ЭДИТ НЕСБИТ

THE MAGIC CITY

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Несбит Э.

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Содержание

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CHAPTER I
THE BEGINNING

Philip Haldane and his sister lived in a little red-roofed house in a little red-roofed town. They had a little garden and a little balcony, and a little stable with a little pony in it—and a little cart for the pony to draw; a little canary hung in a little cage in the little bow-window, and the neat little servant kept everything as bright and clean as a little new pin.

Philip had no one but his sister, and she had no one but Philip. Their parents were dead, and Helen, who was twenty years older than Philip and was really his half-sister, was all the mother he had ever known. And he had never envied other boys their mothers, because Helen was so kind and clever and dear. She gave up almost all her time to him; she taught him all the lessons he learned; she played with him, inventing the most wonderful new games and adventures. So that every morning when Philip woke he knew that he was waking to a new day of joyous and interesting happenings. And this went on till Philip was ten years old, and he had no least shadow of a doubt that it would go on for ever. The beginning of the change came one day when he and Helen had gone for a picnic to the wood where the waterfall was, and as they were driving back behind the stout old pony, who was so good and quiet that Philip was allowed to drive it. They were coming up the last lane before the turning where their house was, and Helen said:

'To-morrow we'll weed the aster bed and have tea in the garden.'

'Jolly,' said Philip, and they turned the corner and came in sight of their white little garden gate. And a man was coming out of it—a man who was not one of the friends they both knew. He turned and came to meet them. Helen put her hand on the reins—a thing which she had always taught Philip was *never* done—and the pony stopped. The man, who was, as Philip put it to himself, 'tall and tweedy,' came across in front of the pony's nose and stood close by the wheel on the side where Helen sat. She shook hands with him, and said, 'How do you do?' in quite the usual way. But after that they whispered. Whispered! And Philip knew how rude it is to whisper, because Helen had often told him this. He heard one or two words, 'at last,' and 'over now,' and 'this evening, then.'

After that Helen said, 'This is my brother Philip,' and the man shook hands with him—across Helen, another thing which Philip knew was not manners, and said, 'I hope we shall be the best of friends.' Pip said, 'How do you do?' because that is the polite thing to say. But inside himself he said, 'I don't want to be friends with *you*.'

Then the man took off his hat and walked away, and Philip and his sister went home. She seemed different, somehow, and he was sent to bed a little earlier than usual, but he could not go to sleep for a long time, because he heard the front-door bell ring and afterwards a man's voice and Helen's going on and on in the little drawing-room under the room which was his bedroom. He went to sleep at last, and when he woke up in the morning it was raining, and the sky was grey and miserable. He lost his collar-stud, he tore one of his stockings as he pulled it on, he pinched his finger in the door, and he dropped his tooth-mug, with water in it too, and the mug was broken and the water went into his boots. There are mornings, you know, when things happen like that. This was one of them.

Then he went down to breakfast, which tasted not quite so nice as usual. He was late, of course. The bacon fat was growing grey with waiting for him, as Helen said, in the cheerful voice that had always said all the things he liked best to hear. But Philip didn't smile. It did not seem the sort of morning for smiling, and the grey rain beat against the window.

After breakfast Helen said, 'Tea in the garden is indefinitely postponed, and it's too wet for lessons.'

That was one of her charming ideas—that wet days should not be made worse by lessons.

'What shall we do?' she said; 'shall we talk about the island? Shall I make another map of it? And put in all the gardens and fountains and swings?'

The island was a favourite play. Somewhere in the warm seas where palm trees are, and rainbow-coloured sands, the island was said to be—their own island, beautified by their fancy with everything they liked and wanted, and Philip was never tired of talking about it. There were times when he almost believed that the island was real. He was king of the island and Helen was queen, and no one else was to be allowed on it. Only these two.

But this morning even the thought of the island failed to charm. Philip straggled away to the window and looked out dismally at the soaked lawn and the dripping laburnum trees, and the row of raindrops hanging fat and full on the iron gate.

'What is it, Pippin?' Helen asked. 'Don't tell me you're going to have horrid measles, or red-hot scarlet fever, or noisy whooping-cough.'

She came across and laid her hand on his forehead.

'Why, you're quite hot, boy of my heart. Tell sister, what is it?'

'*You* tell *me*,' said Philip slowly.

'Tell you what, Pip?'

'You think you ought to bear it alone, like in books, and be noble and all that. But you *must* tell me; you promised you'd never have any secrets from me, Helen, you know you did.'

Helen put her arm round him and said nothing. And from her silence Pip drew the most desperate and harrowing conclusions. The silence lasted. The rain gurgled in the water-pipe and dripped on the ivy. The canary in the green cage that hung in the window put its head on one side and tweaked a seed husk out into Philip's face, then twittered defiantly. But his sister said nothing.

'Don't,' said Philip suddenly, 'don't break it to me; tell me straight out.'

'Tell you what?' she said again.

'What is it?' he said. '*I* know how these unforetold misfortunes happen. Some one always comes—and then it's broken to the family.'

'*What* is?' she asked.

'The misfortune,' said Philip breathlessly. 'Oh, Helen, I'm not a baby. Do tell me! Have we lost our money in a burst bank? Or is the landlord going to put bailiffs into our furniture? Or are we going to be falsely accused about forgery, or being burglars?'

All the books Philip had ever read worked together in his mind to produce these melancholy suggestions. Helen laughed, and instantly felt a stiffening withdrawal of her brother from her arm.

'No, no, my Pippin, dear,' she made haste to say. 'Nothing horrid like that has happened.'

'Then what is it?' he asked, with a growing impatience that felt like a wolf gnawing inside him.

'I didn't want to tell you all in a hurry like this,' she said anxiously; 'but don't you worry, my boy of boys. It's something that makes me very happy. I hope it will you, too.'

He swung round in the circling of her arm and looked at her with sudden ecstasy.

'Oh, Helen, dear—I know! Some one has left you a hundred thousand pounds a year—some one you once opened a railway-carriage door for—and now I can have a pony of my very own to ride. Can't I?'

'Yes,' said Helen slowly, 'you can have a pony; but nobody's left me anything. Look here, my Pippin,' she added, very quickly, 'don't ask any more questions. I'll tell you. When I was quite little like you I had a dear friend I used to play with all day long, and when we grew up we were friends still. He lived quite near us. And then he married some one else. And then the some one died. And now he wants me to marry him. And he's got lots of horses and a beautiful house and park,' she added.

'And where shall I be?' he asked.

'With me, of course, wherever I am.'

'It won't be just us two any more, though,' said Philip, 'and you said it should be, for ever and ever.'

'But I didn't know then, Pip, dear. He's been wanting me so long–'

'Don't *I* want you?' said Pip to himself.

'And he's got a little girl that you'll like so to play with,' she went on. 'Her name's Lucy, and she's just a year younger than you. And you'll be the greatest friends with her. And you'll both have ponies to ride, and–'

'I hate her,' cried Philip, very loud, 'and I hate him, and I hate their beastly ponies. And I hate *you!*' And with these dreadful words he flung off her arm and rushed out of the room, banging the door after him—on purpose.

Well, she found him in the boot-cupboard, among the gaiters and goloshes and cricket-stumps and old rackets, and they kissed and cried and hugged each other, and he said he was sorry he had been naughty. But in his heart that was the only thing he was sorry for. He was sorry that he had made Helen unhappy. He still hated 'that man,' and most of all he hated Lucy.

He had to be polite to that man. His sister was very fond of that man, and this made Philip hate him still more, while at the same time it made him careful not to show how he hated him. Also it made him feel that hating that man was not quite fair to his sister, whom he loved. But there were no feelings of that kind to come in the way of the detestation he felt for Lucy. Helen had told him that Lucy had fair hair and wore it in two plaits; and he pictured her to himself as a fat, stumpy little girl, exactly like the little girl in the story of 'The Sugar Bread' in the old oblong 'Shock-Headed Peter' book that had belonged to Helen when she was little.

Helen was quite happy. She divided her love between the boy she loved and the man she was going to marry, and she believed that they were both as happy as she was. The man, whose name was Peter Graham, was happy enough; the boy, who was Philip, was amused—for she kept him so—but under the amusement he was miserable.

