious to be indoors again as she had been to come out. The fairy-folk had all vanished now, and ghosts and goblins would come in their stead, and pounce upon her as she passed, if she were not quick. Beth scrambled down from the haystack, and made for the side-door in hot haste, and was half-way upstairs, when it suddenly occurred to her that if she locked the door, Jimmie-wimmie and Jenny-penny would not be able to get in. So she retraced her steps, accomplished her purpose, slipped back to bed, and slept until she was roused in the morning by a shrill cry from Bernadine – "See, mummy! see, mummy! lazy Beth is in bed with all her clothes on!"

Beth sat up, and slapped Bernadine promptly; whereupon Mrs. Caldwell slapped Beth.

"Such is life," said Beth, in imitation of Aunt Grace Mary; and Mrs. Caldwell smiled in spite of herself.

Later in the day Beth complained to Mildred of a bad cold in her head.

"Oh dear!" Mildred exclaimed, "I expect Uncle James will talk at that cold as long as it lasts."

"I know," Beth said. "Grace Mary, dear – or Aunt Victoria – have you observed that children always have colds and never have pocket-handkerchiefs?"

Uncle James, however, had a bad cold himself that morning, and described himself as very much indisposed.

"I went out of doors last night before retiring," he explained at luncheon, "tempted by the glorious moonlight and the balmy air; but before I returned the night had changed and become chilly, and unfortunately the side-door had shut itself, and every one was in bed, so I could not get in. I threw pebbles up at Grace Mary's window, but failed to rouse her, she being somewhat deaf. I also knocked and rang, but no one answered, so I was obliged to shelter in the barn. Harriet, however, appeared finally. She – er – gets the men's breakfasts, and – er – the kitchen-window – " But here Uncle James was seized with a sudden fit of sneezing, and the connection between the men's breakfasts and the kitchen-window was never explained. "She is an extremely good girl, is Harriet," he proceeded as soon as he could speak; "up at four o'clock every morning."

"I wish to goodness *my* trollop was," said Lady Benyon. "She gets later every day. Where did you go last night?"

"Oh – I had been loitering among the tombs, so to speak," he answered largely.

Beth was eating cold beef stolidly, but without much appetite because of her cold, and also because there was hot chicken, and Uncle James had not given her her choice. Uncle James kept looking at her. He found it hard to let her alone, but she gave him no cause of offence for some time. Her little nose was troublesome, however, and at last she sniffed. Uncle James looked at Lady Benyon.

"Have you observed," he said, "that when a child has a cold she never has a pocket-handkerchief?"

Beth produced a clean one with a flourish, and burst out laughing.

"What's the matter, Puck?" Lady Benyon asked, beaming already in anticipation.

"Oh, nothing. Only I said Uncle James would say that if I sniffed. Didn't I, Mildred?"

But Mildred, too wary to support her, looked down demurely.

"Puck," said Lady Benyon, "you're a character."

"There are good characters and there are bad characters," Uncle James moralised.

"Arrah, thin, it isn't a bad character you'd be afther givin' your own niece," Beth blarneyed; and then she turned up her naughty eyes to the ceiling and chanted softly: "What will Jimmie-wimmie give his duckie-dearie to be good? A nice – sweet – kiss!"

Uncle James's big white face became suddenly empurpled.

"Gracious! he's swallowed wrong," Lady Benyon exclaimed in alarm. "Drink something. You really should be careful, a great fat man like you."

Uncle James coughed hard behind his handkerchief, then began to recover himself. Beth's eyes were fixed on his face. Her chaunt had been a sudden inspiration, and its effect upon the huge man had somewhat startled her; but clearly Uncle James was afraid she was going to tell.

"How funny!" she ejaculated.

Uncle James gasped again.

"What is the matter, Puck?" Lady Benyon asked.

"Oh, I was just thinking – thinking I would ask Uncle James to give Mildred some chicken."

"Why, of course, my dear child!" Uncle James exclaimed, to everybody's astonishment. "And have some yourself, Beth?"

"No, thank you," Beth answered. "I'm full."

"Beth!" her mother was beginning, when she perceived that Uncle James was laughing.

"Now, that child is really amusing," he said – "*really* amusing."

No one else thought this last enormity a happy specimen of her wit, and they looked at Uncle James, who continued to laugh, in amazement.

"Beth," he said, "when luncheon is over I shall give you a picture-book."

Beth accordingly had to stay behind with him after the others had left the dining-room.

"Beth," he began in a terrible voice, as soon as they were alone together, trying to frighten her; "Beth, what were you doing last night?"

"I was meditating among the tombs," she answered glibly; "but I never heard them called by that name before."

"You bad child, I shall tell your mamma."

"Oh for shame!" said Beth. "Tell-tale! And if you tell I shall. I saw you kissing Jenny-penny."

Uncle James collapsed. He had been prepared to explain to Beth that he had met the poor girl with some rustic lover, and was lecturing her kindly for her good, and making her go in, which would have made a plausible story had it not been for that accursed kissing. Of course he could insist that Beth was lying; the child was known to be imaginative; but then against that was the emotion he had shown. Lady Benyon had no very high opinion of him, he knew, and once she obtained a clue she would soon unravel the truth. No, the only thing was to silence Beth.

