

**GEORGE
MACDONALD**

ADELA
CATHCART,
VOLUME 3

George MacDonald
Adela Cathcart, Volume 3

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George MacDonald

Adela Cathcart, Volume 3

CHAPTER I.

MY UNCLE PETER.—CONTINUED

"It was resolved that on the same evening, Chrissy should tell my uncle her story. We went out for a walk together; and though she was not afraid to go, the least thing startled her. A voice behind her would make her turn pale and look hurriedly round. Then she would smile again, even before the colour had had time to come back to her cheeks, and say—'What a goose I am! But it is no wonder.' I could see too that she looked down at her nice clothes now and then with satisfaction. She does not like me to say so, but she does not deny it either, for Chrissy can't tell a story even about her own feelings. My uncle had given us five pounds each to spend, and that was jolly. We bought each other such a lot of things, besides some for other people. And then we came home and had dinner *tete-a-tete* in my uncle's dining-room; after which we went up to my uncle's room, and sat over the fire in the twilight till his afternoon-nap was over, and he was ready for his tea. This was ready for him by the time he awoke. Chrissy got up on the bed beside him; I got up at the foot of the bed, facing her, and we had the tea-tray and plenty of *etceteras* between us.

"'Oh! I *am* happy!' said Chrissy, and began to cry.

"'So am I, my darling!' rejoined Uncle Peter, and followed her example.

"'So am I,' said I, 'but I don't mean to cry about it.' And then I did.

"We all had one cup of tea, and some bread and butter in silence after this. But when Chrissy had poured out the second cup for Uncle Peter, she began of her own accord to tell us her story.

"'It was very foggy when we came out of school that afternoon, as you may remember, dear uncle.'

"'Indeed I do,' answered Uncle Peter with a sigh.

"'I was coming along the way home with Bessie—you know Bessie, uncle—and we stopped to look in at a bookseller's window where the gas was lighted. It was full of Christmas things already. One of them I thought very pretty, and I was standing staring at it, when all at once I saw that a big drabby woman had poked herself in between Bessie and me. She was staring in at the window too. She was so nasty that I moved away a little from her, but I wanted to have one more look at the picture. The woman came close to me. I moved again. Again she pushed up to me. I looked in her face, for I was rather cross by this time. A horrid feeling, I cannot tell you what it was like, came over me as soon as I saw her. I know how it was now, but I did not know then why I was frightened. I think she saw I was frightened; for she instantly walked against me, and shoved and hustled me round the corner—it was a corner-shop—and before I knew, I was in another street. It was dark and narrow. Just at the moment a man came from the opposite side and joined the woman. Then they caught hold of my hands, and before my fright would let me speak, I was deep into the narrow lane, for they ran with me as fast as they could. Then I began to scream, but they said such horrid words that I was forced to hold my tongue; and in a minute more they had me inside a dreadful house, where the plaster was dropping away from the walls, and the skeleton-ribs of the house were looking through. I was nearly dead with terror and disgust. I don't think it was a bit less dreadful to me from having dim recollections of having known such places well enough at one time of my life. I think that only made me the more frightened, because so the place seemed to have a claim upon me. What if I ought to be there after all, and these dreadful creatures were my father and mother!

"I thought they were going to beat me at once, when the woman, whom I suspected to be my aunt, began to take off my frock. I was dreadfully frightened, but I could not cry. However it was only my clothes that they wanted. But I cannot tell you how frightful it was. They took almost everything I had on, and it was only when I began to scream in despair—sit still, Charlie, it's all over now—that they stopped, with a nod to each other, as much as to say—'we can get the rest afterwards.' Then they put a filthy frock on me; brought me some dry bread to eat; locked the door, and left me. It was nearly dark now. There was no fire. And all my warm clothes were gone.—Do sit still, Charlie.—I was dreadfully cold. There was a wretched-looking bed in one corner, but I think I would have died of cold rather than get into it. And the air in the place was frightful. How long I sat there in the dark, I don't know.'

"What did you do all the time?' said I.

"There was only one thing to be done, Charlie. I think that is a foolish question to ask.'

"Well, what *did* you do, Chrissy?'

"Said my prayers, Charlie.'

"And then?'

"Said them again.'

"And nothing else?'

"Yes; I tried to get out of the window, but that was of no use; for I could not open it. And it was one story high at least.'

"And what did you do next?'

"Said over all my hymns.'

"And then—what *did* you do next?'

"Why do you ask me so many times?'

"Because I want to know.'

"Well, I will tell you.—I left my prayers alone; and I began at the beginning, and I told God the whole story, as if He had known nothing about it, from the very beginning when Uncle Peter found me on the crossing, down to the minute when I was talking there to Him in the dark.'

"Ah! my dear,' said my uncle, with faltering voice, 'you felt better after that, I daresay. And here was I in despair about you, and thought He did not care for any of us. I was very naughty, indeed.'

"And what next?' I said.

"By and by I heard a noise of quarrelling in the street, which came nearer and nearer. The door was burst open by some one falling against it. Blundering steps came up the stairs. The two who had robbed me, evidently tipsy, were trying to unlock the door. At length they succeeded, and tumbled into the room.'

"Where is the unnatural wretch,' said the woman, 'who ran away and left her own mother in poverty and sickness?'—

"Oh! uncle, can it be that she is my mother?' said Chrissy, interrupting herself.

"I don't think she is,' answered Uncle Peter. 'She only wanted to vex you, my lamb. But it doesn't matter whether she is or not.'

"Doesn't it, uncle?—I am ashamed of her.'

"But you are God's child. And He can't be ashamed of you. For He gave you the mother you had, whoever she was, and never asked you which you would have. So you need not mind. We ought always to like best to be just what God has made us.'

"I am sure of that, uncle.—Well, she began groping about to find me, for it was very dark. I sat quite still, except for trembling all over, till I felt her hands on me, when I jumped up, and she fell on the floor. She began swearing dreadfully, but did not try to get up. I crept away to another corner. I heard the man snoring, and the woman breathing loud. Then I felt my way to the door, but, to my horror, found the man lying across it on the floor, so that I could not open it. Then I believe I cried for the first time. I was nearly frozen to death, and there was all the long night to bear yet. How I got

through it, I cannot tell. It did go away. Perhaps God destroyed some of it for me. But when the light began to come through the window, and show me all the filth of the place, the man and the woman lying on the floor, the woman with her head cut and covered with blood, I began to feel that the darkness had been my friend. I felt this yet more when I saw the state of my own dress, which I had forgotten in the dark. I felt as if I had done some shameful thing, and wanted to follow the darkness, and hide in the skirts of it. It was an old gown of some woollen stuff, but it was impossible to tell what, it was so dirty and worn. I was ashamed that even those drunken creatures should wake and see me in it. But the light would come, and it came and came, until at last it waked them up, and the first words were so dreadful! They quarrelled and swore at each other and at me, until I almost thought there couldn't be a God who would let that go on so, and never stop it. But I suppose He wants them to stop, and doesn't care to stop it Himself, for He could easily do that of course, if He liked.'

"Just right, my darling!' said Uncle Peter with emotion.

"Chrissy saw that my uncle was too much excited by her story although he tried not to show it, and with a wisdom which I have since learned to appreciate, cut it short.