And the wedding-day came and went. And Philip travelled on a very hot afternoon by strange trains and a strange carriage to a strange house, where he was welcomed by a strange nurse and—Lucy.

'You won't mind going to stay at Peter's beautiful house without me, will you, dear?' Helen had asked. 'Every one will be kind to you, and you'll have Lucy to play with.'

And Philip said he didn't mind. What else could he say, without being naughty and making Helen cry again?

Lucy was not a bit like the Sugar-Bread child. She had fair hair, it is true, and it was plaited in two braids, but they were very long and straight; she herself was long and lean and had a freckled face and bright, jolly eyes.

'I'm so glad you've come,' she said, meeting him on the steps of the most beautiful house he had ever seen; 'we can play all sort of things now that you can't play when you're only one. I'm an only child,' she added, with a sort of melancholy pride. Then she laughed. '"Only" rhymes with "lonely," doesn't it?' she said.

'I don't know,' said Philip, with deliberate falseness, for he knew quite well.

He said no more.

Lucy tried two or three other beginnings of conversation, but Philip contradicted everything she said.

'I'm afraid he's very very stupid,' she said to her nurse, an extremely trained nurse, who firmly agreed with her. And when her aunt came to see her next day, Lucy said that the little new boy was stupid, and disagreeable as well as stupid, and Philip confirmed this opinion of his behaviour to such a degree that the aunt, who was young and affectionate, had Lucy's clothes packed at once and carried her off for a few days' visit.

So Philip and the nurse were left at the Grange. There was nobody else in the house but servants. And now Philip began to know what loneliness meant. The letters and the picture post-cards which his sister sent every day from the odd towns on the continent of Europe, which she visited on her honeymoon, did not cheer the boy. They merely exasperated him, reminding him of the time when she was all his own, and was too near to him to need to send him post-cards and letters.

The extremely trained nurse, who wore a grey uniform and white cap and apron, disapproved of Philip to the depths of her well-disciplined nature. 'Cantankerous little pig,' she called him to herself.

To the housekeeper she said, 'He is an unusually difficult and disagreeable child. I should imagine that his education has been much neglected. He wants a tight hand.'

She did not use a tight hand to him, however. She treated him with an indifference more annoying than tyranny. He had immense liberty of a desolate, empty sort. The great house was his to go to and fro in. But he was not allowed to touch anything in it. The garden was his—to wander through, but he must not pluck flowers or fruit. He had no lessons, it is true; but, then, he had no games either. There was a nursery, but he was not imprisoned in it—was not even encouraged to spend his time there. He was sent out for walks, and alone, for the park was large and safe. And the nursery was the room of all that great house that attracted him most, for it was full of toys of the most fascinating kind. A rocking-horse as big as a pony, the finest dolls' house you ever saw, boxes of tea-things, boxes of bricks—both the wooden and the terra-cotta sorts—puzzle maps, dominoes, chessmen, draughts, every kind of toy or game that you have ever had or ever wished to have.

And Pip was not allowed to play with any of them.

'You mustn't touch anything, if you please,' the nurse said, with that icy politeness which goes with a uniform. 'The toys are Miss Lucy's. No; I couldn't be responsible for giving you permission to play with them. No; I couldn't think of troubling Miss Lucy by writing to ask her if you may play with them. No; I couldn't take upon myself to give you Miss Lucy's address.'

For Philip's boredom and his desire had humbled him even to the asking for this.

For two whole days he lived at the Grange, hating it and every one in it; for the servants took their cue from the nurse, and the child felt that in the whole house he had not a friend. Somehow he had got the idea firmly in his head that this was a time when Helen was not to be bothered about anything; so he wrote to her that he was quite well, thank you, and the park was very pretty and Lucy had lots of nice toys. He felt very brave and noble, and like a martyr. And he set his teeth to bear it all. It was like spending a few days at the dentist's.

And then suddenly everything changed. The nurse got a telegram. A brother who had been thought to be drowned at sea had abruptly come home. She must go to see him. 'If it costs me the situation,' she said to the housekeeper, who answered:

'Oh, well—go, then. I'll be responsible for the boy—sulky little brat.'

And the nurse went. In a happy bustle she packed her boxes and went. At the last moment Philip, on the doorstep watching her climb into the dog-cart, suddenly sprang forward.

'Oh, Nurse!' he cried, blundering against the almost moving wheel, and it was the first time he had called her by any name. 'Nurse, do—do say I may take Lucy's toys to play with; it *is* so lonely here. I may, mayn't I? I may take them?'

Perhaps the nurse's heart was softened by her own happiness and the thought of the brother who was not drowned. Perhaps she was only in such a hurry that she did not know what she was saying. At any rate, when Philip said for the third time, 'May I take them?' she hastily answered:

'Bless the child! Take anything you like. Mind the wheel, for goodness' sake. Good-bye, everybody!' waved her hand to the servants assembled at the top of the wide steps, and was whirled off to joyous reunion with the undrowned brother.

Philip drew a deep breath of satisfaction, went straight up to the nursery, took out all the toys, and examined every single one of them. It took him all the afternoon.

The next day he looked at all the things again and longed to make something with them. He was accustomed to the joy that comes of making things. He and Helen had built many a city for the dream island out of his own two boxes of bricks and certain other things in the house—her Japanese cabinet, the dominoes and chessmen, cardboard boxes, books, the lids of kettles and teapots. But they had never had enough bricks. Lucy had enough bricks for anything.

He began to build a city on the nursery table. But to build with bricks alone is poor work when you have been used to building with all sorts of other things.

'It looks like a factory,' said Philip discontentedly. He swept the building down and replaced the bricks in their different boxes.

'There must be something downstairs that would come in useful,' he told himself, 'and she did say, "Take what you like."'

By armfuls, two and three at a time, he carried down the boxes of bricks and the boxes of blocks, the draughts, the chessmen, and the box of dominoes. He took them into the long drawing-room where the crystal chandeliers were, and the chairs covered in brown holland—and the many long, light windows, and the cabinets and tables covered with the most interesting things.

He cleared a big writing-table of such useless and unimportant objects as blotting-pad, silver inkstand, and red-backed books, and there was a clear space for his city.

He began to build.

A bronze Egyptian god on a black and gold cabinet seemed to be looking at him from across the room.

'All right,' said Philip. 'I'll build you a temple. You wait a bit.'

The bronze god waited and the temple grew, and two silver candlesticks, topped by chessmen, served admirably as pillars for the portico. He made a journey to the nursery to fetch the Noah's Ark animals—the pair of elephants, each standing on a brick, flanked the entrance. It looked splendid, like an Assyrian temple in the pictures Helen had shown him. But the bricks, wherever he built with them alone, looked mean, and like factories or workhouses. Bricks alone always do.

Philip explored again. He found the library. He made several journeys. He brought up twenty-seven volumes bound in white vellum with marbled boards, a set of Shakespeare, ten volumes in green morocco. These made pillars and cloisters, dark, mysterious, and attractive. More Noah's Ark animals added an Egyptian-looking finish to the building.

'Lor', ain't it pretty!' said the parlour-maid, who came to call him to tea. 'You are clever with your fingers, Master Philip, I will say that for you. But you'll catch it, taking all them things.'

'That grey nurse said I might,' said Philip, 'and it doesn't hurt things building with them. My sister and I always did it at home,' he added, looking confidingly at the parlour-maid. She had praised his building. And it was the first time he had mentioned his sister to any one in that house.

'Well, it's as good as a peep-show,' said the parlour-maid; 'it's just like them picture post-cards my brother in India sends me. All them pillars and domes and things—and the animals too. I don't know how you fare to think of such things, that I don't.'

Praise is sweet. He slipped his hand into that of the parlour-maid as they went down the wide stairs to the hall, where tea awaited him—a very little tray on a very big, dark table.

'He's not half a bad child,' said Susan at her tea in the servants' quarters. 'That nurse frightened him out of his little wits with her prim ways, you may depend. He's civil enough if you speak him civil.'

'But Miss Lucy didn't frighten him, I suppose,' said the cook; 'and look how he behaved to her.'

'Well, he's quiet enough, anyhow. You don't hear a breath of him from morning till night,' said the upper housemaid; 'seems silly-like to me.'

