

Molesworth Mrs.

Hoodie



Mrs. Molesworth

Hoodie

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CHAPTER I. AT WAR WITH THE WORLD

"Who would think so small a thing
Could make so great a pothor?"

A pretty, cheerful nursery – a nursery in which surely children could not but be happy – with pictures on the walls and toys in the glass-doored cupboard, and rocking-horse and doll-house, and everything a child's heart could wish for. Spring sunshine faint but clear, like the first pale primrose, peeping in at the window, a merry fire crackling away in the tidy hearth. And just in front of it, for it is early spring only, a group of children pleasant to see. A soft-haired, quiet-eyed little girl, a book open upon her knee, and at each side, nestling in beside her, a cherub-faced dot of a boy, listening to the story she was reading aloud.

Such a peaceful, pretty picture! Ah yes – what a pity to disturb it. But I must show you the whole of it. Into this pretty nursery flies another child – a tiny fairy of a girl, tiny even for her years which are but five – in she flies, down the long passage which leads to the children's quarters, in at the nursery door, which, in spite of her hurry, she carefully closes, and seeing that the other door is open closes it too, then, flying back to the centre of the room, deliberately sets to work to – children, can you guess? – to *scream!*

She sheds no tears, there is no grief, only wrath, great and furious, in the little face which should have been so pretty, in the big blue eyes which should have been so sweet. She shakes herself till her fair, fluffy hair is all in a "touzle," she dances with rage till her neck and arms are crimson, from time to time in the middle of her screams calling out at the pitch of her voice, "I don't love *any* body. I don't want *any* 'sing. I don't like *any* 'sing. Go away ugly evybody. I don't love Pince. Go away ugly Pince."

The girl by the fire looked up for a moment.

"Prince isn't here," she said. "Oh, Hoodie," she went on wearily, "how *can* you – how can you be so naughty?"

Hoodie turned towards her sister.

"I don't love *zou*, Maudie. Naughty, ugly Maudie. Pince *sall* be here. Naughty Maudie. I *sall* be naughty. I don't love *any* body."

"Nebber mind, Maudie dear, nebber mind naughty Hoodie. Hoodie's always naughty. Please go on, Maudie," said one of the two little boys.

Magdalen tried to go on. But in the midst of such a din, it was very difficult to make herself heard, and at last she gave up in despair.

"It's no good, Hec," she said, "I can't go on. Hoodie spoils everything when she gets like that."

The little fellows' faces lengthened.

"Hoodie 'poils ebery'sing," they murmured.

Just then the door opened.

"Miss Hoodie," said the maid who came in, "Miss Hoodie again! And Sunday morning too – the day you should be extra good."

"The day she is nearly always extra naughty," said Magdalen, with the superiority of eight years old. "It's no good speaking to her, Martin. She's going to go on – she shut the doors first."

Martin seated herself composedly beside the three children.

"I never did see such a child," she said; "no, never. You would think, Miss Maudie, she might stop if she liked, seeing how she can keep it in like, as long as she's afraid of her Mamma hearing. If she can keep it in till she shuts the doors, she might keep it in altogether, you would think."

"Stop! of course she can stop if she likes," said Magdalen. "What was it set her off, Martin, do you know?"

"Something about Prince," replied Martin. "Thomas said she was trying to get him to come up-stairs with her, and he whistled to him, not knowing, and Prince ran away from her."

"Hoodie's kept all her biscuits for Pince, for a treat for him for Sunday," said little Hec, with some evident sympathy for Hoodie.

"She shouldn't be so silly then," said Maudie. "What do dogs know about its being Sunday, and treats? I know Hoodie always spoils *our* Sundays, and we're better than dogs."

"I don't love you, naughty Maudie. I don't love *any* body," screamed Hoodie.

"It certainly doesn't look as if you did, and very soon nobody will love you, Miss Hoodie, if you go on so," said Martin, virtuously.

"I wish," said Duke, the second twin, "I wish papa would build another *gate* big house and put Hoodie to live there all alone, don't you, Maudie? A gate big house where not nobody could hear her scaming."

Great applause followed this brilliant idea – but the laughter only increased Hoodie's fury. Duke was the next she turned upon.

"I don't love you, naughty, ugly Duke," she screamed. "I don't love *any* body. Go away evybody, go away, go *away*, go *AWAY*."

Such was Hoodie – poor Hoodie – at five years old!