"They did not treat me cruelly, though, the worst was, that they gave me next to nothing to eat. Perhaps they wanted to make me thin and wretched looking, and I believe they succeeded.—Charlie, you'll turn over the cream, if you don't sit still.—Three days passed this way. I have thought all over it, and I think they were a little puzzled how to get rid of me. They had no doubt watched me for a long time, and now they had got my clothes, they were afraid.—At last one night they took me out. My aunt, if aunt she is, was respectably dressed—that is, comparatively, and the man had a great-coat on, which covered his dirty clothes. They helped me into a cart which stood at the door, and drove off. I resolved to watch the way we went. But we took so many turnings through narrow streets before we came out in a main road, that I soon found it was all one mass of confusion in my head; and it was too dark to read any of the names of the streets, for the man kept as much in the middle of the road as possible. We drove some miles, I should think, before we stopped at the gate of a small house with a big porch, which stood alone. My aunt got out and went up to the house, and was admitted. After a few minutes, she returned, and making me get out, she led me up to the house, where an elderly lady stood, holding the door half open. When we reached it, my aunt gave me a sort of shove in, saying to the lady, 'There she is.' Then she said to me: 'Come now be a good girl and don't tell lies,' and turning hastily, ran down the steps, and got into the cart at the gate, which drove off at once the way we had come. The lady looked at me from head to foot sternly but kindly too, I thought, and so glad was I to find myself clear of those dreadful creatures, that I burst out crying. She instantly began to read me a lecture on the privilege of being placed with Christian people, who would instruct me how my soul might be saved, and teach me to lead an honest and virtuous life. I tried to say that I had led an honest life. But as often as I opened my mouth to tell anything about myself or my uncle, or, indeed, to say anything at all, I was stopped by her saying—'Now don't tell lies. Whatever you do, don't tell lies.' This shut me up quite. I could not speak when I knew she would not believe me. But I did not cry, I only felt my face get very hot, and somehow my back-bone grew longer, though I felt my eyes fixed on the ground.

"'But,' she went on, 'you must change you dress. I will show you the way to your room, and you will find a print gown there, which I hope you will keep clean. And above all things don't tell lies.'

"Here Chrissy burst out laughing, as if it was such fun to be accused of lying; but presently her eyes filled, and she made haste to go on.

"'You may be sure I made haste to put on the nice clean frock, and, to my delight, found other clean things for me as well. I declare I felt like a princess for a whole day after, notwithstanding the occupation. For I soon found that I had been made over to Mrs. Sprinx, as a servant of all work. I think she must have paid these people for the chance of reclaiming one whom they had represented as at least a great liar. Whether my wages were to be paid to them, or even what they were to be, I never heard. I made up my mind at once that the best thing would be to do the work without grumbling, and

do it as well as I could, for that would be doing no harm to anyone, but the contrary, while it would give me the better chance of making my escape. But though I was determined to get away the first opportunity, and was miserable when I thought how anxious you would all be about me, yet I confess it was such a relief to be clean and in respectable company, that I caught myself singing once or twice the very first day. But the old lady soon stopped that. She was about in the kitchen the greater part of the day till almost dinner-time, and taught me how to cook and save my soul both at once.'

"Indeed,' interrupted Uncle Peter, 'I have read receipts for the salvation of the soul that sounded very much as if they came out of a cookery-book.' And the wrinkles of his laugh went up into his night-cap. Neither Chrissy nor I understood this at the time, but I have often thought of it since.

"Chrissy went on:

"I had finished washing up my dinner-things, and sat down for a few minutes, for I was tired. I was staring into the fire, and thinking and thinking how I should get away, and what I should do when I got out of the house, and feeling as if the man and the woman were always prowling about it, and watching me through the window, when suddenly I saw a little boy in a corner of the kitchen, staring at me with great brown eyes. He was a little boy, perhaps about six years old, with a pale face, and very earnest look. I did not speak to him, but waited to see what he would do. A few minutes passed, and I forgot him. But as I was wiping my eyes, which would get wet sometimes, notwithstanding my good-fortune, he came up to me, and said in a timid whisper,

"Are you a princess?"

"What makes you think that?' I said.

"You have got such white hands,' he answered.

"No, I am not a princess,' I said.

"Aren't you Cinderella?"

"No, my darling,' I replied; 'but something like her; for they have stolen me away from home and brought me here. I wish I could get away.'

"And here I confess I burst into a down right fit of crying.

"Don't cry,' said the little fellow, stroking my cheek. 'I will let you out some time. Shall you be able to find your way home all by yourself?"

"Yes I think so,' I answered; but at the same time, I felt very doubtful about it, because I always fancied those people watching, me. But before either of us spoke again, in came Mrs. Sprinx.

"You naughty boy! What business have you to make the servant neglect her work?"

"For I was still sitting by the fire, and my arm was round the dear little fellow, and his head was leaning on my shoulder.

"She's not a servant, auntie!' cried he, indignantly. 'She's a real princess, though of course she won't own to it.'

"What lies you have been telling the boy! You ought to be ashamed of yourself. Come along directly. Get the tea at once, Jane.'

"My little friend went with his aunt, and I rose and got the tea. But I felt much lighter-hearted since I had the sympathy of the little boy to comfort me. Only I was afraid they would make him hate me. But, although I saw very little of him the rest of the time, I knew they had not succeeded in doing so; for as often as he could, he would come sliding up to me, saying 'How do you do, princess?' and then run away, afraid of being seen and scolded.

"I was getting very desperate about making my escape, for there was a high wall about the place, and the gate was always locked at night. When Christmas-Eve came, I was nearly crazy with thinking that to-morrow was uncle's birthday; and that I should not be with him. But that very night, after I had gone to my room, the door opened, and in came little Eddie in his nightgown, his eyes looking very bright and black over it.

"There, princess!" said he, 'there is the key of the gate. Run.'

"I took him in my arms and kissed him, unable to speak. He struggled to get free, and ran to the door. There he turned and said:

"You will come back and see me some day—will you not?"

"That I will," I answered.

"That you shall," said Uncle Peter.

"I hid the key, and went to bed, where I lay trembling. As soon as I was sure they must be asleep, I rose and dressed. I had no bonnet or shawl but those I had come in; and though they disgusted me, I thought it better to put them on. But I dared not unlock the street-door for fear of making a noise. So I crept out of the kitchen-window, and then I got out at the gate all safe. No one was in sight. So I locked it again, and threw the key over. But what a time of fear and wandering about I had in the darkness, before I dared to ask any one the way. It was a bright, clear night; and I walked very quietly till I came upon a great wide common. The sky, and the stars, and the wideness frightened me, and made me gasp at first. I felt as if I should fall away from everything into nothing. And it was so lonely! But then I thought of God, and in a moment I knew that what I had thought loneliness was really the presence of God. And then I grew brave again, and walked on. When the morning dawned, I met a bricklayer going to his work; and found that I had been wandering away from London all the time; but I did not mind that. Now I turned my face towards it, though not the way I had come. But I soon got dreadfully tired and faint, and once I think I fainted quite. I went up to a house, and asked for a piece of bread, and they gave it to me, and I felt much better after eating it. But I had to rest so often, and got so tired, and my feet got so sore, that—you know how late it was before I got home to my darling uncle."

"And me too!" I expostulated.

"And you, too, Charlie," she answered; and we all cried over again.

"This shan't happen any more!" said my uncle.

"After tea was over, he asked for writing things, and wrote a note, which he sent off.

"The next morning, about eleven, as I was looking out of the window, I saw a carriage drive up and stop at our door.

"What a pretty little brougham!" I cried. "And such a jolly horse!"

Look here, Chrissy!"

"Presently Uncle Peter's bell rang, and Miss Chrissy was sent for. She came down again radiant with pleasure.

"What do you think, Charlie! That carriage is mine—all my own. And I am to go to school in it always. Do come and have a ride in it."

"You may be sure I was delighted to do so.

"Where shall we go?" I said.

"Let us ask uncle if we may go and see the little darling who set me free."

"His consent was soon obtained, and away we went. It was a long drive, but we enjoyed it beyond everything. When we reached the house, we were shown into the drawing-room.

"There was Mrs. Sprinx and little Eddie. The lady stared; but the child knew Cinderella at once, and flew into her arms.

"I knew you were a princess!" he cried. "There, auntie!"

"But Mrs. Sprinx had put on an injured look, and her hands shook very much.

"Really, Miss Belper, if that is your name, you have behaved in a most unaccountable way. Why did you not tell me, instead of stealing the key of the gate, and breaking the kitchen window? A most improper way for a young lady to behave—to run out of the house at midnight!"

"You forget, madam," replied Chrissy, with more dignity than I had ever seen her assume, "that as soon as ever I attempted to open my mouth, you told me not to tell lies. You believed the wicked people who brought me here rather than myself. However, as you will not be friendly, I think we had better go. Come, Charlie?"

"Don't go, princess,' pleaded little Eddie.