'You slip in and look what he's been building, that's all,' Susan told them. 'You won't call him silly then. India an' pagodas ain't in it.'

They did slip in, all of them, when Philip had gone to bed. The building had progressed, though it was not finished.

'I shan't touch a thing,' said Susan. 'Let him have it to play with to-morrow. We'll clear it all away before that nurse comes back with her caps and her collars and her stuck-up cheek.'

So next day Philip went on with his building. He put everything you can think of into it: the dominoes, and the domino-box; bricks and books; cotton-reels that he begged from Susan, and a collar-box and some cake-tins contributed by the cook. He made steps of the dominoes and a terrace of the domino-box. He got bits of southernwood out of the garden and stuck them in cotton-reels, which made beautiful pots, and they looked like bay trees in tubs. Brass finger-bowls served for domes, and the lids of brass kettles and coffee-pots from the oak dresser in the hall made minarets of dazzling splendour. Chessmen were useful for minarets, too.

'I must have paved paths and a fountain,' said Philip thoughtfully. The paths were paved with mother-of-pearl card counters, and the fountain was a silver and glass ash-tray, with a needlecase of filigree silver rising up from the middle of it; and the falling water was made quite nicely out of narrow bits of the silver paper off the chocolate Helen had given him at parting. Palm trees were easily made—Helen had shown him how to do that—with bits of larch fastened to elder stems with plasticine. There was plenty of plasticine among Lucy's toys; there was plenty of everything.

And the city grew, till it covered the table. Philip, unwearied, set about to make another city on another table. This had for chief feature a great water-tower, with a fountain round its base; and now he stopped at nothing. He unhooked the crystal drops from the great chandeliers to make his fountains. This city was grander than the first. It had a grand tower made of a waste-paper basket and an astrologer's tower that was a photograph-enlarging machine.

The cities were really very beautiful. I wish I could describe them thoroughly to you. But it would take pages and pages. Besides all the things I have told of alone there were towers and turrets and grand staircases, pagodas and pavilions, canals made bright and water-like by strips of silver paper, and a lake with a boat on it. Philip put into his buildings all the things out of the doll's house that seemed suitable. The wooden things-to-eat and dishes. The leaden tea-cups and goblets. He peopled the place with dominoes and pawns. The handsome chessmen were used for minarets. He made forts and garrisoned them with lead soldiers.

He worked hard and he worked cleverly, and as the cities grew in beauty and interestingness he loved them more and more. He was happy now. There was no time to be unhappy in.

'I will keep it as it is till Helen comes. How she will *love* it!' he said.

The two cities were connected by a bridge which was a yard-stick he had found in the servants' sewing-room and taken without hindrance, for by this time all the servants were his friends. Susan had been the first—that was all.

He had just laid his bridge in place, and put Mr. and Mrs. Noah in the chief square to represent the inhabitants, and was standing rapt in admiration of his work, when a hard hand on each of his shoulders made him start and scream.

It was the nurse. She had come back a day sooner than any one expected her. The brother had brought home a wife, and she and the nurse had not liked each other; so she was very cross, and she took Philip by the shoulders and shook him, a thing which had never happened to him before.

'You naughty, wicked boy!' she said, still shaking.

'But I haven't hurt anything—I'll put everything back,' he said, trembling and very pale.

'You'll not touch any of it again,' said the nurse. 'I'll see to that. I shall put everything away myself in the morning. Taking what doesn't belong to you!'

'But you said I might take anything I liked,' said Philip, 'so if it's wrong it's your fault.'

'You untruthful child!' cried the nurse, and hit him over the knuckles. Now, no one had ever hit Philip before. He grew paler than ever, but he did not cry, though his hands hurt rather badly. For she had snatched up the yard-stick to hit him with, and it was hard and cornery.

'You are a coward,' said Philip, 'and it is you who are untruthful and not me.'

'Hold your tongue,' said the nurse, and whirled him off to bed.

'You'll get no supper, so there!' she said, angrily tucking him up.

'I don't want any,' said Philip, 'and I have to forgive you before the sun goes down.'

'Forgive, indeed!' said she, flouncing out.

'When you get sorry you'll know I've forgiven you,' Philip called after her, which, of course, made her angrier than ever.

Whether Philip cried when he was alone is not our business. Susan, who had watched the shaking and the hitting without daring to interfere, crept up later with milk and sponge-cakes. She found him asleep, and she says his eyelashes were wet.

When he awoke he thought at first that it was morning, the room was so light. But presently he saw that it was not yellow sunlight but white moonshine which made the beautiful brightness.

He wondered at first why he felt so unhappy, then he remembered how Helen had gone away and how hateful the nurse had been. And now she would pull down the city and Helen would never see it. And he would never be able to build such a beautiful one again. In the morning it would be gone, and he would not be able even to remember how it was built.

The moonlight was very bright.

'I wonder how my city looks by moonlight?' he said.

And then, all in a thrilling instant, he made up his mind to go down and see for himself how it did look.

He slipped on his dressing-gown, opened his door softly, and crept along the corridor and down the broad staircase, then along the gallery and into the drawing-room. It was very dark, but he felt his way to a window and undid the shutter, and there lay his city, flooded with moonlight, just as he had imagined it.

He gazed on it for a moment in ecstasy and then turned to shut the door. As he did so he felt a slight strange giddiness and stood a moment with his hand to his head. He turned and went again towards the city, and when he was close to it he gave a little cry, hastily stifled, for fear some one should hear him and come down and send him to bed. He stood and gazed about him bewildered and, once more, rather giddy. For the city had, in a quick blink of light, followed by darkness, disappeared. So had the drawing-room. So had the chair that stood close to the table. He could see mountainous shapes raising enormous heights in the distance, and the moonlight shone on the tops of them. But he himself seemed to be in a vast, flat plain. There was the softness of long grass round his feet, but there were no trees, no houses, no hedges or fences to break the expanse of grass. It seemed darker in some parts than others. That was all. It reminded him of the illimitable prairie of which he had read in books of adventure.

'I suppose I'm dreaming,' said Philip, 'though I don't see how I can have gone to sleep just while I was turning the door handle. However–'

He stood still expecting that something would happen. In dreams something always does happen, if it's only that the dream comes to an end. But nothing happened now—Philip just stood there quite quietly and felt the warm soft grass round his ankles.

Then, as his eyes became used to the darkness of the plain, he saw some way off a very steep bridge leading up to a dark height on whose summit the moon shone whitely. He walked towards it, and as he approached he saw that it was less like a bridge than a sort of ladder, and that it rose to a giddy height above him. It seemed to rest on a rock far up against dark sky, and the inside of the rock seemed hollowed out in one vast dark cave.

And now he was close to the foot of the ladder. It had no rungs, but narrow ledges made hold for feet and hands. Philip remembered Jack and the Beanstalk, and looked up longingly; but the ladder was a very very long one. On the other hand, it was the only thing that seemed to lead anywhere, and he had had enough of standing lonely in the grassy prairie, where he seemed to have been for a very long time indeed. So he put his hands and feet to the ladder and began to go up. It was a very long climb. There were three hundred and eight steps, for he counted them. And the steps were only on

one side of the ladder, so he had to be extremely careful. On he went, up and on, on and up, till his feet ached and his hands felt as though they would drop off for tiredness. He could not look up far, and he dared not look down at all. There was nothing for it but to climb and climb and climb, and at last he saw the ground on which the ladder rested—a terrace hewn in regular lines, and, as it seemed, hewn from the solid rock. His head was level with the ground, now his hands, now his feet. He leaped sideways from the ladder and threw himself face down on the ground, which was cold and smooth like marble. There he lay, drawing deep breaths of weariness and relief.

There was a great silence all about, which rested and soothed, and presently he rose and looked around him. He was close to an archway with very thick pillars, and he went towards it and peeped cautiously in. It seemed to be a great gate leading to an open space, and beyond it he could see dim piles that looked like churches and houses. But all was deserted; the moonlight and he had the place, whatever it was, to themselves.

'I suppose every one's in bed,' said Philip, and stood there trembling a little, but very curious and interested, in the black shadow of the strange arch.