"Beth," he said, "I quite agree with you, my dear child. I was only joking when I said I would tell your mamma. Nothing would induce me to tell tales out of school."

Beth smiled up at him frankly: "Nor me neither. I don't believe you're such a bad old boy after all."

Uncle James winced. How he would have liked to throttle her! He controlled himself, however, and even managed to make a smile as he got up to leave the room.

"I say, though," Beth exclaimed, seeing him about to depart, "where's that picture-book?"

"Oh!" he ejaculated. "I had forgotten. But no, Beth, it would never do. If I give it to you now, it would look like a bribe; and I'm sure you would never accept a bribe."

"I should think not," said Beth.

And it was long years before she understood the mean adroitness of this last evasion.

## CHAPTER XIV

There are those who maintain that a man can do everything better than a woman can do it. This is certainly true of nagging. When a man nags, he shows his thoroughness, his continuity, and that love of sport which is the special pride and attribute of his sex. When a man nags, he puts his whole heart into the effort; a woman only nags, as a rule, because the heart has been taken out of her. The nagging woman is an over-tasked creature with jarred nerves, whose plaint is an expression of pain, a cry for help; in any interval of ease which lasts long enough to relax the tension, she feels remorse, and becomes amiably anxious to atone. With the male nag it is different. He is usually sleek and smiling, a joyous creature, fond of good living, whose self-satisfaction bubbles over in artistic attempts to make everybody else uncomfortable. This was the kind of creature Uncle James Patten was. He loved to shock and jar and startle people, especially if they were powerless to retaliate. Of two ways of saying a thing he invariably chose the more disagreeable; and when he had bad news to break, it added to his interest in it if the victim felt it deeply and showed signs of suffering.

One morning at breakfast it might have been suspected that there was something unpleasant toward. Uncle James had read prayers with such happy unction, and showed such pleased importance as he took his seat.

"Aunt Victoria," he lisped, "I have just observed in yesterday's paper that money matters are in a bad way. There has been a crisis in the city, and your investments have sunk so low that your income will be practically nil."

"What!" said Aunt Victoria incredulously, "the shares you advised me to buy?"

"Those are the ones, yes," he answered.

"But, then – I fear you have lost money too," she exclaimed.

"Oh no, thank you," he assured her, in a tone which implied reproach, "*I* never speculate."

"James Patten," said Aunt Victoria quietly, "am I to understand that you advised me to buy stock in which you yourself did not venture to speculate?"

"Well – er – you see," he answered with composure, "as speculation was against my principles, I could not take advantage of the opportunity myself, but that seemed to me no reason why you should not try to double your income. It may have been an error of judgment on my part; I am far from infallible – far from infallible. But I think I may claim to be disinterested. I did not hope to benefit myself –"

"During my lifetime," Aunt Victoria suggested, in the same tone of quiet self-restraint. "I see. My modest fortune would not have been much in itself to a man of your means; but it would have been a considerable sum if doubled."

"Yes, doubles or quits, doubles or quits," said Uncle James, beaming on Aunt Victoria as if he were saying something reassuring. "Alas! the family failing!"

"It is a new departure, however, for the family – to gamble at other people's expense," said Aunt Victoria.

"Alas! poor human nature," Uncle James philosophised, shaking his head. "You never know – you never know."

Aunt Victoria looked him straight in the eyes, but made no further show of emotion, except that she sat more rigidly upright than usual perhaps, and the rose-tint faded from her delicate face, leaving it waxen-white beneath her auburn front.

Uncle James ate an egg, with a pious air of thankfulness for the mercies vouchsafed him.

"And where will you live now, Aunt Victoria?" he asked at last, with an affectation of as much concern as he could get into his fat voice. For many years he had insisted that Fairholm was the proper place for his mother's sister, but then she had had money to leave. "Do not desert us altogether," he pursued. "You must come and see us as often as your altered circumstances will admit."

Great-Aunt Victoria Bench bowed expressively. Aunt Grace Mary grew very red in the face. Mrs. Caldwell seemed to be controlling herself with difficulty.

"There will be a spare room in my cottage, Aunt Victoria," she said. "I hope you will consider it your own, and make your home with me."

"Thank you kindly, Caroline," the old lady answered; "but I must consider."

"It would be a most proper arrangement," Uncle James genially decided; "and you would have our dear little Beth, of whom you approve, you know, for an interest in life."

Beth left her seat impulsively, and, going round to the old lady, nestled up to her, slipped her little hand through her arm, and glared at Uncle James defiantly.

The old lady's face quivered for a moment, and she patted the child's hand.

But no more was said on the subject in Beth's hearing; only, later, she found that Aunt Victoria was going to live with them.

Uncle James had suddenly become quite anxious that Mrs. Caldwell should be settled in her own little house; he said it would be so much more comfortable for her. The little house was Aunt Grace Mary's property, by the way – rent, ten pounds a year; but as it had not been let for a long time, and it did houses no good to stand empty, Uncle James had graciously lent it to his sister. When she was so settled in it that it would be a great inconvenience to move, he asked for the rent.