What had made her so naughty? That was the question that puzzled everybody concerned – not forgetting Hoodie herself.

"I didn't make myself. 'Tisn't my fault. God should have made Hoodie gooder," she would say defiantly.

And was it not a puzzle? There was Maudie, just as nice and good a little girl as one would wish to see, and Hec and Duke, both comfortable, good-natured little fellows – all three, children to whom things came right, and whose presence in the world seemed as natural and pleasant a thing as that of birds in the trees or daisies in the grass. Why should not Hoodie be like them? She was born in July – one bright sunny day when all the world was rejoicing – and little Maudie had been so pleased to have a baby sister, and her godmother had begged that she might be called "Julian," and everybody had, for a time, made much of her. But, alas, as the years went on, they told a different tale – governesses and nurses, sister and brothers, it was the same story with all – Hoodie's temper was the strangest and the worst that ever a child had made herself and other people miserable by.

"I could really fancy," said Maudie one day, "I could really fancy, if there *were* such things as fairies, you know – that one of them had been offended at not being asked to Hoodie's christening."

And when Hoodie grew old enough to hear fairy tales, this speech of Maudie's came back to her mind, and she wondered, with the strange unexpressed bewilderment of a child, if indeed there were some mystery about her naughtiness – some spell cast upon her which it was hopeless to try to break. For she knew she was naughty, very naughty – she never thought of denying it. Only deep down *somewhere* in her – where, she could not have told – there was a feeling that she did not *want* to be naughty – she did not *like* being naughty – there was a mistake about her somehow or somewhere, which nobody could understand or ever would, and which it never entered her head to try to explain to any one.

The screaming went on steadily – agreeably for Hoodie herself, it is to be hoped, for it certainly was anything but pleasant for other people. Suddenly there came a lull – a step was heard coming along the passage, and light as it was, Hoodie's quick ears were the first to hear it. It was mother!

Hoodie's power of self-control was really very great – her screams ceased entirely, only, as her fury had this time been *very* great even for her, it had naturally arrived at tears and sobs, and in consequence she was not able all at once to stifle the sobs that shook her, or even by scrubbing at her poor eyes with all her might, with a rather grimy little ball which she called her "pocket-hankerwich," could she succeed in destroying all traces of the storm. She ran over to the window and stood with her back to the door, staring, or pretending to stare, down at the pretty garden beds, gay with crocuses and snowdrops. But mother's eyes were not to be so easily deceived. One glance at the peaceful, though subdued group round the fireplace, one anxious look at the little figure standing solitary by the window, its fat dimpled shoulders convulsively heaving every moment or two, its face resolutely turned away, and mother knew all.

"What is wrong with Miss Julian?" she asked.

"Really, ma'am, I can't quite say. I was down-stairs and when I came back she was in one of her ways, and you know, ma'am, it is no use speaking to her while she's like that. It was just some trifle about Prince, but if it wasn't that it would be something else."

Martin's tone was slightly querulous, but Mrs. Caryll could not resent it. Martin as a rule was so good and patient with the children, and with the other three – Maudie and the boys – there was never a shadow of trouble. Even to Hoodie she was really kind, and though sometimes it did seem as if she did not take what is called "quite the right way with her," it would hardly have been fair to blame her for that, seeing that this mysterious right way in Hoodie's case, was quite as great a puzzle as the passage round the North Pole! So great a puzzle indeed that its very existence had come to be doubted, for hitherto one thing only about it was certain – no one had ever succeeded in finding it.

On the whole, mother herself managed Hoodie better than any one else, but that, I fear, is not saying much. For whenever, after a long talk and many tears, Mrs. Caryll left the nursery with a somewhat lightened heart, thinking that for some time to come at least there was going to be peace, she was almost *sure* to be disappointed. Generally these very times were followed by the worst outbreaks, and in despair Mrs. Caryll would leave off talks and gentle measures and simply lock the aggravating little girl into her bedroom, whence in a few hours, the fit having at last worked itself off, Hoodie would emerge, silent indeed, but *so* cross, so unbearably irritable, that no one in the nursery dared look at her, much less speak to her, till a night's rest had to some extent soothed her down.

It really seemed as if, as Martin said, there was nothing to do but leave her to herself, and it was with a terror of making things worse that Hoodie's mother now stood and looked at her, asking herself what *would* be best to do.