CHAPTER II
DELIVERER OR DESTROYER

Philip stood in the shadow of the dark arch and looked out. He saw before him a great square surrounded by tall irregular buildings. In the middle was a fountain whose waters, silver in the moonlight, rose and fell with gentle plashing sound. A tall tree, close to the archway, cast the shadow of its trunk across the path—a broad black bar. He listened, listened, listened, but there was nothing to listen to, except the deep night silence and the changing soft sound the fountain made.

His eyes, growing accustomed to the dimness, showed him that he was under a heavy domed roof supported on large square pillars—to the right and left stood dark doors, shut fast.

'I will explore these doors by daylight,' he said. He did not feel exactly frightened. But he did not feel exactly brave either. But he wished and intended to be brave, so he said, 'I will explore these doors. At least I think I will,' he added, for one must not only be brave but truthful.

And then suddenly he felt very sleepy. He leaned against the wall, and presently it seemed that sitting down would be less trouble, and then that lying down would be more truly comfortable. A bell from very very far away sounded the hour, twelve. Philip counted up to nine, but he missed the tenth bell-beat, and the eleventh and the twelfth as well, because he was fast asleep cuddled up warmly in the thick quilted dressing-gown that Helen had made him last winter. He dreamed that everything was as it used to be before That Man came and changed everything and took Helen away. He was in his own little bed in his own little room in their own little house, and Helen had come to call him. He could see the sunlight through his closed eyelids—he was keeping them closed just for the fun of hearing her try to wake him, and presently he would tell her he had been awake all the time, and they would laugh together about it. And then he awoke, and he was not in his soft bed at home but on the hard floor of a big, strange gate-house, and it was not Helen who was shaking him and saying, 'Here—I say, wake up, can't you,' but a tall man in a red coat; and the light that dazzled his eyes was not from the sun at all, but from a horn lantern which the man was holding close to his face.

'What's the matter?' said Philip sleepily.

'That's the question,' said the man in red. 'Come along to the guard-room and give an account of yourself, you young shaver.'

He took Philip's ear gently but firmly between a very hard finger and thumb.

'Leave go,' said Philip, 'I'm not going to run away.' And he stood up feeling very brave.

The man shifted his hold from ear to shoulder and led Philip through one of those doors which he had thought of exploring by daylight. It was not daylight yet, and the room, large and bare, with an arch at each end and narrow little windows at the sides, was lighted by horn lanterns and tall tapers in pewter candlesticks. It seemed to Philip that the room was full of soldiers.

Their captain, with a good deal of gold about him and a very smart black moustache, got up from a bench.

'Look what I've caught, sir,' said the man who owned the hand on Philip's shoulder.

'Humph,' said the captain, 'so it's really happened at last.'

'What has?' said Philip.

'Why, you have,' said the captain. 'Don't be frightened, little man.'

'I'm not frightened,' said Philip, and added politely, 'I should be so much obliged if you'd tell me what you mean.' He added something which he had heard people say when they asked the way to the market or the public gardens, 'I'm quite a stranger here,' he said.

A jolly roar of laughter went up from the red-coats.

'It isn't manners to laugh at strangers,' said Philip.

'Mind your own manners,' said the captain sharply; 'in this country little boys speak when they're spoken to. Stranger, eh? Well, we knew that, you know!'

Philip, though he felt snubbed, yet felt grand too. Here he was in the middle of an adventure with grown-up soldiers. He threw out his chest and tried to look manly.

The captain sat down in a chair at the end of a long table, drew a black book to him—a black book covered with dust—and began to rub a rusty pen-nib on his sword, which was not rusty.

'Come now,' he said, opening the book, 'tell me how you came here. And mind you speak the truth.'

'I *always* speak the truth,' said Philip proudly.

All the soldiers rose and saluted him with looks of deep surprise and respect.

'Well, nearly always,' said Philip, hot to the ears, and the soldiers clattered stiffly down again on to the benches, laughing once more. Philip had imagined there to be more discipline in the army.

'How did you come here?' said the captain.

'Up the great bridge staircase,' said Philip.

The captain wrote busily in the book.

'What did you come for?'

'I didn't know what else to do. There was nothing but illimitable prairie—and so I came up.'

'You are a very bold boy,' said the captain.

'Thank you,' said Philip. 'I do *want* to be.'

'What was your purpose in coming?'

'I didn't do it on purpose—I just happened to come.'

The captain wrote that down too. And then he and Philip and the soldiers looked at each other in silence.

'Well?' said the boy.

'Well?' said the captain.

'I do wish,' said the boy, 'you'd tell me what you meant by my really happening after all. And then I wish you'd tell me the way home.'

'Where do you want to get to?' asked the captain.

'The *address*,' said Philip, 'is The Grange, Ravelsham, Sussex.'

'Don't know it,' said the captain briefly, 'and anyhow you can't go back there now. Didn't you read the notice at the top of the ladder? Trespassers will be prosecuted. You've got to be prosecuted before you can go back anywhere.'

'I'd rather be persecuted than go down that ladder again,' he said. 'I suppose it won't be very bad—being persecuted, I mean?'

His idea of persecution was derived from books. He thought it to be something vaguely unpleasant from which one escaped in disguise—adventurous and always successful.

'That's for the judges to decide,' said the captain, 'it's a serious thing trespassing in our city. This guard is put here expressly to prevent it.'

'Do you have many trespassers?' Philip asked. The captain seemed kind, and Philip had a great-uncle who was a judge, so the word judges made him think of tips and good advice, rather than of justice and punishment.

'Many trespassers indeed!' the captain almost snorted his answer. 'That's just it. There's never been one before. You're the first. For years and years and years there's been a guard here, because when the town was first built the astrologers foretold that some day there would be a trespasser who would do untold mischief. So it's our privilege—we're the Polistopolitan guards—to keep watch over the only way by which a trespasser could come in.'

'May I sit down?' said Philip suddenly, and the soldiers made room for him on the bench.

'My father and my grandfather and all my ancestors were in the guards,' said the captain proudly. 'It's a very great honour.'

'I wonder,' said Philip, 'why you don't cut off the end of your ladder—the top end I mean; then nobody could come up.'

'That would never do,' said the captain, 'because, you see, there's another prophecy. The great deliverer is to come that way.'

'Couldn't I,' suggested Philip shyly, 'couldn't I be the deliverer instead of the trespasser? I'd much rather, you know.'

'I daresay you would,' said the captain; 'but people can't be deliverers just because they'd much rather, you know.'

'And isn't any one to come up the ladder bridge except just those two?'

'We don't know; that's just it. You know what prophecies are.'

'I'm afraid I don't—exactly.'

'So vague and mixed up, I mean. The one I'm telling you about goes something like this.

Who comes up the ladder stair?
Beware, beware,
Steely eyes and copper hair
Strife and grief and pain to bear
All come up the ladder stair.

You see we can't tell whether that means one person or a lot of people with steely eyes and copper hair.'

'My hair's just plain boy-colour,' said Philip; 'my sister says so, and my eyes are blue, I believe.'

'I can't see in this light;' the captain leaned his elbows on the table and looked earnestly in the boy's eyes. 'No, I can't see. The other prophecy goes:

From down and down and very far down
The king shall come to take his own;
He shall deliver the Magic town,
And all that he made shall be his own.
Beware, take care. Beware, prepare,
The king shall come by the ladder stair.

'How jolly,' said Philip; 'I love poetry. Do you know any more?'

'There are heaps of prophecies of course,' said the captain; 'the astrologers must do *something* to earn their pay. There's rather a nice one:

Every night when the bright stars blink
The guards shall turn out, and have a drink
As the clock strikes two.
And every night when no stars are seen
The guards shall drink in their own canteen
When the clock strikes two.

To-night there aren't any stars, so we have the drinks served here. It's less trouble than going across the square to the canteen, and the principle's the same. Principle is the great thing with a prophecy, my boy.'

'Yes,' said Philip. And then the far-away bell beat again. One, two. And outside was a light patter of feet.

A soldier rose—saluted his officer and threw open the door. There was a moment's pause; Philip expected some one to come in with a tray and glasses, as they did at his great-uncle's when gentlemen were suddenly thirsty at times that were not meal-times.