During the next week he drove every day to the station in Aunt Grace Mary's pony-carriage, to see if Mrs. Caldwell's furniture had arrived from Ireland; and when at last it came, he sent every available servant he had to set the house in order, so that it might be ready for immediate occupation. He also persuaded Harriet Elvidge, his invaluable kitchen-maid, to enter Mrs. Caldwell's service as maid-of-all-work. There is reason to believe that this arrangement was the outcome of Uncle James's peculiar sense of humour; but Mrs. Caldwell never suspected it.

"It will be nice for you to have some one I know all about," Uncle James insisted, "and with a knowledge of cooking besides. And how glad you will be to sleep under your own roof to-night!" he added in a tone of kindly congratulation.

"And how glad you will be to get rid of us," said Beth, thus early giving voice to what other people were only daring to think.

As soon as they were settled in the little bow-windowed house, it became obvious that there would be differences of opinion between mamma and Great-Aunt Victoria Bench. They differed about the cooking, about religion, and about the education of children. Aunt Victoria thought that if you cooked meat a second time it took all the goodness out of it. Mrs. Caldwell liked stews, and she said if the joints were under-done at first, as they should be, re-cooking did *not* take the goodness out of the meat; but Aunt Victoria abominated under-done joints more than anything.

The education of the children was a more serious matter, however – a matter of principle, in fact, as opposed to a matter of taste. Mrs. Caldwell had determined to give her boys a good start in life. In order to do this on her very limited income, she was obliged to exercise the utmost self-denial, and even with that, there would be little or nothing left to spend on the girls. This, however, did not seem to Mrs. Caldwell to be a matter of much importance. It is customary to sacrifice the girls of a family to the boys; to give them no educational advantages, and then to jeer at them for their ignorance and silliness. Mrs. Caldwell's own education had been of the most desultory character, but such as it was, she was content with it. "The method has answered in my case," she complacently maintained, without the slightest suspicion that the assertion proved nothing but extreme self-satisfaction. Accordingly, as she could not afford to send her daughters to school as well as the boys, she decided to educate them herself. Everybody who could read, write, and cipher was supposed to be able to teach in those days, and Mrs. Caldwell undertook the task without a doubt of her own capacity. But Aunt Victoria was not so sanguine.

"I hope religious instruction will be a part of their education," she said, when the subject was first discussed.

"They shall read the Bible from beginning to end," Mrs. Caldwell answered shortly.

"That, I should think, would be hardly desirable," Aunt Victoria deprecated gently.

"And I shall teach them their Catechism, and take them to church," Mrs. Caldwell proceeded.

"That is the way in which *I* was taught."

"*We* were instructed in doctrine, and taught to order our conduct on certain fixed principles, which were explained to us," Aunt Victoria ventured.

"Indeed, yes, I dare say," Mrs. Caldwell observed politely; so there the subject had to drop.

But Aunt Victoria was far from satisfied. She shook her head sadly over her niece's spiritual state, and determined to save the souls of her great-nieces by instructing them herself as occasion should offer.

"What is education, mamma?" Beth asked.

"Why, learning things, of course," Mrs. Caldwell replied, with a smile at the child's simplicity.

"I know that," Beth snapped, irritated by her mother's manner.

"Then why did you ask?" Mrs. Caldwell wished to know.

"The child has probably heard that that is not all," said Aunt Victoria. "'Learning things' is but one item of education – if you mean by that the mere acquisition of knowledge. A well-ordered day, for instance, is an essential part of education. Education is a question of discipline, of regular hours for everything, from the getting up in the morning to the going to bed at night. No mind can be properly developed without routine. Teach a child how to order its time, and its talents will do the rest."

"Get out your books, children," said Mrs. Caldwell, and Aunt Victoria hurriedly withdrew.

Beth put a large Bible, Colenso's arithmetic, a French grammar, and Pinnock (an old-fashioned compilation of questions and answers), on the table, and looked at them despondently. Then she took a slate, set herself the easiest addition sum she could find in Colenso, and did it wrong. Her mother told her to correct it.

"I wish you would show me how, mamma," Beth pleaded.

"You must find out for yourself," her mother answered.

This was her favourite formula. She had no idea of making the lessons either easy or interesting to the children. Teaching was a duty she detested, a time of trial both to herself and to her pupils, to be got over as soon as possible. The whole proceeding only occupied two or three dreadful hours of the morning, and then the children were free for the rest of the day, and so was she.

After lessons they all went out together to the north cliffs, where Aunt Victoria and Mrs. Caldwell walked to and fro on a sheltered terrace, while the children played on the sands below. It was a still day when Beth first saw the sands, and the lonely level and the tranquil sea delighted her. On her left, white cliffs curved round the bay like an arm; on her right was the grey and solid old stone pile, and behind her the mellow red brick houses of the little town scrambled up an incline from the shore irregularly. Silver sparkles brightened the hard smooth surface of the sand in the sunshine. The tide was coming in, and tiny waves advanced in irregular curves, and broke with a merry murmur. Joy got hold of Beth as she gazed about her, feeling the beauty of the scene. With the infinite charity of childhood, she forgave her mother her trespasses against her for that day, and her little soul was filled with the peace of the newly shriven. She flourished a little wooden spade that Aunt Victoria had given her, but did not dig. The surface of the sand was all unbroken; no disfiguring foot of man had trodden the long expanse, and Beth hesitated to be the first to spoil its exquisite serenity. Her heart expanded, however, and she shouted aloud in a great, uncontrollable burst of exultation.