"But I must, for your auntie does not like me,' said Chrissy.

"I am sure I always meant to do my duty by you. And I will do so still.—Beware, my dear young woman, of the deceitfulness of riches. Your carriage won't save your soul!"

"Chrissy was on the point of saying something rude, as she confessed when we got out; but she did not. She made her bow, turned and walked away. I followed, and poor Eddie would have done so too, but was laid hold of by his aunt. I confess this was not quite proper behaviour on Chrissy's part; but I never discovered that till she made me see it. She was very sorry afterwards, and my uncle feared the brougham had begun to hurt her already, as she told me. For she had narrated the whole story to him, and his look first let her see that she had been wrong. My uncle went with her afterwards to see Mrs. Sprinx, and thank her for having done her best; and to take Eddie such presents as my uncle only knew how to buy for children. When he went to school, I know he sent him a gold watch. From that time till now that she is my wife, Chrissy has had no more such adventures; and if Uncle Peter did not die on Christmas-day, it did not matter much, for Christmas-day makes all the days of the year as sacred as itself."

CHAPTER II. THE GIANT'S HEART

When Harry had finished reading, the colonel gallantly declared that the story was the best they had had. Mrs. Armstrong received this as a joke, and begged him not to be so unsparing.

"Ah! Mrs. Armstrong," returned he laughing, "you are not old enough yet, to know the truth from a joke. Don't you agree with me about the story, Mrs. Cathcart?"

"I think it is very pretty and romantic. Such men as Uncle Peter are not very common in the world. The story is not too true to Nature."

This she said in a tone intended to indicate superior acquaintance with the world and its nature. I fear Mrs. Cathcart and some others whom I could name, mean by *Nature* something very bad indeed, which yet an artist is bound to be loyal to. The colonel however seemed to be of a different opinion.

"If there never was such a man as Uncle Peter," said he, "there ought to have been; and it is all the more reason for putting him into a story that he is not to be found in the world."

"Bravo!" cried I. "You have answered a great question in a few words."

"I don't know," rejoined our host. "Have I? It seems to me as plain as the catechism."

I thought he might have found a more apt simile, but I held my peace.

Next morning, I walked out in the snow. Since the storm of that terrible night, it had fallen again quietly and plentifully; and now in the sunlight, the world—houses and trees, ponds and rivers—was like a creation, more than blocked out, but far from finished—in marble.

"And this," I said to myself, as I regarded the wondrous loveliness with which the snow had at once clothed and disfigured the bare branches of the trees, "this is what has come of the chaos of falling flakes! To this repose of beauty has that storm settled and sunk! Will it not be so with our mental storms as well?"

But here the figure displeased me; for those were not the true right shapes of the things; and the truth does not stick to things, but shows itself out of them.

"This lovely show," I said, "is the result of a busy fancy. This white world is the creation of a poet such as Shelley, in whom the fancy was too much for the intellect. Fancy settles upon anything; half destroys its form, half beautifies it with something that is not its own. But the true creative imagination, the form-seer, and the form-bestower, falls like the rain in the spring night, vanishing amid the roots of the trees; not settling upon them in clouds of wintry white, but breaking forth from them in clouds of summer green."

And then my thoughts very naturally went from Nature to my niece; and I asked myself whether within the last few days I had not seen upon her countenance the expression of a mental spring-time. For the mind has its seasons four, with many changes, as well as the world, only that the cycles are generally longer: they can hardly be more mingled than as here in our climate.

Let me confess, now that the subject of the confession no longer exists, that there had been something about Adela that, pet-child of mine as she was, had troubled me. In all her behaviour, so far as I had had any opportunity of judging, she had been as good as my desires at least. But there was a want in her face, a certain flatness of expression which I did not like. I love the common with all my heart, but I hate the common-place; and, foolish old bachelor that I am, the common-place in a woman troubles me, annoys me, makes me miserable. Well, it was something of the common-place in Adela's expression that had troubled me. Her eyes were clear, with lovely long dark lashes, but somehow the light in them had been always the same; and occasionally when I talked to her of the things I most wished her to care about, there was such an immobile condition of the features, associated with such a ready assent in words, that I felt her notion of what I meant must be something very different indeed from what I did mean. Her face looked as if it were made of something too

thick for the inward light to shine through—wax, and not living muscle and skin. The fact was, the light within had not been kindled, else that face of hers would have been ready enough to let it shine out. Hitherto she had not seemed to me to belong at all to that company that praises God with sweet looks, as Thomas Hood describes Ruth as doing. What was wanting I had found it difficult to define. Her soul was asleep. She was dreaming a child's dreams, instead of seeing a woman's realities—realities that awake the swift play of feature, as the wind of God arouses the expression of a still landscape. So there seemed after all a gulf between her and me. She did not see what I saw, feel what I felt, seek what I sought. Occasionally even, the delicate young girl, pure and bright as the snow that hung on the boughs around me, would shock the wizened old bachelor with her worldliness—a worldliness that lay only in the use of current worldly phrases of selfish contentment, or selfish care. Ah! how little do young beauties understand of the pitiful emotions which they sometimes rouse in the breasts of men whom they suppose to be absorbed in admiration of them! But for faith that these girls are God's work and only half made yet, one would turn from them with sadness, almost painful dislike, and take refuge with some noble-faced grandmother, or withered old maid, whose features tell of sorrow and patience. And the beauty would think with herself that such a middle-aged gentleman did not admire pretty girls, and was severe and unkind and puritanical; whereas it was the lack of beauty that made him turn away; the disappointment of a face—dull, that ought to be radiant; or the presence of only that sort of beauty, which in middle age, except the deeper nature should meantime come into play, would be worse than common-place—would be mingled with the trail of more or less guilty sensuality. Many a woman at forty is repulsive, whom common men found at twenty irresistibly attractive; and many a woman at seventy is lovely to the eyes of the man who would have been compelled to allow that she was decidedly plain at seventeen.

"Maidens' bairns are aye weel guided," says the Scotch proverb; and the same may be said of bachelors' wives. So I will cease the strain, and return to Adela, the change in whom first roused it.

Of late, I had seen a glimmer of something in her countenance which I had never seen before—a something which, the first time I perceived it, made me say to her, in my own hearing only: "Ah, my dear, we shall understand each other by and by!" And now and then the light in her eye would be dimmed as by the fore-shadowing of a tear, when there was no immediate and visible cause to account for it; and—which was very strange—I could not help fancying she began to be a little shy of her old uncle.—Could it be that she was afraid of his insight reaching to her heart, and reading there more than she was yet willing to confess to herself?—But whatever the cause of the change might be, there was certainly a responsiveness in her, a readiness to meet every utterance, and take it home, by which the vanity of the old bachelor would have been flattered to the full, had not his heart come first, and forestalled the delight.

So absorbed was I in considering these things, that the time passed like one of my thoughts; and before I knew I found myself on the verge of the perilous moor over which Harry had ridden in the teeth and heart of the storm. How smooth yet cruel it looked in its thick covering of snow! There was heather beneath, within which lay millions of purple bells, ready to rush out at the call of summer, and ring peals of merry gladness, making the desolate place not only blossom but rejoice as the rose. And there were cold wells of brown water beneath that snow, of depth unknown, which nourished nothing but the green grass that hid the cold glare of their presence from the eyes of the else warefully affrighted traveller. And I thought of Adela when I thought of the heather; and of some other woman whom I had known, when I thought of the wells.

When I came home, I told Adela where I had been, and what a desolate place it was. And the flush that rose on her pale cheek was just like the light of the sunset which I had left shining over the whiteness of that snowy region. And I said to myself: "It *is* so. And I trust it may be well."

As I walked home, I had bethought myself of a story which I had brought down with me in the hope of a chance of reading it, but which Adela's illness had put out of my mind; for it was only a

child's story; and although I hoped older people might find something in it, it would have been absurd to read it without the presence of little children. So I said to Adela:

"Don't you know any little children in Purleybridge, Adela?"

"Oh! yes; plenty."

"Couldn't you ask some of them one night, and I would tell them a story. I think at this season they should have a share in what is going, and I have got one I think they would like."