But instead, after a moment's pause, a dozen greyhounds stepped daintily in on their padded cat-like feet; and round the neck of each dog was slung a roundish thing that looked like one of the little barrels which St. Bernard dogs wear round their necks in the pictures. And when these were loosened and laid on the table Philip was charmed to see that the roundish things were not barrels but cocoa-nuts.

The soldiers reached down some pewter pots from a high shelf—pierced the cocoa-nuts with their bayonets and poured out the cocoa-nut milk. They all had drinks, so the prophecy came true, and what is more they gave Philip a drink as well. It was delicious, and there was as much of it as he wanted. I have never had as much cocoa-nut milk as I wanted. Have you?

Then the hollow cocoa-nuts were tied on to the dogs' necks again and out they went, slim and beautiful, two by two, wagging their slender tails, in the most amiable and orderly way.

'They take the cocoa-nuts to the town kitchen,' said the captain, 'to be made into cocoa-nut ice for the army breakfast; waste not want not, you know. We don't waste anything here, my boy.' Philip had quite got over his snubbing. He now felt that the captain was talking with him as man to man. Helen had gone away and left him; well, he was learning to do without Helen. And he had got away from the Grange, and Lucy, and that nurse. He was a man among men. And then, just as he was feeling most manly and important, and quite equal to facing any number of judges, there came a little tap at the door of the guard-room, and a very little voice said:

'Oh, do please let me come in.'

Then the door opened slowly.

'Well, come in, whoever you are,' said the captain. And the person who came in was—Lucy. Lucy, whom Philip thought he had got rid of—Lucy, who stood for the new hateful life to which Helen had left him. Lucy, in her serge skirt and jersey, with her little sleek fair pig-tails, and that anxious 'I-wish-we-could-be-friends' smile of hers. Philip was furious. It was too bad.

'And who is this?' the captain was saying kindly.

'It's me—it's Lucy,' she said. 'I came up with *him*.'

She pointed to Philip. 'No manners,' thought Philip in bitterness.

'No, you didn't,' he said shortly.

'I did—I was close behind you when you were climbing the ladder bridge. And I've been waiting alone ever since, when you were asleep and all. I *knew* he'd be cross when he knew I'd come,' she explained to the soldiers.

'I'm *not* cross,' said Philip very crossly indeed, but the captain signed to him to be silent. Then Lucy was questioned and her answers written in the book, and when that was done the captain said:

'So this little girl is a friend of yours?'

'No, she isn't,' said Philip violently; 'she's not my friend, and she never will be. I've seen her, that's all, and I don't want to see her again.'

'You *are* unkind,' said Lucy.

And then there was a grave silence, most unpleasant to Philip. The soldiers, he perceived, now looked coldly at him. It was all Lucy's fault. What did she want to come shoving in for, spoiling everything? Any one but a girl would have known that a guard-room wasn't the right place for a girl. He frowned and said nothing. Lucy had smuggled up against the captain's knee, and he was stroking her hair.

'Poor little woman,' he said. 'You must go to sleep now, so as to be rested before you go to the Hall of Justice in the morning.'

They made Lucy a bed of soldiers' cloaks laid on a bench; and bearskins are the best of pillows. Philip had a soldier's cloak and a bench, and a bearskin too—but what was the good? Everything was

spoiled. If Lucy had not come the guard-room as a sleeping-place would have been almost as good as the tented field. But she *had* come, and the guard-room was no better now than any old night-nursery. And how had she known? How had she come? How had she made her way to that illimitable prairie where he had found the mysterious beginning of the ladder bridge? He went to sleep a bunched-up lump of prickly discontent and suppressed fury.

When he woke it was bright daylight, and a soldier was saying, 'Wake up, Trespassers. Breakfast–'

'How jolly,' thought Philip, 'to be having military breakfast.' Then he remembered Lucy, and hated her being there, and felt once more that she had spoiled everything.

I should not, myself, care for a breakfast of cocoa-nut ice, peppermint creams, apples, bread and butter and sweet milk. But the soldiers seemed to enjoy it. And it would have exactly suited Philip if he had not seen that Lucy was enjoying it too.

'I do hate greedy girls,' he told himself, for he was now in that state of black rage when you hate everything the person you are angry with does or says or is.

And now it was time to start for the Hall of Justice. The guard formed outside, and Philip noticed that each soldier stood on a sort of green mat. When the order to march was given, each soldier quickly and expertly rolled up his green mat and put it under his arm. And whenever they stopped, because of the crowd, each soldier unrolled his green mat, and stood on it till it was time to go on again. And they had to stop several times, for the crowd was very thick in the great squares and in the narrow streets of the city. It was a wonderful crowd. There were men and women and children in every sort of dress. Italian, Spanish, Russian; French peasants in blue blouses and wooden shoes, workmen in the dress English working people wore a hundred years ago. Norwegians, Swedes, Swiss, Turks, Greeks, Indians, Arabians, Chinese, Japanese, besides Red Indians in dresses of skins, and Scots in kilts and sporrans. Philip did not know what nation most of the dresses belonged to—to him it was a brilliant patchwork of gold and gay colours. It reminded him of the fancy-dress party he had once been to with Helen, when he wore a Pierrot's dress and felt very silly in it. He noticed that not a single boy in all that crowd was dressed as he was—in what he thought was the only correct dress for boys. Lucy walked beside him. Once, just after they started, she said, 'Aren't you frightened, Philip?' and he would not answer, though he longed to say, 'Of course not. It's only girls who are afraid.' But he thought it would be more disagreeable to say nothing, so he said it.

When they got to the Hall of Justice, she caught hold of his hand, and said:

'Oh!' very loud and sudden, 'doesn't it remind you of anything?' she asked.

Philip pulled his hand away and said 'No' before he remembered that he had decided not to speak to her. And the 'No' was quite untrue, for the building did remind him of something, though he couldn't have told you what.

The prisoners and their guard passed through a great arch between magnificent silver pillars, and along a vast corridor, lined with soldiers who all saluted.

'Do all sorts of soldiers salute you?' he asked the captain, 'or only just your own ones?'

'It's *you* they're saluting,' the captain said; 'our laws tell us to salute all prisoners out of respect for their misfortunes.'

The judge sat on a high bronze throne with colossal bronze dragons on each side of it, and wide shallow steps of ivory, black and white.

Two attendants spread a round mat on the top of the steps in front of the judge—a yellow mat it was, and very thick, and he stood up and saluted the prisoners. ('Because of your misfortunes,' the captain whispered.)

The judge wore a bright yellow robe with a green girdle, and he had no wig, but a very odd-shaped hat, which he kept on all the time.

The trial did not last long, and the captain said very little, and the judge still less, while the prisoners were not allowed to speak at all. The judge looked up something in a book, and consulted

in a low voice with the crown lawyer and a sour-faced person in black. Then he put on his spectacles and said:

'Prisoners at the bar, you are found guilty of trespass. The punishment is Death—if the judge does not like the prisoners. If he does not dislike them it is imprisonment for life, or until the judge has had time to think it over. Remove the prisoners.'

'Oh, *don't!*' cried Philip, almost weeping.

'I thought you weren't afraid,' whispered Lucy.

'Silence in court,' said the judge.

Then Philip and Lucy were removed.

They were marched by streets quite different from those they had come by, and at last in the corner of a square they came to a large house that was quite black.

'Here we are,' said the captain kindly. 'Good-bye. Better luck next time.'

The gaoler, a gentleman in black velvet, with a ruff and a pointed beard, came out and welcomed them cordially.

'How do you do, my dears?' he said. 'I hope you'll be comfortable here. First-class misdemeanants, I suppose?' he asked.

'Of course,' said the captain.

'Top floor, if you please,' said the gaoler politely, and stood back to let the children pass. 'Turn to the left and up the stairs.'

The stairs were dark and went on and on, and round and round, and up and up. At the very top was a big room, simply furnished with a table, chairs, and a rocking-horse. Who wants more furniture than that?

'You've got the best view in the whole city,' said the gaoler, 'and you'll be company for me. What? They gave me the post of gaoler because it's nice, light, gentlemanly work, and leaves me time for my writing. I'm a literary man, you know. But I've sometimes found it a trifle lonely. You're the first prisoners I've ever had, you see. If you'll excuse me I'll go and order some dinner for you. You'll be contented with the feast of reason and the flow of soul, I feel certain.'