A man with a brown beard and moustache, short, crisp, curly hair, and deep-set, glittering dark grey eyes, came up to her from behind. He wore a blue pilot-coat, blue trousers, and a peaked cap, the dress of a merchant-skipper.

"Don't desecrate this heavenly solitude with discordant cries," he exclaimed.

Beth had not heard him approach, and she turned round, startled, when he spoke.

"I thought I was singing!" she rejoined.

"Don't dig and disfigure the beautiful bare brown bosom of the shore," he pursued.

"I did not mean to dig," Beth said, looking up in his face; and then looking round about her in perfect comprehension of his mood – "The beautiful bare brown bosom of the shore," she slowly repeated, delighting in the phrase. "It's the kind of thing you can sing, you know."

"Yes," said the man, suddenly smiling; "it is pure poetry, and I make you a present of the copyright."

"But," Beth objected, "the shore is *not* brown. I've been thinking and thinking what to call it. It's the colour – the colour of – the colour of tarnished silver," she burst out at last triumphantly.

"Well observed," he said.

"Then I make you a present of the copyright," Beth answered readily.

"Thank you," he said; "but it will not scan."

"What is scan?"

"It won't fit into the verse, you know."

"The beautiful bare colour-of-tarnished-silver bosom of the shore," she sang out glibly; then agreed, with a wise shake of her head, that the phrase was impossible; and recurred to another point of interest, as was her wont – "What is copyright?"

Before he could answer, however, Mrs. Caldwell had swooped down upon them. She had seen him from the cliff talking to Beth, and hastened down the steps in her hot-tempered way, determined to rebuke the man for his familiarity, and heedless of Aunt Victoria, who had made an effort to stop her.

"May I ask why you are interfering with my child, sir?" she demanded.

The man in the sailor-suit raised his hat and bowed low.

"Excuse me, madam," he said. "I could not possibly have supposed that she was your child."

Mrs. Caldwell coloured angrily as at an insult, although the words seemed innocent enough. When he had spoken, he turned to Beth, with his hat still in his hand, and added – "Good-bye, little lady. We must meet again, you and I – on the beautiful bare brown bosom of the shore."

Beth's sympathy shone out in a smile, and she waved her hand confidently to him as he turned away. Mrs. Caldwell seized her arm and hurried her up the steps to Aunt Victoria, who stood on the edge of the cliff blinking calmly.

"Imagine Beth scraping acquaintance with such a common-looking person!" Mrs. Caldwell cried. "You must never speak to him or look at him again – do you hear? I wonder what taste you will develop next!"

"It is a pity that you are so impetuous, Caroline," Aunt Victoria observed quietly. "That gentleman is the Count Gustav Bartahlsky, who may perhaps be considered eccentric here, where noblemen of great attainments and wealth are certainly not numerous; but is hardly to be called common-looking."

Beth saw her mother's countenance drop.

"Then I *may* speak to him," she decided for herself. "What's a copyright, mamma?"

"Oh, don't bother, Beth!" Mrs. Caldwell exclaimed irritably.

When they went home, Bernadine clamoured for food, and her mother gave her a piece of bread. They were to have dinner at four o'clock, but no luncheon, for economy's sake. Beth was hungry too, but she would not confess it. What she had heard of their poverty had made a deep impression on her, and she was determined to eat as little as possible. Aunt Victoria glanced at Bernadine and the bread as she went up to her room, and Beth fancied she heard her sigh. Was the old lady hungry too, she wondered, and her little heart sank.

This was Beth's first exercise in self-denial, but she had plenty of practice, for the scene was repeated day after day.

The children being free, had to amuse themselves as best they could, and went out to play in the little garden at the back of the house. Mrs. Caldwell's own freedom was merely freedom for thought.

Most of the day she spent beside the dining-room table, making and mending, her only distraction being an occasional glance through the window at the boughs of the apple-trees which showed above the wall opposite, or at the people passing. Even when teaching the children she made, mended, and pursued her own thoughts, mapping out careers for her boys, making brilliant matches for Mildred and Bernadine, and even building a castle for Beth now and then. She made and mended as badly as might be expected of a woman whose proud boast it was that when she was married she could not hem a pocket-handkerchief; and she did it all herself. She had no notion of utilising the motive-power at hand in the children. As her own energy had been wasted in her childhood, so she wasted theirs, letting it expend itself to no purpose instead of teaching them to apply it. She was essentially a creature of habit. All that she had been taught in her youth, she taught them; but any accomplishment she had acquired in later life, she seemed to think that they also should wait to acquire. She had always dressed for dinner; so now, at half-past three every day, she put away her work, went into the kitchen for some hot water, which she carried upstairs herself, called the children, and proceeded to brush her own hair carefully, and change her dress. She expected the children to follow her example, but did not pay much attention to their proceedings, and they, childlike, constantly and consistently shirked as much of the ceremony as possible. If their mother caught them with unwashed hands and half-brushed hair, she thumped them on the back, and made them wash and brush; but she was generally thinking about something else, and did not catch them. The rite, however, being regularly although imperfectly performed, resulted in a good habit.