"I shall be delighted. I will speak to papa about it at once. But next time—."

"Yes, I know. Next time Harry Armstrong was going to read; but to tell you the truth, Adela, I doubt if he will be ready. I know he is dreadfully busy just now, and I believe he will be thankful to have a reprieve for a day or two, and his story, which I expect will be a good one, will be all the better for it."

"Then I will speak to papa about it the moment he comes in; and you will tell Mr. Henry. And mind, uncle, you take the change upon your own shoulders."

"Trust me, my dear," I said, as I left the room.

As I had anticipated, Harry was grateful. Everything was arranged. So the next evening but one, we had a merry pretty company of boys and girls, none older, or at least looking older, than twelve. It did my heart good to see how Adela made herself at home with them, and talked to them as if she were one of themselves. By the time tea was over, I had made friends with them all, which was a stroke in its way nearly equal to Chaucer's, who made friends with all the nine and twenty Canterbury pilgrims before the sun was down. And the way I did was this. I began with the one next me, asking her the question:

"Do you like fairy-stories?"

"Yes, I do," answered she, heartily.

"Did you ever hear of the princess with the blue foot?"

"No. Will you tell me, please?"

Then I turned to the one on my other side, and asked her:

"Did you ever hear of the giant that was all skin—not skin and bone, you know, but all skin?"

"No-o" she answered, and her round blue eyes got rounder and bluer.

The next was a boy. I asked him:

"Did you ever hear of Don Worm of Wakemup?"

"No. Do please tell us about it."

And so I asked them, round the room. And by that time all eyes were fixed upon me. Then I said:

"You see I cannot tell you all these stories to-night. But would you all like one of some sort?"

A chorus of *I should* filled the room.

"What shall it be about, then?"

"A wicked fairy."

"No; that's stupid. I'm tired of wicked fairies," said a scornful little girl.

"A good giant, then," said a priggish imp, with a face as round as the late plum-pudding.

"I am afraid I could not tell you a story about a *good* giant; for unfortunately all the good giants I ever heard of were very stupid; so stupid that a story would not make itself about them; so stupid, indeed, that they were always made game of by creatures not half so big or half so good; and I don't like such stories. Shall I tell you about the wicked giant that grew little children in his garden instead of radishes, and then carried them about in his waistcoat pocket, and ate one as often as he remembered he had got some?"

"Yes, yes; please do."

"He used to catch little children and plant them in his garden, where you might see them in rows, with their heads only above ground, rolling their eyes about, and growing awfully fast. He liked greedy boys best—boys that ate plum-pudding till they felt as if their belts were too tight."

Here the fat-faced boy stuck both his hands inside his belt.

"Because he was so fond of radishes," I went on, "he lived just on the borders of Giantland, where it touched on the country of common people. Now, everything in Giantland was so big, that the common people saw only a mass of awful mountains and clouds; and no living man had ever come from it, as far as anybody knew, to tell what he had seen in it.

"Somewhere near these borders, on the other side, by the edge of a great forest, lived a labourer with his wife and a great many children. One day Tricksey-Wee, as they called her, teased her brother Buffy-Bob, till he could not bear it any longer, and gave her a box on the ear. Tricksey-Wee cried; and Buffy-Bob was so sorry and ashamed of himself, that he cried too, and ran off into the wood. He was so long gone, that Tricksey-Wee began to be frightened, for she was very fond of her brother; and she was so sorry that she had first teased him, and then cried, that at last she ran into the wood to look for him, though there was more chance of losing herself than of finding him. And, indeed, so it seemed likely to turn out; for, running on without looking, she at length found herself in a valley she knew nothing about. And no wonder; for what she thought was a valley with round, rocky sides, was no other than the space between two of the roots of a great tree that grew on the borders of Giantland. She climbed over the side of it, and right up to what she took for a black, round-topped mountain, far away; but she soon discovered that it was close to her, and was a hollow place so great that she could not tell what it was hollowed out of. Staring at it, she found that it was a doorway; and, going nearer and staring harder, she saw the door, far in, with a knocker of iron upon it, a great many yards above her head, and as large as the anchor of a big ship. Now, nobody had ever been unkind to Tricksey-Wee, and therefore she was not afraid of anybody. For Buffy-Bob's box on the ear she did not think worth considering. So, spying a little hole at the bottom of the door, which had been nibbled by some giant mouse, she crept through it, and found herself in an enormous hall, as big as if the late Mr. Martin, R.A., had been the architect. She could not have seen the other end of it at all, except for the great fire that was burning there, diminished to a spark in the distance. Towards this fire she ran as fast as she could, and was not far from it when something fell before her with a great clatter, over which she tumbled, and went rolling on the floor. She was not much hurt, however, and got up in a moment. Then she saw that she had fallen over something not unlike a great iron bucket. When she examined it more closely, she discovered that it was a thimble; and looking up to see who had dropped it, beheld a huge face, with spectacles as big as the round windows in a church, bending over her, and looking everywhere for the thimble. Tricksey-Wee immediately laid hold of it in both her arms, and lifted it about an inch nearer to the nose of the peering giantess. This movement made the old lady see where it was, and, her finger popping into it, it vanished from the eyes of Tricksey-Wee, buried in the folds of a white stocking, like a cloud in the sky, which Mrs. Giant was busy darning. For it was Saturday night, and her husband would wear nothing but white stockings on Sunday."

"But how could he be so particular about white stockings on Sunday, and eat little children?" asked one of the group.

"Why, to be sure," I answered, "he did eat little children, but only *very* little ones; and if ever it crossed his mind that it was wrong to do so, he always said to himself that he wore whiter stockings on Sunday than any other giant in all Giantland.

"At that instant, Tricksey-Wee heard a sound like the wind in a tree full of leaves, and could not think what it could be; till, looking up, she found that it was the giantess whispering to her; and when she tried very hard, she could hear what she said well enough.

"'Run away, dear little girl,' she said, 'as fast as you can; for my husband will be home in a few minutes.'

"'But I've never been naughty to your husband,' said Tricksey-Wee, looking up in the giantess's face.

"'That doesn't matter. You had better go. He is fond of little children, particularly little girls!'

"'Oh! Then he won't hurt me.'

"I am not sure of that. He is so fond of them that he eats them up; and I am afraid he couldn't help hurting you a little. He's a very good man though."

"Oh! then—" began Tricksey-Wee, feeling rather frightened; but before she could finish her sentence, she heard the sound of footsteps very far apart and very heavy. The next moment, who should come running towards her, full speed, and as pale as death, but Buffy-Bob! She held out her arms, and he ran into them. But when she tried to kiss him, she only kissed the back of his head; for his white face and round eyes were turned to the door.

"Run, children; run and hide," said the giantess.

"Come, Buffy," said Tricksey; 'yonder's a great brake; we'll hide in it.'

The brake was a big broom; and they had just got into the bristles of it, when they heard the door open with a sound of thunder; and in stalked the giant. You would have thought you saw the whole earth through the door when he opened it, so wide was it; and, when he closed it, it was like nightfall.

"Where is that little boy?" he cried, with a voice like the bellowing of cannon. 'He looked a very nice boy, indeed. I am almost sure he crept through the mouse hole at the bottom of the door. Where is he, my dear?'

"I don't know," answered the giantess.

"But you know it is wicked to tell lies; don't you, dear?" retorted the giant.

"Now, you ridiculous old Thunderthump!" said his wife, with a smile as broad as the sea in the sun; 'how can I mend your white stockings, and look after little boys? You have got plenty to last you over Sunday, I am sure. Just look what good little boys they are!'

Tricksey-Wee and Buffy-Bob peered through the bristles, and discovered a row of little boys, about a dozen, with very fat faces and goggle eyes, sitting before the fire, and looking stupidly into it. Thunderthump intended the most of these for seed, and was feeding them well before planting them. Now and then, however, he could not keep his teeth off them, and would eat one by the bye, without salt."

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"Now, you know that's all nonsense; for little children don't grow in gardens, I know. *You* may believe in the radish beds: *I* don't," said one pert little puss.