The moment the door had closed on the gaoler's black back Philip turned on Lucy.

'I hope you're satisfied,' he said bitterly. 'This is all *your* doing. They'd have let me off if you hadn't been here. What on earth did you want to come here for? Why did you come running after me like that? You know I don't like you?'

'You're the hatefullest, disagreeablest, horridest boy in all the world,' said Lucy firmly—'there!'

Philip had not expected this. He met it as well as he could.

'I'm not a little sneak of a white mouse squeezing in where I'm not wanted, anyhow,' he said.

And then they stood looking at each other, breathing quickly, both of them.

'I'd rather be a white mouse than a cruel bully,' said Lucy at last.

'I'm not a bully,' said Philip.

Then there was another silence. Lucy sniffed. Philip looked round the bare room, and suddenly it came to him that he and Lucy were companions in misfortune, no matter whose fault it was that they were imprisoned. So he said:

'Look here, I don't like you and I shan't pretend I do. But I'll call it Pax for the present if you like. We've got to escape from this place somehow, and I'll help you if you like, and you may help me if you can.'

'Thank you,' said Lucy, in a tone which might have meant anything.

'So we'll call it Pax and see if we can escape by the window. There might be ivy—or a faithful page with a rope ladder. Have you a page at the Grange?'

'There's two stable-boys,' said Lucy, 'but I don't think they're faithful, and I say, I think all this is much more magic than you think.'

'Of course I know it's magic,' said he impatiently; 'but it's quite real too.'

'Oh, it's real enough,' said she.

They leaned out of the window. Alas, there was no ivy. Their window was very high up, and the wall outside, when they touched it with their hand, felt smooth as glass.

'*That's* no go,' said he, and the two leaned still farther out of the window looking down on the town. There were strong towers and fine minarets and palaces, the palm trees and fountains and gardens. A white building across the square looked strangely familiar. Could it be like St. Paul's which Philip had been taken to see when he was very little, and which he had never been able to remember? No, he could not remember it even now. The two prisoners looked out in a long silence. Far below lay the city, its trees softly waving in the breeze, flowers shining in a bright many-coloured patchwork, the canals that intersected the big squares gleamed in the sunlight, and crossing and recrossing the squares and streets were the people of the town, coming and going about their business.

'Look here!' said Lucy suddenly, 'do you mean to say you don't know?'

'Know what?' he asked impatiently.

'Where we are. What it is. Don't you?'

'No. No more do you.'

'Haven't you seen it all before?'

'No, of course I haven't. No more have you.'

'All right. I *have* seen it before though,' said Lucy, 'and so have you. But I shan't tell you what it is unless you'll be nice to me.' Her tone was a little sad, but quite firm.

'I *am* nice to you. I told you it was Pax,' said Philip. 'Tell me what you think it is.'

'I don't mean that sort of grandish standoffish Pax, but real Pax. Oh, don't be so horrid, Philip. I'm dying to tell you—but I won't if you go on being like you are.'

'*I'm* all right,' said Philip; 'out with it.'

'No. You've got to say it's Pax, and I will stand by you till we get out of this, and I'll always act like a noble friend to you, and I'll try my best to like you. Of course if you can't like me you can't, but you ought to try. Say it after me, won't you?'

Her tone was so kind and persuading that he found himself saying after her, 'I, Philip, agree to try and like you, Lucy, and to stand by you till we're out of this, and always to act the part of a noble friend to you. And it's real Pax. Shake hands.'

'Now then,' said he when they had shaken hands, and Lucy uttered these words:

'Don't you see? It's your own city that we're in, your own city that you built on the tables in the drawing-room? It's all got big by magic, so that we could get in. Look,' she pointed out of the window, 'see that great golden dome, that's one of the brass finger-bowls, and that white building's my old model of St. Paul's. And there's Buckingham Palace over there, with the carved squirrel on the top, and the chessmen, and the blue and white china pepper-pots; and the building we're in is the black Japanese cabinet.'

Philip looked and he saw that what she said was true. It *was* his city.

'But I didn't build insides to my buildings,' said he; 'and when did *you* see what I built anyway?'

'The insides are part of the magic, I suppose,' Lucy said; 'and I saw the cities you built when Auntie brought me home last night, after you'd been sent to bed. And I did love them. And oh, Philip, I'm so glad it's Pax because I do think you're so *frightfully* clever, and Auntie thought so too, building those beautiful things. And I knew nurse was going to pull it all down. I begged her not to, but she was addymant, and so I got up and dressed and came down to have another look by moonlight. And one or two of the bricks and chessmen had fallen down. I expect nurse knocked them down. So I built them up again as well as I could—and I was loving it all like anything; and then the door opened and I hid under the table, and you came in.'

'Then you were there—did you notice how the magic began?'

'No, but it all changed to grass; and then I saw you a long way off, going up a ladder. And so I went after you. But I didn't let you see me. I knew you'd be so cross. And then I looked in at the guard-room door, and I did so want some of the cocoa-nut milk.'

'When did you find out it was *my* city?'

'I thought the soldiers looked like my lead ones somehow. But I wasn't sure till I saw the judge. Why he's just old Noah, out of the Ark.'

'So he is,' cried Philip; 'how wonderful! How perfectly wonderful! I wish we weren't prisoners. Wouldn't it be jolly to go all over it—into all the buildings, to see what the insides of them have turned into? And all the other people. I didn't put *them* in.'

'That's more magic, I expect. But—Oh, we shall find it all out in time.'

She clapped her hands. And on the instant the door opened and the gaoler appeared.

'A visitor for you,' he said, and stood aside to let some one else come in, some one tall and thin, with a black hooded cloak and a black half-mask, such as people wear at carnival time.

When the gaoler had shut the door and gone away the tall figure took off its mask and let fall its cloak, showing to the surprised but recognising eyes of the children the well-known shape of Mr. Noah—the judge.

'How do you do?' he said. 'This is a little unofficial visit. I hope I haven't come at an inconvenient time.'

'We're very glad,' said Lucy, 'because you can tell us–'

'I won't answer questions,' said Mr. Noah, sitting down stiffly on his yellow mat, 'but I will tell you something. We don't know who you are. But I myself think that you may be the Deliverer.'

'Both of us,' said Philip jealously.

'One or both. You see the prophecy says that the Destroyer's hair is red. And your hair is not red. But before I could get the populace to feel sure of, that my own hair would be grey with thought and argument. Some people are so wooden-headed. And I am not used to thinking. I don't often have to do it. It distresses me.'

The children said they were sorry. Philip added:

'Do tell us a little about your city. It isn't a question. We want to know if it's magic. That isn't a question either.'

'I was about to tell you,' said Mr. Noah, 'and I will not answer questions. Of course it is magic. Everything in the world is magic, until you understand it.

'And as to the city. I will just tell you a little of our history. Many thousand years ago all the cities of our country were built by a great and powerful giant, who brought the materials from far and wide. The place was peopled partly by persons of his choice, and partly by a sort of self-acting magic rather difficult to explain. As soon as the cities were built and the inhabitants placed here the life of the city began, and it was, to those who lived it, as though it had always been. The artisans toiled, the musicians played, and the poets sang. The astrologers, finding themselves in a tall tower evidently designed for such a purpose, began to observe the stars and to prophesy.'

'I know that part,' said Philip.

'Very well,' said the judge. 'Then you know quite enough. Now I want to ask a little favour of you both. Would you mind escaping?'

'If we only could,' Lucy sighed.

'The strain on my nerves is too much,' said Mr. Noah feelingly. 'Escape, my dear children, to please me, a very old man in indifferent health and poor spirits.'

'But how–'

'Oh, you just walk out. You, my boy, can disguise yourself in your dressing-gown which I see has been placed on yonder chair, and I will leave my cloak for you, little girl.'

They both said 'Thank you,' and Lucy added: 'But *how?*'

'Through the door,' said the judge. 'There is a rule about putting prisoners on their honour not to escape, but there have not been any prisoners for so long that I don't suppose they put you on honour. No? You can just walk out of the door. There are many charitable persons in the city who will help to conceal you. The front-door key turns easily, and I myself will oil it as I go out. Good-bye—thank you so much for falling in with my little idea. Accept an old man's blessing. Only don't tell the gaoler. He would never forgive me.'