There was another thing too for which Beth had good reason to be grateful to her mother. During winter, when the days were short, or when bad weather made it impossible to go out on summer evenings, Mrs. Caldwell always read aloud to the children after tea till bed-time. Most mothers would have made the children read; but there was a great deal of laxity mixed with Mrs. Caldwell's harshness. She found it easier to do things herself than to make the children do them for her. They objected to read, and liked to be read to, so she read to them; and as, fortunately, she had no money to buy children's books, she read what there were in the house. Beth's ear was still quicker than her eye, and she would not read to herself if she could help it; but before she was fourteen, thanks to her mother, she knew much of Scott, Jane Austen, Dickens, Thackeray, Bulwer Lytton, and even some of Shakespeare, well; besides such books as "The Woman in White," "The Dead Secret," "Loyal Heart; or, The Trappers," "The Scalp Hunters," and many more, all of which helped greatly to develop her intelligence.

## CHAPTER XV

During the next two years, Beth continued to look on at life, with eyes wide open, deeply interested. Her mind at this time, acting without conscious effort, was a mere photographic apparatus for the registration of impressions on the brain. Every incident stored and docketed itself somewhere in her consciousness for future use, and it was upon this hoard that she drew eventually with such astonishing effect.

Rousseau in "Emile" chose a common capacity to educate, because, he said, genius will educate itself; but even genius would find its labours lightened by having been taught the use of some few tools, such as are supplied by the rudiments of a conventional education. Beth was never taught anything thoroughly; very few girls were in her day. A woman was expected at that time to earn her livelihood by marrying a man and bringing up a family; and, so long as her face was attractive, the fact that she was ignorant, foolish, and trivial did not, in the estimation of the average man, at all disqualify her for the task. Beth's education, at this most impressionable period of her life, consisted in the acquisition of a few facts which were not made to interest her, and neither influenced her conduct nor helped to form her character. She might learn in the morning, for instance, that William the Conqueror arrived 1066, but the information did not prevent her being as naughty as possible in the afternoon. One cannot help speculating on how much she lost or gained by the haphazard of her early training; but one thing is certain, had the development of her genius depended upon a careful acquisition of such knowledge as is to be had at school, it must have remained latent for ever.

As it was, however, being forced out into the life-school of the world, she there matriculated on her own account, and so, perhaps, saved her further faculty from destruction. For theoretical knowledge would have dulled the keenness of her insight probably, confused her point of view, and brought in accepted commonplaces to spoil the originality of her conclusions. It was from practical experience of life rather than from books that she learnt her work; she saw for herself before she came under the influence of other people's observations; and this was doubtless the secret of her success; but it involved the cruel necessity of a hard and strange apprenticeship. From the time of their arrival in Rainharbour she lived three lives a day – the life of lessons and coercion which was forced upon her, an altogether artificial and unsatisfactory life; the life she took up the moment she was free to act for herself; and a life of endless dreams, which mingled with the other two unwholesomely. For the rich soil of her mind, left uncultivated, was bound to bring forth something, and because there was so little seed sown in it, the crop was mostly weeds.

When we review the march of events which come crowding into a life, seeing how few it is possible to describe, no one can wonder that there is talk of the difficulty of selection. Who, for instance, could have supposed that a good striped jacket Jim had outgrown, and Mrs. Caldwell's love of grey, would have had much effect upon Beth's career? And yet these trifles were epoch-making. Mrs. Caldwell thought grey a ladylike colour, and therefore bought Beth a carmelite dress of a delicate shade for the summer. For the first few weeks the dress was a joy to Beth, but after that it began to be stained by one thing and another, and every spot upon it was a source of misery, not only because she was punished for messing the dress, but also because she had messed it; for she was beginning to be fastidious about her clothes; and every time she went out she was conscious of those unsightly stains, and fancied everybody was looking at them. She had to wear the frock, however, for want of another; and in the autumn, when the days began to be chilly, a cast-off jacket of Jim's was added to the affliction. Mrs. Caldwell caught her trying it on one day, and after shaking her for doing so, she noticed that the jacket fitted her, and the bright idea of making Beth wear it out, so that it might not be wasted, occurred to her. To do her justice, Mrs. Caldwell had no idea of the torture she was inflicting upon Beth by forcing her to appear in her soiled frock and a boy's jacket. The poor lady was in great straits at the time, and had nothing to spend on her daughters, because her sons were

growing up, and beginning to clamour for pocket-money. Their mother considered it right that they should have it too; and so the tender, delicate, sensitive little girl had to go dirty and ashamed in order that her brothers might have the wherewithal to swing a cane, smoke, drink beer, play billiards, and do all else that makes boys men in their own estimation at an early age.