"I never said I did," replied I. "If the giant did, that's enough for my story. I told you the good giants are very stupid; so you may think what the bad ones are. Indeed, the giant never really tried the plan. No doubt he did plant the children, but he always pulled them up and ate them before they had a chance of increasing.

"He strode up to the wretched children. Now, what made them very wretched indeed was, that they knew if they could only keep from eating, and grow thin, the giant would dislike them, and turn them out to find their way home; but notwithstanding this, so greedy were they, that they ate as much as ever they could hold. The giantess, who fed them, comforted herself with thinking that they were not real boys and girls, but only little pigs pretending to be boys and girls.

"Now tell me the truth," cried the giant, bending his face down over them. They shook with terror, and every one hoped it was somebody else the giant liked best. 'Where is the little boy that ran into the hall just now? Whoever tells me a lie shall be instantly boiled.'

"He's in the broom," cried one dough-faced boy. 'He's in there, and a little girl with him.'

"The naughty children," cried the giant, 'to hide from *me*!' And he made a stride towards the broom.

"Catch hold of the bristles, Bobby. Get right into a tuft, and hold on," cried Tricksey-Wee, just in time.

"The giant caught up the broom, and seeing nothing under it, set it down again with a bang that threw them both on the floor. He then made two strides to the boys, caught the dough-faced one by the neck, took the lid off a great pot that was boiling on the fire, popped him in as if he had been a trussed chicken, put the lid on again, and saying, 'There boys! See what comes of lying!' asked no more questions; for, as he always kept his word, he was afraid he might have to do the same to them all; and he did not like boiled boys. He like to eat them crisp, as radishes, whether forked or not, ought to be eaten. He then sat down, and asked his wife if his supper was ready. She looked into the pot, and, throwing the boy out with the ladle, as if he had been a black-beetle that had tumbled in and had had the worst of it, answered that she thought it was. Whereupon he rose to help her; and, taking the pot from the fire, poured the whole contents, bubbling and splashing into a dish like a vat. Then they say down to supper. The children in the broom could not see what they had; but it seemed to agree with them; for the giant talked like thunder, and the giantess answered like the sea, and they grew chattier and chattier. At length the giant said:

"'I don't feel quite comfortable about that heart of mine.' And as he spoke, instead of laying his hand on his bosom, he waved it away towards the corner where the children were peeping from the broom-bristles, like frightened little mice.

"'Well, you know, my darling Thunderthump,' answered his wife, 'I always thought it ought to be nearer home. But you know best, of course.'

"'Ha! ha! You don't know where it is, wife. I moved it a month ago.'

"'What a man you are, Thunderthump! You trust any creature alive rather than your wife.'

"Here the giantess gave a sob which sounded exactly like a wave going flop into the mouth of a cave up to the roof.

"'Where have you got it now?' she resumed, checking her emotion.

"'Well, Doodlem, I don't mind telling *you*,' said the giant, soothingly. 'The great she-eagle has got it for a nest-egg. She sits on it night and day, and thinks she will bring the greatest eagle out of it that ever sharpened his beak on the rocks of Mount Skycrack. I can warrant no one else will touch it while she has got it. But she is rather capricious, and I confess I am not easy about it; for the least scratch of one of her claws would do for me at once. And she *has* claws.'"

* * * * *

"What funny things you do make up!" said a boy. "How could the giant's heart be in an eagle's nest, and the giant himself alive and well without it?"

"Whatever you may think of it, Master Fred, I assure you I did not make it up. If it ever was made up, no one can tell who did it; for it was written in the chronicles of Giantland long before one of us was born. It was quite common," said I, in an injured tone, "for a giant to put his heart out to nurse, because he did not like the trouble and responsibility of doing it himself. It was, I confess, a dangerous sort of thing to do.—But do you want any more of my story or not?"

"Oh! yes, please," cried Frederick, very heartily.

"Then don't you find any more fault with it, or I will stop."

Master Fred was straightway silent, and I went on.

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"All this time Buffy-Bob and Tricksey-Wee were listening with long ears. *They* did not dispute about the giant's heart, and impossibility, and all that; for they were better educated than Master Fred, and knew all about it. 'Oh!' thought Tricksey-Wee, 'if I could but find the giant's cruel heart, wouldn't I give it a squeeze!'

"The giant and giantess went on talking for a long time. The giantess kept advising the giant to hide his heart somewhere in the house; but he seemed afraid of the advantage it would give her over him.

"'You could hide it at the bottom of the flour-barrel,' said she.

"'That would make me feel chokey,' answered he.

"'Well, in the coal-cellar, or in the dust-hole. That's the place! No one would think of looking for your heart in the dust-hole.'

"'Worse and worse!' cried the giant.

"'Well, the water-butts?' said she.

"'No, no; it would grow spongy there,' said he.

"'Well, what will you do with it?'

"'I will leave it a month longer where it is, and then I will give it to the Queen of the Kangaroos, and she will carry it in her pouch for me. It is best to change, you know, and then my enemies can't find it. But, dear Doodlem, it's a fretting care to have a heart of one's own to look after. The responsibility is too much for me. If it were not for a bite of a radish now and then, I never could bear it.'

"Here the giant looked lovingly towards the row of little boys by the fire, all of whom were nodding, or asleep on the floor.

"'Why don't you trust it to me, dear Thunderthump?' said his wife. 'I would take the best possible care of it.'

"'I don't doubt it, my love. But the responsibility would be too much for you. You would no longer be my darling, light-hearted, airy, laughing Doodlem. It would transform you into a heavy, oppressed woman, weary of life—as I am.'

"The giant closed his eyes and pretended to go to sleep. His wife got his stockings, and went on with her darning. Soon, the giant's pretence became reality, and the giantess began to nod over her work.

"'Now, Buffy,' whispered Tricksey-Wee, 'now's our time. I think it's moonlight, and we had better be off. There's a door with a hole for the cat just behind us.'

"'All right!' said Bob; 'I'm ready.'

"So they got out of the broom-brake, and crept to the door. But, to their great disappointment, when they got through it, they found themselves in a sort of shed. It was full of tubs and things, and, though it was built of wood only, they could not find a crack.

"'Let us try this hole,' said Tricksey; for the giant and giantess were sleeping behind them, and they dared not go back.

"'All right,' said Bob. He seldom said anything else than *All right*.

"Now this hole was in a mound that came in through the wall of the shed and went along the floor for some distance. They crawled into it, and found it very dark. But groping their way along, they soon came to a small crack, through which they saw grass, pale in the moonshine. As they crept on, they found the hole began to get wider and lead upwards.

"'What is that noise of rushing?' said Buffy-Bob.

"'I can't tell,' replied Tricksey; 'for, you see, I don't know what we are in.'

"The fact was, they were creeping along a channel in the heart of a giant tree; and the noise they heard was the noise of the sap rushing along in its wooden pipes. When they laid their ears to the wall, they heard it gurgling along with a pleasant noise.

"'It sounds kind and good,' said Tricksey. 'It is water running. Now it must be running from somewhere to somewhere. I think we had better go on, and we shall come somewhere.'

"It was now rather difficult to go on, for they had to climb as if they were climbing a hill; and now the passage was wide. Nearly worn out, they saw light overhead at last, and creeping through a crack into the open air, found themselves on the fork of a huge tree. A great, broad, uneven space lay around them, out of which spread boughs in every direction, the smallest of them as big as the

biggest tree in the country of common people. Overhead were leaves enough to supply all the trees they had ever seen. Not much moonlight could come through, but the leaves would glimmer white in the wind at times. The tree was full of giant birds. Every now and then, one would sweep through, with a great noise. But, except an occasional chirp, sounding like a shrill pipe in a great organ, they made no noise. All at once an owl began to hoot. He thought he was singing. As soon as he began, other birds replied, making rare game of him. To their astonishment, the children found they could understand every word they sang. And what they said was something like this:

"I will sing a song.
I'm the owl.'
'Sing a song, you sing-song
Ugly fowl!
What will you sing about,
Now the light is out?'

"Sing about the night;
I'm the owl.'
'You could not see for the light,
Stupid fowl.'
'Oh! the moon! and the dew!
And the shadows!—tu-whooh!'