He got off his mat, rolled it up and went.

'Well!' said Lucy.

'Well!' said Philip.

'I suppose we go?' he said. But Lucy said, 'What about the gaoler? Won't he catch it if we bolt?'

Philip felt this might be true. It was annoying, and as bad as being put on one's honour.

'Bother!' was what he said.

And then the gaoler came in. He looked pale and worried.

'I am so awfully sorry,' he began. 'I thought I should enjoy having you here, but my nerves are all anyhow. The very sound of your voices. I can't write a line. My brain reels. I wonder whether you'd be good enough to do a little thing for me? Would you mind escaping?'

'But won't you get into trouble?'

'Nothing could be worse than this,' said the gaoler, with feeling. 'I had no idea that children's voices were so penetrating. Go, go. I implore you to escape. Only don't tell the judge. I am sure he would never forgive me.'

After that, what prisoner would not immediately have escaped?

The two children only waited till the sound of the gaoler's keys had died away on the stairs, to open their door, run down the many steps and slip out of the prison gate. They walked a little way in silence. There were plenty of people about, but no one seemed to notice them.

'Which way shall we go?' Lucy asked. 'I wish we'd asked him where the Charitables live.'

'I think,' Philip began; but Lucy was not destined to know what he thought.

There was a sudden shout, a clattering of horses' hoofs, and all the faces in the square turned their way.

'They've seen us,' cried Philip. 'Run, run, run!'

He himself ran, and he ran toward the gate-house that stood at the top of the ladder stairs by which they had come up, and behind him came the shouting and clatter of hot pursuit. The captain stood in the gateway alone, and just as Philip reached the gate the captain turned into the guard-room and pretended not to see anything. Philip had never run so far or so fast. His breath came in deep sobs; but he reached the ladder and began quickly to go down. It was easier than going up.

He was nearly at the bottom when the whole ladder bridge leapt wildly into the air, and he fell from it and rolled in the thick grass of that illimitable prairie.

All about him the air was filled with great sounds, like the noise of the earthquakes that destroy beautiful big palaces, and factories which are big but not beautiful. It was deafening, it was endless, it was unbearable.

Yet he had to bear that, and more. And now he felt a curious swelling sensation in his hands, then in his head—then all over. It was extremely painful. He rolled over in his agony, and saw the foot of an enormous giant quite close to him. The foot had a large, flat, ugly shoe, and seemed to come out of grey, low-hanging, swaying curtains. There was a gigantic column too, black against the grey. The ladder bridge, cast down, lay on the ground not far from him.

Pain and fear overcame Philip, and he ceased to hear or feel or know anything.

When he recovered consciousness he found himself under the table in the drawing-room. The swelling feeling was over, and he did not seem to be more than his proper size.

He could see the flat feet of the nurse and the lower part of her grey skirt, and a rattling and rumbling on the table above told him that she was doing as she had said she would, and destroying

his city. He saw also a black column which was the leg of the table. Every now and then the nurse walked away to put back into its proper place something he had used in the building. And once she stood on a chair, and he heard the tinkling of the lustre-drops as she hooked them into their places on the chandelier.

'If I lie very still,' said he, 'perhaps she won't see me. But I do wonder how I got here. And what a dream to tell Helen about!'

He lay very still. The nurse did not see him. And when she had gone to her breakfast Philip crawled out.

Yes, the city was gone. Not a trace of it. The very tables were back in their proper places.

Philip went back to his proper place, which, of course, was bed.

'What a splendid dream,' he said, as he cuddled down between the sheets, 'and now it's all over!'

Of course he was quite wrong.

CHAPTER III
LOST

Philip went to sleep, and dreamed that he was at home again and that Helen had come to his bedside to call him, leading a white pony that was to be his very own. It was a pony that looked clever enough for anything, and he was not surprised when it shook hands with him; but when it said, 'Well, we must be moving,' and began to try to put on Philip's shoes and stockings, Philip called out, 'Here, I say, stop that,' and awoke to a room full of sunshine, but empty of ponies.

'Oh, well,' said Philip, 'I suppose I'd better get up.' He looked at his new silver watch, one of Helen's parting presents, and saw that it marked ten o'clock.

'I say, you know,' said he to the watch, 'you can't be right.' And he shook it to encourage it to think over the matter. But the watch still said 'ten' quite plainly and unmistakably.

Now the Grange breakfast time was at eight. And Philip was certain he had not been called.

'This is jolly rum,' he remarked. 'It must be the watch. Perhaps it's stopped.'

But it hadn't stopped. Therefore it must be two hours past breakfast time. The moment he had thought this he became extremely hungry. He got out of bed as soon as he knew exactly how hungry he was.

There was no one about, so he made his way to the bath-room and spent a happy hour with the hot water and the cold water, and the brown Windsor soap and the shaving soap and the nail brush and the flesh brush and the loofahs and the shower bath and the three sponges. He had not, so far, been able thoroughly to investigate and enjoy all these things. But now there was no one to interfere, and he enjoyed himself to that degree that he quite forgot to wonder why he hadn't been called. He thought of a piece of poetry that Helen had made for him, about the bath; and when he had done playing he lay on his back in water that was very hot indeed, trying to remember the poetry. The water was very nearly cold by the time he had remembered the poetry. It was called Dreams of a Giant Life, and this was it.

DREAMS OF A GIANT LIFE

What was I once—in ages long ago?
I look back, and I see myself. We grow
So changed through changing years, I hardly see
How that which I look back on could be me?[1]

Glorious and splendid, giant-like I stood
On a white cliff, topped by a darkling wood.
Below me, placid, bright and sparkling, lay
The equal waters of a lovely bay.
White cliffs surrounded it—and calm and fair
It lay asleep, in warm and silent air.

I stood alone—naked and strong, upright
My limbs gleamed in the clear pure golden light.
I saw below me all the water lie

[1] Never mind grammar.

Expecting something, and that thing was I.[2]

I leaned, I plunged, the waves splashed over me.
I lay, a giant in a little sea.

White cliffs all round, wood-crowned, and as I lay
I saw the glories of the dying day;
No wind disturbed my sea; the sunlight was
As though it came through windows of gold glass.
The white cliffs rose above me, and around
The clear sea lay, pure, perfect and profound;
And I was master of the cliffs, the sea,
And the gold light that brightened over me.

Far miles away my giant feet showed plain,
Rising, like rocks out of the quiet main.
On them a lighthouse could be built, to show
Wayfaring ships the way they must not go.

I was the master of that cliff-girt sea.
I splashed my hands, the waves went over me,
And in the dimples of my body lay
Little rock-pools, where small sea-beasts might play.

I found a boat, its deck was perforate;
I launched it, and it dared the storms of fate.
Its woollen sail stood out against the sky,
Supported by a mast of ivory.

Another boat rode proudly to my hand,
Upon its deck a thousand spears did stand;
I launched it, and it sped full fierce and fast
Against the boat that had the ivory mast
And woollen sail and perforated deck.
The two went down in one stupendous wreck!

Beneath the waves I chased with joyous hand
Upon the bed of an imagined sand
The slippery brown sea mouse, that still escaped,
Where the deep cave beneath my knee was shaped.
Caught it at last and caged it into rest
Upon the shallows of my submerged breast.

Then, as I lay, wrapped as in some kind arm
By the sweet world of waters soft and warm,
A great voice cried, from some far unseen shore,
And I was not a giant any more.

[2] This is correct grammar, but never mind.

'Come out, come out,' cried out the voice of power,
'You've been in for a quarter of an hour.
The water's cold—come, Master Pip—your head
'S all wet, and it is time you were in bed.'

I rose all dripping from the magic sea
And left the ships that had been slaves to me—
The soap-dish, with its perforated deck,
The nail-brush, that had rushed to loss and wreck,
The flannel sail, the tooth-brush that was mast,
The sleek soap-mouse—I left them all at last.

I went out of that magic sea and cried
Because the time came when I must be dried
And leave the splendour of a giant's joy
And go to bed—a little well-washed boy.