Rainharbour was little more than a fishing village in those days, though it became a fashionable watering-place in a very few years. When Mrs. Caldwell first settled there, a whole codfish was sold for sixpence, fowls were one-and-ninepence a pair, eggs were almost given away, and the manners of the people were in keeping with the low prices. The natives had no idea of concealing their feelings, and were in the habit of expressing their opinions of each other and things in general at the top of their voices in the open street. They were as conservative as the Chinese too, and thought anything new and strange ridiculous. Consequently, when a little girl appeared amongst them in a boy's jacket, they let her know that they resented the innovation.

"She's gotten a lad's jacket on! oh! oh! she's gotten a lad's jacket on!" the children called aloud after her in the street, while their mothers came to the cottage-doors, wiping soap-suds from their arms, and stood staring as at a show; and even the big bland sailors lounging on the quay expanded into broad grins or solemnly winked at one another. Beth flushed with shame, but her courageous little heart was instantly full of fight. "What ignorant people these are!" she exclaimed haughtily, turning to Bernadine, who had dropped behind out of the obloquy. "What ignorant people these are! they know nothing of the fashions." The insinuation stung her persecutors, but that only made them the more offensive, and wherever she went she was jeered at – openly if there were no grown-up person with her, covertly if there were, but always so that she understood. After that first explosion she used to march along with an air of calm indifference as if she heard nothing, but she had to put great constraint upon herself in order to seem superior while feeling deeply humiliated; and all the time she suffered so acutely that at last she could hardly be induced to go out at all.

Mrs. Caldwell, who never noticed the "common people" enough to be aware of their criticism, would not listen to anything Beth had to say on the subject, and considered that her objection to go out in the jacket was merely another instance of her tiresome obstinacy. Punishments ensued, and Beth had the daily choice whether she should be scolded and beaten for refusing to go out, or be publicly jeered at for wearing a "lad's jacket."

Sometimes she preferred the chance of public derision to the certainty of private chastisement; but oftener she took the chastisement. This state of things could not last much longer, however. Hitherto her mother had ruled her by physical force, but now their wills were coming into collision, and it was inevitable that the more determined should carry her point.

"Go and put your things on directly, you naughty, obstinate child," her mother screamed at her one day. Beth did not move.

"Do you hear me?" Mrs. Caldwell exclaimed.

Beth made no sign. And suddenly Mrs. Caldwell realised that if Beth would not go out, she could not make her. She never thought of trying to persuade her. All that occurred to her was that Beth was too big to be carried or pulled or pushed; that she might be hurt, but could not be frightened; and that there was nothing for it, therefore, but to let her have her own way.

"Very well, then," said Mrs. Caldwell, "I shall go without you. But you'll be punished for your wickedness some day, you'll see, and then you'll be sorry."

Mildred had gone to be educated by a rich sister of her father's by this time, Aunt Victoria and Bernadine usually went out with Mrs. Caldwell, so it came to pass that Beth began to be left pretty much to her own resources, of which Harriet Elvidge in the kitchen was one, and a considerable one.

Harriet was a woman of well-marked individuality and brilliant imagination. She could never separate fact from fiction in any form of narrative, and narrative was her speciality. She was always recounting something. Beth used to follow her from room to room, as she went about her work, listening with absolute faith and the deepest interest to the stream of narrative which flowed on

without interruption, no matter what Harriet was doing. Sometimes, when she was dusting the drawing-room mantelpiece, she would pause with a china cup in one hand and her duster in the other, to emphasise a thrilling incident, or make a speech impressive with suitable gesticulation; and sometimes, for the same purpose, she would stop with her hand on the yellowstone with which she was rubbing the kitchen-hearth, and her head in the grate almost. Often, too, Beth in her eager sympathy would say, "Let me do that!" and Harriet would sit in an arm-chair if they were in the drawing-room, and resign the duster – or the dishcloth, if they were in the kitchen – and continue the recital, while Beth showed her appreciation, and encouraged her to proceed, by doing the greater part of her work for her. Mrs. Caldwell never could make out why Beth's hands were in such a state. "They are all cracked and begrimed," she would exclaim, "as if the child had to do dirty work like a servant!" And it was a good thing for Beth that she did it, for otherwise she would have had no physical training at all, and would have suffered as her sister Mildred did for want of it. Mildred, unlike Beth, held her head high, and never forgot that she was a young lady by right of descent, with an hereditary aptitude for keeping her inferiors in their proper place. She only went into the kitchen of necessity, and would never have dreamed of dusting, sweeping, bed-making, or laying the table, to help the servant, however much she might have been over-tasked; neither would Harriet have dared to approach her with the familiar pleading: "I say, miss, 'elp uz, I'm that done," to which Beth so readily responded. Mildred was studious; she had profited by the good teaching she had had while her father was alive, and was able to "make things out" for herself; but she cultivated her mind at the expense of her body. She was one of those delicate, nervous, sensitive girls, whose busy brains require the rest of regular manual exercise; and for want of it, she lived upon books, and very literally died of them eventually. She was naturally, so to speak, an artificial product of conventional ideas; Beth, on the contrary, was altogether a little human being, but one of those who answer to expectation with fatal versatility. She liked blacking grates, and did them well, because Harriet told her she could; she hated writing copies, and did them disgracefully, because her mother beat her for a blot, and said she would never improve. For the same reason, long before she could read aloud to her mother intelligibly, she had learnt all that Harriet could teach her, not only of the house-work, but of the cooking, from cleaning a fish and trussing a fowl to making barley-broth and puff-pastry. Harriet was a good cook if she had the things, as she said herself, having picked up a great deal when she was kitchen-maid in Uncle James's household.