"The owl spread out his silent, soft, sly wings, and lighting between Tricksey-Wee and Buffy-Bob, nearly smothered them, closing up one under each wing. It was like being buried in a down bed. But the owl did not like anything between his sides and his wings, so he opened his wings again, and the children made haste to get out. Tricksey-Wee immediately went in front of the bird, and looking up into his huge face, which was as round as the eyes of the giantess's spectacles, and much bigger, dropped a pretty courtesy, and said:

"Please, Mr. Owl, I want to whisper to you.'

"Very well, small child,' answered the owl, looking important, and stooping his ear towards her. 'What is it?'

"Please tell me where the eagle lives that sits on the giant's heart.'

"Oh, you naughty child! That's a secret. For shame!'

"And with a great hiss that terrified them, the owl flew into the tree. All birds are fond of secrets; but not many of them can keep them so well as the owl.

"So the children went on because they did not know what else to do. They found the way very rough and difficult, the tree was so full of humps and hollows. Now and then they plashed into a pool of rain; now and then they came upon twigs growing out of the trunk where they had no business, and they were as large as full-grown poplars. Sometimes they came upon great cushions of soft moss, and on one of them they lay down and rested. But they had not lain long before they spied a large nightingale sitting on a branch, with its bright eyes looking up at the moon. In a moment more he began to sing, and the birds about him began to reply, but in a very different tone from that in which they had replied to the owl. Oh, the birds did call the nightingale such pretty names! The nightingale sang, and the birds replied like this:—

"I will sing a song.
I'm the nightingale.'
'Sing a song, long, long,
Little Neverfail!

What will you sing about,
Light in or light out?'

'Sing about the light
Gone away;
Down, away, and out of sight—
Poor lost day!
Mourning for the day dead,
O'er his dim bed.'

"The nightingale sang so sweetly, that the children would have fallen asleep but for fear of losing any of the song. When the nightingale stopped they got up and wandered on. They did not know where they were going, but they thought it best to keep going on, because then they might come upon something or other. They were very sorry they forgot to ask the nightingale about the eagle's nest, but his music had put everything else out of their heads. They resolved, however, not to forget the next time they had a chance. They went on and on, till they were both tired, and Tricksey-Wee said at last, trying to laugh,

"I declare my legs feel just like a Dutch doll's.'

"Then here's the place to go to bed in,' said Buffy-Bob.

"They stood at the edge of a last year's nest, and looked down with delight into the round, mossy cave. Then they crept gently in, and, lying down in each other's arms, found it so deep, and warm, and comfortable, and soft, that they were soon fast asleep.

"Now close beside them, in a hollow, was another nest, in which lay a lark and his wife; and the children were awakened very early in the morning, by a dispute between Mr. and Mrs. Lark.

"Let me up,' said the lark.

"It is not time,' said the lark's wife.

"It is,' said the lark, rather rudely. 'The darkness is quite thin. I can almost see my own beak.'

"Nonsense!' said the lark's wife. 'You know you came home yesterday morning quite worn out—you had to fly so very high before you saw him. I am sure he would not mind if you took it a little easier. Do be quiet and go to sleep again.'

"That's not it at all,' said the lark. 'He doesn't want me. I want him. Let me up, I say.'

"He began to sing; and Tricksey-Wee and Buffy-Bob, having now learned the way, answered him:—

"I will sing a song,
I'm the Lark.'
'Sing, sing, Throat-strong,
Little Kill-the-dark.
What will you sing about,
Now the night is out?'

"I can only call;
I can't think.
Let me up—that's all.
Let me drink!
Thirsting all the long night
For a drink of light.'

"By this time the lark was standing on the edge of his nest and looking at the children.

"Poor little things! You can't fly,' said the lark.

"No; but we can look up,' said Tricksey.

"Ah! you don't know what it is to see the very first of the sun.'

"But we know what it is to wait till he comes. He's no worse for your seeing him first, is he?'

"Oh! no, certainly not,' answered the lark, with condescension; and then, bursting into his *jubilate*, he sprung aloft, clapping his wings like a clock running down.

"Tell us where—' began Buffy-Bob.

"But the lark was out of sight. His song was all that was left of him.

That was everywhere, and he was nowhere.

"Selfish bird!" said Buffy. 'It's all very well for larks to go hunting the sun, but they have no business to despise their neighbours, for all that.'

"Can I be of any use to you?' said a sweet bird-voice out of the nest. This was the lark's wife, who staid at home with the young larks while her husband went to church.

"Oh! thank you. If you please,' answered Tricksey-Wee.

"And up popped a pretty brown head; and then up came a brown feathery body; and last of all came the slender legs on to the edge of the nest. There she turned, and, looking down into the nest, from which came a whole litany of chirpings for breakfast, said, 'Lie still, little ones.' Then she turned to the children. 'My husband is King of the Larks,' she said.

"Buffy-Bob took off his cap, and Tricksey-Wee courtesied very low.

"Oh, it's not me,' said the bird, looking very shy. 'I am only his wife. It's my husband.' And she looked up after him into the sky, whence his song was still falling like a shower of musical hailstones. Perhaps she could see him.

"He's a splendid bird,' said Buffy-Bob; 'only you know he *will* get up a little too early.'

"Oh, no! he doesn't. It's only his way, you know. But tell me what I can do for you.'

"Tell us, please, Lady Lark, where the she-eagle lives that sits on Giant Thunderthump's heart.'

"Oh! that is a secret.'

"Did you promise not to tell?'

"No; but larks ought to be discreet. They see more than other birds.'

"But you don't fly up high like your husband, do you?'

"Not often. But it's no matter. I come to know things for all that.'

"Do tell me, and I will sing you a song,' said Tricksey-Wee.

"Can you sing too?'

"Yes. And I will sing you a song I learned the other day about a lark and his wife.'

"Please do,' said the lark's wife. 'Be quiet, children, and listen.'

"Tricksey-Wee was very glad she happened to know a song which would please the lark's wife, at least, whatever the lark himself might have thought of it, if he had heard it. So she sang:

"Good morrow, my lord!" in the sky alone,
Sang the lark, as the sun ascended his throne.
'Shine on me, my lord; I only am come,
Of all your servants, to welcome you home.
I have flown for an hour, right up, I swear,
To catch the first shine of your golden hair!"

'Must I thank you, then,' said the king, 'Sir Lark,
For flying so high, and hating the dark?
You ask a full cup for half a thirst:
Half is love of me, and half love to be first.
There's many a bird that makes no haste,

But waits till I come. That's as much to my taste.'

And the king hid his head in a turban of cloud;
And the lark stopped singing, quite vexed and cowed.
But he flew up higher, and thought, 'Anon,
The wrath of the king will be over and gone;
And his crown, shining out of the cloudy fold,
Will change my brown feathers to a glory of gold.'

So he flew, with the strength of a lark he flew.
But, as he rose, the cloud rose too;
And not a gleam of the golden hair
Came through the depth of the misty air;
Till, weary with flying, with sighing sore,
The strong sun-seeker could do no more.

His wings had had no chrism of gold;
And his feathers felt withered and worn and old;
And he sank, and quivered, and dropped like a stone.
And there on his nest, where he left her, alone,
Sat his little wife on her little eggs,
Keeping them warm with wings and legs.

Did I say alone? Ah, no such thing!
Full in her face was shining the king.
'Welcome, Sir Lark! You look tired,' said he.
'Up is not always the best way to me.
While you have been singing so high and away,
I've been shining to your little wife all day.'

He had set his crown all about the nest,
And out of the midst shone her little brown breast;
And so glorious was she in russet gold,
That for wonder and awe Sir Lark grew cold.
He popped his head under her wing, and lay
As still as a stone, till the king was away.

"As soon as Tricksey-Wee had finished her song, the lark's wife began a low, sweet, modest little song of her own; and after she had piped away for two or three minutes, she said:

"You dear children, what can I do for you?"

"Tell us where the she-eagle lives, please," said Tricksey-Wee.

"Well, I don't think there can be much harm in telling such wise, good children," said Lady Lark; "I am sure you don't want to do any mischief."