When he had quite remembered the poetry he had another shower-bath, and then when he had enjoyed the hot rough towels out of the hot cupboard he went back to his room to dress. He now felt how deeply he wanted his breakfast, so he dressed himself with all possible speed, even forgetting to fasten his bootlaces properly. He was in such a hurry that he dropped his collar-stud, and it was as he stooped to pick it up that he remembered his dream. Do you know that was really the first time he had thought of it. The dream—that indeed would be something to think about.

Breakfast was the really important thing. He went down very hungry indeed. 'I shall ask for my breakfast directly I get down,' he said. 'I shall ask the first person I meet.' And he met no one.

There was no one on the stairs, or in the hall, or in the dining-room, or in the drawing-room. The library and billiard-room were empty of living people, and the door of the nursery was locked. So then Philip made his way into the regions beyond the baize door, where the servants' quarters were. And there was no one in the kitchen, or in the servants' hall, or in the butler's pantry, or in the scullery, or the washhouse, or the larder. In all that big house, and it was much bigger than it looked from the front because of the long wings that ran out on each side of its back—in all that big house there was no one but Philip. He felt certain of this before he ran upstairs and looked in all the bedrooms and in the little picture gallery and the music-room, and then in the servants' bedrooms and the very attics. There were interesting things in those attics, but Philip only remembered that afterwards. Now he tore down the stairs three at a time. All the room doors were open as he had left them, and somehow those open doors frightened him more than anything else. He ran along the corridors, down more stairs, past more open doors and out through the back kitchen, along the moss-grown walk by the brick wall and so round by the three yew trees and the mounting block to the stable-yard. And there was no one there. Neither coachman nor groom nor stable-boys. And there was no one in the stables, or the coach-house, or the harness-room, or the loft.

Philip felt that he could not go back into the house. Something terrible must have happened. Was it possible that any one could want the Grange servants enough to kidnap them? Philip thought of the nurse and felt that, at least as far as she was concerned, it was *not* possible. Or perhaps it was magic! A sort of Sleeping-Beauty happening! Only every one had vanished instead of just being put to sleep for a hundred years.

He was alone in the middle of the stable-yard when the thought came to him.

'Perhaps they're only made invisible. Perhaps they're all here and watching me and making fun of me.'

He stood still to think this. It was not a pleasant thought.

Suddenly he straightened his little back, and threw back his head.

'They shan't see I'm frightened anyway,' he told himself. And then he remembered the larder.

'I haven't had any breakfast,' he explained aloud, so as to be plainly heard by any invisible people who might be about. 'I ought to have my breakfast. If nobody gives it to me I shall take my breakfast.'

He waited for an answer. But none came. It was very quiet in the stable-yard. Only the rattle of a halter ring against a manger, the sound of a hoof on stable stones, the cooing of pigeons and the rustle of straw in the loose-box broke the silence.

'Very well,' said Philip. 'I don't know what *you* think I ought to have for breakfast, so I shall take what *I* think.'

He drew a long breath, trying to draw courage in with it, threw back his shoulders more soldierly than ever, and marched in through the back door and straight to the larder. Then he took what he thought he ought to have for breakfast. This is what he thought:

1 cherry pie,
2 custards in cups,
1 cold sausage,
2 pieces of cold toast,
1 piece of cheese,
2 lemon cheese-cakes,
1 small jam tart (there was only one left),
Butter, 1 pat.

'What jolly things the servants have to eat,' he said. 'I never knew. I thought that nothing but mutton and rice grew here.'

He put all the food on a silver tray and carried it out on to the terrace, which lies between the two wings at the back of the house. Then he went back for milk, but there was none to be seen so he got a white jug full of water. The spoons he couldn't find, but he found a carving-fork and a fish-slice. Did you ever try to eat cherry pie with a fish-slice?

'Whatever's happened,' said Philip to himself, through the cherry pie, 'and whatever happens it's as well to have had your breakfast.' And he bit a generous inch off the cold sausage which he had speared with the carving-fork.

And now, sitting out in the good sunshine, and growing less and less hungry as he plied fish-slice and carving-fork, his mind went back to his dream, which began to seem more and more real. Suppose it really *had* happened? It might have; magic things did happen, it seemed. Look how all the people had vanished out of the house—out of the world too, perhaps.

'Suppose every one's vanished,' said Philip. 'Suppose I'm the only person left in the world who hasn't vanished. Then everything in the world would belong to me. Then I could have everything that's in all the toy shops.' And his mind for a moment dwelt fondly on this beautiful idea.

Then he went on. 'But suppose I vanished too? Perhaps if I were to vanish I could see the other people who have. I wonder how it's done.'

He held his breath and tried hard to vanish. Have you ever tried this? It is not at all easy to do. Philip could not do it at all. He held his breath and he tried and he tried, but he only felt fatter and fatter and more and more as though in one more moment he should burst. So he let his breath go.

'No,' he said, looking at his hands; 'I'm not any more invisible than I was before. Not so much I think,' he added thoughtfully, looking at what was left of the cherry pie. 'But that dream–'

He plunged deep in the remembrance of it that was, to him, like swimming in the waters of a fairy lake.

He was hooked out of his lake suddenly by voices. It was like waking up. There, away across the green park beyond the sunk fence, were people coming.

'So every one hasn't vanished,' he said, caught up the tray and took it in. He hid it under the pantry shelf. He didn't know who the people were who were coming and you can't be too careful. Then he went out and made himself small in the shadow of a red buttress, heard their voices coming nearer and nearer. They were all talking at once, in that quick interested way that makes you certain something unusual has happened.

He could not hear exactly what they were saying, but he caught the words: 'No.'

'Of course I've asked.'

'Police.'

'Telegram.'

'Yes, of course.'

'Better make quite sure.'

Then every one began speaking all at once, and you could not hear anything that anybody said. Philip was too busy keeping behind the buttress to see who they were who were talking. He was glad *something* had happened.

'Now I shall have something to think about besides the nurse and my beautiful city that she has pulled down.'

But what was it that had happened? He hoped nobody was hurt—or had done anything wrong. The word police had always made him uncomfortable ever since he had seen a boy no bigger than himself pulled along the road by a very large policeman. The boy had stolen a loaf, Philip was told. Philip could never forget that boy's face; he always thought of it in church when it said 'prisoners and captives,' and still more when it said 'desolate and oppressed.'

'I do hope it's not *that*,' he said.

And slowly he got himself to leave the shelter of the red-brick buttress and to follow to the house those voices and those footsteps that had gone by him.

He followed the sound of them to the kitchen. The cook was there in tears and a Windsor arm-chair. The kitchenmaid, her cap all on one side, was crying down most dirty cheeks. The coachman was there, very red in the face, and the groom, without his gaiters. The nurse was there, neat as ever she seemed at first, but Philip was delighted when a more careful inspection showed him that there was mud on her large shoes and on the bottom of her skirt, and that her dress had a large three-cornered tear in it.

'I wouldn't have had it happen for a twenty-pun note,' the coachman was saying.

'George,' said the nurse to the groom, 'you go and get a horse ready. I'll write the telegram.'

'You'd best take Peppermint,' said the coachman. 'She's the fastest.'

The groom went out, saying under his breath, 'Teach your grandmother,' which Philip thought rude and unmeaning.

Philip was standing unnoticed by the door. He felt that thrill—if it isn't pleasure it is more like it than anything else—which we all feel when something real has happened.

But what *had* happened. What?

'I wish I'd never come back,' said the nurse. 'Then nobody could pretend it was *my* fault.'

'It don't matter what they pretend,' the cook stopped crying to say. 'The thing is what's happened. Oh, my goodness. I'd rather have been turned away without a character than have had this happen.'

'And I'd rather *any*thing,' said the nurse. 'Oh, my goodness me. I wish I'd never been born.'

And then and there, before the astonished eyes of Philip, she began to behave as any nice person might—she began to cry.

'It wouldn't have happened,' said the cook, 'if the master hadn't been away. He's a Justice of the Peace, he is, and a terror to gipsies. It wouldn't never have happened if–'

Philip could not bear it any longer.

'*What* wouldn't have happened if?' he asked, startling everybody to a quick jump of surprise.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.