Harriet was the daughter of a labourer. Her people lived at a village some miles away, and every Saturday morning a carrier with a covered cart brought her a letter from home, and a little parcel containing a cheesecake or some other dainty. Beth took a lively interest both in the cheesecake and the letter. "What's the news from home to-day?" she would ask. "How's Annie, and what has mother sent?" Whereupon Harriet would share the cheesecake with her, and read the letter aloud, work being suspended as long as possible for the purpose.

Harriet was about twenty-five at this time. She had very black silky hair, straight and heavy, parted in the middle, drawn down over her ears, and gathered up in a knot behind. Her face was oval, forehead high, eyebrows arched and delicate, nose straight, and she had large expressive dark grey eyes, rather deeply set, with long black lashes, and a mouth that would have been handsome of the sensual full-lipped kind, had it not been distorted by a burn, which had disfigured her throat and chin as well. She had set her pinafore on fire when she was a child, and it had blazed up under her chin, causing irreparable injury before the flames could be extinguished. But for that accident she would have been a singularly good-looking woman of a type which was common in books of beauty at the beginning of this reign.

She could read and write after a fashion, and was intelligent, but ignorant, deceitful, superstitious, and hysterical. Mrs. Caldwell continually lectured Beth about going into the kitchen so much; but she only lectured on principle really. Young ladies could not be allowed to associate with servants as a rule, but an exception might be made in the case of a good, steady, sober sort

of person, such as Mrs. Caldwell believed Harriet to be, who would keep the troublesome child out of mischief, and do her no harm. Harriet, as it happened, delighted in mischief, and was often the instigator; but Mrs. Caldwell might be excused for not suspecting this, as she only saw her on her best behaviour. When the children were safe in bed, and Miss Victoria Bench, who was an early person, had also retired, Harriet would put on a clean apron, and appear before Mrs. Caldwell in the character of a respectable, vigilant domestic, more anxious about her mistress's interests than her own; and she would then make a report in which Beth figured as a fiend of a child who could not be trusted alone for a moment, and Harriet herself as a conscientious custodian, but for whom nobody knows what might have happened.

When Harriet had no particular incident to report at these secret conferences, she would tell Mrs. Caldwell her dreams, and describe signs and portents of coming events which she had observed during the day; and Mrs. Caldwell would listen with interest. Superstition is a subject on which the most class-proud will consult with the lowest and the wickedest; it is a mighty leveller downwards. But the poor lady had a lonely life. It was not Mrs. Caldwell's fault, but the fault of her day, that she was not a noble woman. She belonged to early Victorian times, when every effort was made to mould the characters of women as the homes of the period were built, on lines of ghastly uniformity. The education of a girl in those days was eminently calculated to cloud her intelligence and strengthen every failing developed in her sex by ages of suppression. Mrs. Caldwell was a plastic person, and her mind had been successfully compressed into the accustomed groove until her husband came and helped it to escape a little in one or two directions – with the effect, however, of spoiling its conventional symmetry without restoring its natural beauty. If the mind be tight-laced long enough, it is ruined as a model, just as the body is; and throwing off the stays which restrained it, merely exposes its deformities without remedying them; so that there is nothing for the old generation but to remain in stays. Mrs. Caldwell, with all her deformities, was just as heroic as she knew how to be. She lived for her children to the extent of denying herself the bare necessities of life for them; and bore poverty and obscurity of a galling kind without a murmur. She scarcely ever saw a soul to speak to. Uncle James Patten and the Benyon family did not associate much with the townspeople, and were not popular in the county; so that Mrs. Caldwell had very few visitors. Of course it was an advantage to be known as a relation of the great people of the place, although the great people had a bad name; but then she was evidently a poor relation, which made it almost a virtue to neglect her in a community of Christians who only professed to love the Lord Himself for what they could get. "You must worship God because He can give you everything," was what they taught their children. Even the vicar of the parish would not call on anybody with less than five hundred a year. He kept a school for boys, which paid him more than cent. per cent., but did nothing for his parishioners except preach sermons an hour long on Sundays. Self-denial and morality were his favourite subjects. He had had three wives himself, and was getting through a fourth as fast as one baby a year would do it.