"Oh, no; quite the contrary," said Buffy-Bob.

"Then I'll tell you. She lives on the very topmost peak of Mount Skycrack; and the only way to get up is, to climb on the spiders' webs that cover it from top to bottom."

"That's rather serious," said Tricksey-Wee.

"But you don't want to go up, you foolish little thing. You can't go.

And what do you want to go up for?"

"That is a secret,' said Tricksey-Wee.

"Well, it's no business of mine,' rejoined Lady Lark, a little offended, and quite vexed that she had told them. So she flew away to find some breakfast for her little ones, who by this time were chirping very impatiently. The children looked at each other, joined hands, and walked off.

"In a minute more the sun was up, and they soon reached the outside of the tree. The bark was so knobby and rough, and full of twigs, that they managed to get down, though not without great difficulty. Then, far away to the north, they saw a huge peak, like the spire of a church, going right up into the sky. They thought this must be Mount Skycrack, and turned their faces towards it. As they went on, they saw a giant or two, now and then, striding about the fields or through the woods, but they kept out of their way. Nor were they in much danger; for it was only one or two of the border giants that were so very fond of children. At last they came to the foot of Mount Skycrack. It stood in a plain alone, and shot right up, I don't know how many thousand feet, into the air, a long, narrow, spearlike mountain. The whole face of it, from top to bottom, was covered with a network of spiders' webs, with threads of various sizes, from that of silk to that of whipcord. The webs shook, and quivered, and waved in the sun, glittering like silver. All about ran huge, greedy spiders, catching huge, silly flies, and devouring them.

"Here they sat down to consider what could be done. The spiders did not heed them, but ate away at the flies. At the foot of the mountain, and all round it, was a ring of water, not very broad, but very deep. Now, as they sat watching, one of the spiders, whose web was woven across this water, somehow or other lost his hold, and fell on his back. Tricksey-Wee and Buffy-Bob ran to his assistance, and laying hold each of one of his legs, succeeded, with the help of the other legs, which struggled spiderfully, in getting him out upon dry land. As soon as he had shaken himself, and dried himself a little, the spider turned to the children, saying,

"And now, what can I do for you?"

"Tell us, please,' said they, 'how we can get up the mountain to the she-eagle's nest.'

"Nothing is easier,' answered the spider. 'Just run up there, and tell them all I sent you, and nobody will mind you.'

"But we haven't got claws like you, Mr. Spider,' said Buffy.

"Ah! no more you have, poor unprovided creatures! Still, I think we can manage it. Come home with me.'

"You won't eat us, will you?' said Buffy.

"My dear child,' answered the spider, in a tone of injured dignity, 'I eat nothing but what is mischievous or useless. You have helped me, and now I will help you.'

"The children rose at once, and, climbing as well as they could, reached the spider's nest in the centre of the web. They did not find it very difficult; for whenever too great a gap came, the spider spinning a strong cord stretched it just where they would have chosen to put their feet next. He left them in his nest, after bringing them two enormous honey-bags, taken from bees that he had caught. Presently about six of the wisest of the spiders came back with him. It was rather horrible to look up and see them all round the mouth of the nest, looking down on them in contemplation, as if wondering whether they would be nice eating. At length one of them said:

"Tell us truly what you want with the eagle, and we will try to help you.'

"Then Tricksey-Wee told them that there was a giant on the borders who treated little children no better than radishes, and that they had narrowly escaped being eaten by him; that they had found out that the great she-eagle of Mount Skycrack was at present sitting on his heart; and that, if they could only get hold of the heart, they would soon teach the giant better behaviour.

"But,' said their host, 'if you get at the heart of the giant, you will find it as large as one of your elephants. What can you do with it?'

"The least scratch will kill it,' answered Buffy-Bob.

"Ah! but you might do better than that,' said the spider.—'Now we have resolved to help you. Here is a little bag of spider-juice. The giants cannot bear spiders, and this juice is dreadful poison to them. We are all ready to go up with you, and drive the eagle away. Then you must put the heart into this other bag, and bring it down with you; for then the giant will be in your power.'

"But how can we do that?' said Buffy. 'The bag is not much bigger than a pudding-bag.'

"But it is as large as you will find convenient to carry.'

"Yes; but what are we to do with the heart?'

"Put it into the bag, to be sure. Only, first, you must squeeze a drop out of the other bag upon it. You will see what will happen.'

"Very well; we will,' said Tricksey-Wee. 'And now, if you please, how shall we go?'

"Oh, that's our business,' said the first spider. 'You come with me, and my grandfather will take your brother. Get up.'

"So Tricksey-Wee mounted on the narrow part of the spider's back, and held fast. And Buffy-Bob got on the grandfather's back. And up they scrambled, over one web after another, up and up. And every spider followed; so that, when Tricksey-Wee looked back, she saw a whole army of spiders scrambling after them.

"What can we want with so many?' she thought; but she said nothing.

"The moon was now up, and it was a splendid sight below and around them. All Giantland was spread out under them, with its great hills, lakes, trees, and animals. And all above them was the clear heaven, and Mount Skycrack rising into it, with its endless ladders of spiderwebs, glittering like cords made of moonbeams. And up the moonbeams went, crawling, and scrambling, and racing, a huge army of huge spiders.

"At length they reached all but the very summit, where they stopped. Tricksey-Wee and Buffy-Bob could see above them a great globe of feathers, that finished off the mountain like an ornamental knob.

"How shall we drive her off?' said Buffy.

"We'll soon manage that,' said the grandfather spider. 'Come on, you, down there.'

"Up rushed the whole army, past the children, over the edge of the nest, on to the she-eagle, and buried themselves in her feathers. In a moment she became very restless, and went picking about with her beak. All at once she spread out her wings, with a sound like a whirlwind, and flew off to bathe in the sea; and then the spiders began to drop from her in all directions on their gossamer wings. The children had to hold fast to keep the wind of the eagle's flight from blowing them off. As soon as it was over, they looked into the nest, and there lay the giant's heart—an awful and ugly thing.

"Make haste, child!' said Tricksey's spider. So Tricksey took her bag, and squeezed a drop out of it upon the heart. She thought she heard the giant give a far-off roar of pain, and she nearly fell from her seat with terror. The heart instantly began to shrink. It shrunk and shrivelled till it was nearly gone; and Buffy-Bob caught it up and put it into the bag. Then the two spiders turned and went down again as fast as they could. Before they got to the bottom, they heard the shrieks of the she-eagle over the loss of her egg; but the spiders told them not to be alarmed, for her eyes were too big to see them. By the time they reached the foot of the mountain, all the spiders had got home, and were busy again catching flies, as if nothing had happened. So the children, after renewed thanks to their friends, set off, carrying the giant's heart with them.

"If you should find it at all troublesome, just give it a little more spider-juice directly,' said the grandfather, as they took their leave.

"Now, the giant had given an awful roar of pain, the moment they anointed his heart, and had fallen down in a fit, in which he lay so long that all the boys might have escaped if they had not been so fat. One did—and got home in safety. For days the giant was unable to speak. The first words he uttered were,

"Oh, my heart! my heart!"

"Your heart is safe enough, dear Thunderthump,' said his wife. 'Really a man of your size ought not to be so nervous and apprehensive. I am ashamed of you.'

"You have no heart, Doodlem,' answered he. 'I assure you that this moment mine is in the greatest danger. It has fallen into the hands of foes, though who they are I cannot tell.'

"Here he fainted again; for Tricksey-Wee, finding the heart begin to swell a little, had given it the least touch of spider-juice.

"Again he recovered, and said:

"Dear Doodlem, my heart is coming back to me. It is coming nearer and nearer.'

"After lying silent for a few hours, he exclaimed:

"It is in the house, I know!' And he jumped up and walked about, looking in every corner.

"Just then, Tricksey-Wee and Buffy-Bob came out of the hole in the tree-root, and through the cat-hole in the door, and walked boldly towards the giant. Both kept their eyes busy watching him. Led by the love of his own heart, the giant soon spied them, and staggered furiously towards them.

"I will eat you, you vermin!' he cried. 'Give me my heart.'

"Tricksey gave the heart a sharp pinch; when down fell the giant on his knees, blubbering, and crying, and begging for his heart.

"You shall have it, if you behave yourself properly,' said Tricksey.

"What do you want me to do?' asked he, whimpering.

"To take all those boys and girls, and carry them home at once.'

"I'm not able; I'm too ill.'

"Take them up directly.'

"I can't, till you give me my heart.'

"Very well!' said Tricksey; and she gave the heart another pinch.

"The giant jumped to his feet, and catching up all the children, thrust some into his waistcoat pockets, some into his breast-pocket, put two or three into his hat, and took a bundle of them under each arm. Then he staggered to the door. All this time poor Doodlem was sitting in her armchair, crying, and mending a white stocking.

"The giant led the way to the borders. He could not go fast, so that Buffy and Tricksey managed to keep up with him. When they reached the borders, they thought it would be safer to let the children find their own way home. So they told him to set them down. He obeyed.

"Have you put them all down, Mr. Thunderthump?' asked Tricksey-Wee.

"Yes,' said the giant.

"That's a lie!' squeaked a little voice; and out came a head from his waistcoat-pocket.

"Tricksey-Wee pinched the heart till the giant roared with pain.

"You're not a gentleman. You tell stories,' she said.

"He was the thinnest of the lot,' said Thunderthump, crying.

"Are you all there now, children?' asked Tricksey.

"Yes, ma'am,' said they, after counting themselves very carefully, and with some difficulty; for they were all stupid children.

"Now,' said Tricksey-Wee to the giant, 'will you promise to carry off no more children, and never to eat a child again all your life?'

"Yes, yes! I promise,' answered Thunderthump, sobbing.

"And you will never cross the borders of Giantland?'

"Never.'

"And you shall never again wear white stockings on a Sunday, all your life long.—Do you promise?'

"The giant hesitated at this, and began to expostulate; but Tricksey-Wee, believing it would be good for his morals, insisted; and the giant promised.

"Then she required of him, that, when she gave him back his heart, he should give it to his wife to take care of for him for ever after. The poor giant fell on his knees and began again to beg. But Tricksey-Wee giving the heart a slight pinch, he bawled out:

"Yes, yes! Doodlem shall have it, I swear. Only she must not put it in the flour-barrel, or in the dust-hole.'

"Certainly not. Make your own bargain with her.—And you promise not to interfere with my brother and me, or to take any revenge for what we have done?'

"Yes, yes, my dear children; I promise everything. Do, pray, make haste and give me back my poor heart.'

"Wait there, then, till I bring it to you.'

"Yes, yes. Only make haste, for I feel very faint.'

"Tricksey-Wee began to undo the mouth of the bag. But Buffy-Bob, who had got very knowing on his travels, took out his knife with the pretence of cutting the string; but, in reality, to be prepared for any emergency.

"No sooner was the heart out of the bag, than it expanded to the size of a bullock; and the giant, with a yell of rage and vengeance, rushed on the two children, who had stepped sideways from the terrible heart. But Buffy-Bob was too quick for Thunderthump. He sprang to the heart, and buried his knife in it, up to the hilt. A fountain of blood spouted from it; and with a dreadful groan, the giant fell dead at the feet of little Tricksey-Wee, who could not help being sorry for him after all."

* * * * *

"Silly thing!" said a little wisehead.

"What a horrid story!" said one small girl with great eyes, who sat staring into the fire.

"I don't think it at all a nice story for supper, with those horrid spiders, too," said an older girl.

"Well, let us have a game and forget it," I said.

"No; that we shan't, I am sure," said one.

"I will tell our Amy. Won't it be fun?"

"She'll scream," said another.

"I'll tell her all the more."

"No, no; you mustn't be unkind," said I; "else you will never help little children against wicked giants. The giants will eat you too, then."

"Oh! I know what you mean. You can't frighten me."

This was said by one of the elder girls, who promised fair to reach before long the summit of uncompromising womanhood. She made me feel very small with my moralizing; so I dropt it. On the whole I was rather disappointed with the effect of my story. Perhaps the disappointment was no more than I deserved; but I did not like to think I had failed with children.

Nor did I think so any longer after a darling little blue-eyed girl, who had sat next me at tea, came to me to say good night, and, reaching up, put her arms round my neck and kissed me, and then whispered very gently:

"Thank you, dear Mr. Smith. I will be good. It was a very nice story. If I was a man, I would kill all the wicked people in the world. But I am only a little girl, you know; so I can only be good."

The darling did not know how much more one good woman can do to kill evil than all the swords of the world in the hands of righteous heroes.

CHAPTER III. A CHILD'S HOLIDAY

When the next evening of our assembly came, I could see on Adela's face a look of subdued expectation, and I knew now to what to attribute it: Harry was going to read. There was a restlessness in her eyelids—they were always rising, and falling as suddenly. But when the time drew near, they grew more still; only her colour went and came a little. By the time we were all seated, she was as quiet as death. Harry pulled out a manuscript.

"Have you any objection to a ballad-story?" he asked of the company generally.

"Certainly not," was the common reply; though Ralph stared a little, and his wife looked at him. I believe the reason was, that they had never known Harry write poetry before. But as soon as he had uttered the title—"*The Two Gordons*"—

"You young rascal!" cried his brother. "Am I to keep you in material for ever? Are you going to pluck my wings till they are as bare as an egg? Really, ladies and gentlemen," he continued, in pretended anger, while Harry was keeping down a laugh of keen enjoyment, "it is too bad of that scapegrace brother of mine! Of course you are all welcome to anything I have got; but he has no right to escape from his responsibilities on that account. It is rude to us all. I know he can write if he likes."

"Why, Ralph, you would be glad of such a brother to steal your sermons from, if you had been up all night as I was. Of course I did not mean to claim any more credit than that of unearthing some of your shy verses.—May I read them or not?"

"Oh! of course. But it is lucky I came prepared for some escapade of the sort, and brought a manuscript of proper weight and length in my pocket."

Suddenly Harry's face changed from a laughing to a grave one. I saw how it was. He had glanced at Adela, and her look of unmistakeable disappointment was reflected in his face. But there was a glimmer of pleasure in his eyes, notwithstanding; and I fancied I could see that the pleasure would have been more marked, had he not feared that he had placed himself at a disadvantage with her, namely, that she would suppose him incapable of producing a story. However, it was only for a moment that this change of feeling stopped him. With a gesture of some haste he re-opened the manuscript, which he had rolled up as if to protect it from the indignation of his brother, and read the following ballad:

"The Two Gordons

I

"There was John Gordon, and Archibold,
And an earl's twin sons were they.
When they were one and twenty years old,
They fell out on their birth-day.

"'Turn,' said Archibold, 'brother sly!
Turn now, false and fell;
Or down thou goest, as black as a lie,
To the father of lies in hell.'

"'Why this to me, brother Archie, I pray?"

What ill have I done to thee?
'Smooth-faced hound, thou shall rue the day
Thou gettest an answer of me.

"For mine will be louder than Lady Janet's,
And spoken in broad daylight—
And the wall to scale is my iron mail,
Not her castle wall at night.'

"I clomb the wall of her castle tall,
In the moon and the roaring wind;
It was dark and still in her bower until
The morning looked in behind.'

"Turn therefore, John Gordon, false brother;
For either thou or I,
On a hard wet bed—wet, cold, and red,
For evermore shall lie.'

"Oh, Archibold, Janet is my true love;
Would I had told it thee!
'I hate thee the worse. Turn, or I'll curse
The night that got thee and me.'

"Their swords they drew, and the sparks they flew,
As if hammers did anvils beat;
And the red blood ran, till the ground began
To plash beneath their feet.

"Oh, Archie! thou hast given me a cold supper,
A supper of steel, I trow;
But reach me one grasp of a brother's hand,
And turn me, before you go.'

"But he turned himself on his gold-spurred heel,
And away, with a speechless frown;
And up in the oak, with a greedy croak,
The carrion-crow claimed his own.

II

"The sun looked over a cloud of gold;

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