Mrs. Caldwell, left to herself, found her evenings especially long and dreary. It was her habit to write her letters then, and read, particularly in French and Italian, which, she had some vague notion, helped to improve her mind. But she often wearied for a word, and began to hear voices herself in the howling winter winds, and to brood upon the possible meaning of her own dreams, and to wonder why a solitary rook flew over her house in particular, and cawed twice as it passed. Little things naturally become of great importance in such a life, and Harriet kept up the supply; she being the connecting link between Mrs. Caldwell and the outer world. She knew all that was happening in the place, and she claimed to know all that was going to happen; and by degrees the mistress as well as the maid fell into the way of comparing events with the forebodings which had preceded them, and often established a satisfactory connection between the two.

Mrs. Caldwell always made coffee in the kitchen for breakfast in the morning, and while she was so engaged, Harriet, busy making toast, would begin – "Did you 'ear a noise last night, m'em?"

"No, Harriet – at least – was it about ten o'clock?"

"Yes, m'em, just about – a sort of scraping rattling noise, like a lot of people walking over gravel."

"I did hear something of the kind. I wonder what it was," Mrs. Caldwell would rejoin.

"Well, m'em, I think it means there are people coming to the 'ouse, for I remember it 'appened the night before your brother come, m'em, unexpected, and the lawyer."

If nobody came during the day, the token would be supposed to refer to some future period; and so, by degrees, signs and portents took the place of more substantial interests in Mrs. Caldwell's dreary life. Such things were in the air, for the little seaside place was quite out of the world at the time, and the people still had more faith in an incantation than a doctor's dose. If an accident happened, or a storm decimated the fishing-fleet, signs innumerable were always remembered which had preceded the event. If you asked why nobody had profited by the warning, people would shake their heads and tell you it was to be; and if you asked what was the use of the warning then, they would say to break the blow – in which idea there seemed to be some sense.

"When they told Tom's wife 'e was drowned, she'd 'a' dropped down dead 'erself and left the children, if she 'adn't 'a' knowed it all along," Harriet explained to Beth. "Eh! lass, you mark my words, warnin's comes for one thing, and warnin's comes for another, but they always comes for good, an' you're forced to take notice an' act on 'em or you're forced to leave 'em alone, just as is right, an' ye can't 'elp it yerself, choose 'ow. There's Mrs. Pettinger, she dreamed one night 'er husband's boat was lost, an' next mornin' 'e was to go out fishin', but she wouldn't let 'im. 'No, 'Enery John,' she ses, 'you'll not go, not if ah 'as to 'old you,' ses she, an' 'e was that mad 'e struck 'er an' knocked 'er down an' broke 'er arm, an' then, needs must, 'e 'ad to fetch the doctor to set it, an' by the time that was done, the boat 'ad gone wi'out 'im. The other men thought 'e was drunk – 'e often was – an' they wouldn't wait. Well, that boat never came back."

"And did he beat his wife again?" Beth asked.

"Oh, as to that, 'ow could it make any difference?" Harriet answered.

Beth was fascinated by the folk-lore of the place, and soon surpassed Harriet herself in the interpretation of dreams and the reading of signs and tokens. She began to invent methods of divination for herself too, such as, "If the boards don't creak when I walk across the room I shall get through my lessons without trouble this morning," a trick which soon became a confirmed habit into which she was apt to lapse at any time; and so persistent are these early impressions that to the end of her days she would always rather have seen two rooks together than one alone, rooks being the birds of omen in a land where magpies were scarce. Mrs. Caldwell knew nothing of Beth's proficiency in the black arts. She would never have discussed such a subject before the children, and took it for granted that Harriet was equally discreet; while Beth on her part, with her curious quick sense of what was right and proper, believed her mother to be above such things.

Harriet was a person of varied interests, all of which she discussed with Beth impartially. She had many lovers, according to her own account, and was stern and unyielding with them all, and so particular that she would dismiss them at any moment for nothing almost. If she went out at night she had always much to tell the next morning, and Beth would hurry over her lessons, watch her mother out of the way, and slip into the kitchen or upstairs after Harriet, and question her about what she had said, and he had said, and if she had let him kiss her even once.

"Well, last night," Harriet said on one occasion, in a tone of apology for her own weakness and good-nature. "Last night I couldn't 'elp it. 'E just put 'is arm round me, and, well, there! I was sorry for 'im."

"Why don't you say *he* and *him* and *his*, Harriet?"

"I do."

"No, you don't. You say 'e and 'im and 'is."

"Well, that's what you say."

Beth shouted the aspirates at her for answer, but in vain; with all the will in the world to "talk fine," as she called it, Harriet could never acquire the art, for want of an ear to hear. She could not perceive the slightest difference between him and 'im.

Even at this age Beth had her own point of view in social matters, and frequently disconcerted Harriet by a word or look or inflection of the voice which expressed disapproval of her conduct. Harriet had been at home on one occasion for a week's holiday, a charwoman having done her work in her absence, and on her return she had much to relate of Charles Russell, the groom at Fairholm, who continued to be an ardent admirer of hers, but not an honourable one, because he did not realise what a very superior person Harriet was. He thought she was no better than other girls, and when they were sitting up one night together in her mother's cottage, the rest of the family having gone to bed, he made her a proposal which Harriet indignantly rejected.

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