"Perhaps it would have been better," she said to herself, "if I had taken no notice of anything wrong," for she believed that Hoodie's intense mortification at *mother's* knowing of her naughtiness was what gave her more influence over her than any one else. But it was not quite the kind of influence she most cared to have – mortification, to my thinking, never does any one any good, but only fosters the evil *roots* from whence all these troubles spring. "If Hoodie cared about my knowing for fear of it grieving me, I would understand better how to manage her," thought Mrs. Caryll. "But if it were so she would show her sorrow in a different way. It is her pride, not her love, that is concerned."

She was right, but wrong too. Hoodie was proud, but also intensely loving. She did grieve in her own wild, unreasonable way, at distressing her mother, but most of all she grieved that *she* should be the cause of it. It would have made her sorry for mother to be grieved by Maudie or the boys, but still that would have been different. It was the misery of believing herself to be always the cause of the unhappiness that seemed to come back and back upon her, making the very time at which she was "sorriest," the time at which it was hardest to be good.

Hoodie's mother stood and considered. Then she crossed the room and touched her little girl on the neck. The bare white dumpling of a shoulder just "shrugged itself up" a little higher, but Hoodie gave no other sign of having felt anything.

"Hoodie," said her mother.

No reply.

"Hoodie," a little louder.

Hoodie *had* to look round. What a face! Red eyes, tangled hair, frowning forehead, tight shut lips. No, the good angels had not yet found their way back to Hoodie's heart – the little black dog was still curled up on her back, scowling at every one that came near.

"Hoodie," said her mother very quietly, "come with me to my room."

Hoodie did not resist. She allowed her mother to take her hand and lead her away. As the door closed after them Maudie gave a sigh of relief.

"Let's go on with our reading as long as we can," she said. "Hoodie will be worse than ever after she comes back. As soon as ever mother has gone down again and she thinks she won't hear, she'll begin again. Won't she, Martin?"

"She often is like that," said Martin, "but perhaps she'll be better to-day. Go on reading, Miss Maudie, and take no notice of her when she comes in."

In about ten minutes the door opened and Hoodie appeared. She marched in with a half-defiant air – evidently "humble-pie" had at present no attraction for her. No one took any notice of her. This did not suit Hoodie. She dragged her little chair across the room and placed it beside her sister's.

"Doin' to be dood," she announced.

"I'm glad to hear it, Miss Hoodie," said Martin.

"Doin' to be dood. Maudie, litsen," said Hoodie impatiently, giving Magdalen's chair a jerk, "doin' to be *dood*."

"Very well, Hoodie, only please don't pull my chair," said Maudie, in some fear and trembling.

"You're not to read, you're to litsen when I speak," said Hoodie, "and I will pull your chair, if I like. I love mother, don't love *you*, Maudie, ugly 'sing that you is."

Maudie did not answer. She glanced up at Martin for advice.

"Well, Miss Maudie," said Martin cheerfully, "aren't you going on with your story?"

"It's done, Martin, you forget," said Maudie.

Martin gave her a glance which Maudie understood. "Say something to take off her attention," was the interpretation of it.

"I'll look for another. Don't run away, Hec and Duke," said the elder sister quickly. "I am afraid there is nothing in this book but what we have read lots of times," she added, after turning over the leaves for a minute or two. "I wish it was somebody's birthday soon, and then we'd get some new stories."

"My birthday next," observed Hoodie, complacently.

"No, Hoodie, 't isn't," exclaimed both the boys, "'t isn't your birthday nextest. 'Tis ours. Aren't it now, Martin? You told us."

"Yes, dears, it is yours next. In June, Miss Hoodie dear, is theirs, you know, and yours won't be till July."

Martin made the statement gingerly. She was uncommonly afraid of what she might be drawing on herself by her venturing to disagree with the small autocrat of the nursery. To her surprise Hoodie took the information philosophically, relieving her feelings only by a piece of biting satire.

"That's acos the months is wrong. When *I* make the months they will come 'July, June,' not 'June, July,'" she said.

Hec and Duke thought this so original that they began laughing. A doubtful expression crept over Hoodie's face. Should she resent it, or laugh with them? Martin took the bull by the horns.

"Shall I tell you a story, my dears?" she said, "of what I once did on one of my birthdays when I was little? It came into my mind the other day, and I wonder I never told it you before, for it's something like the story of 'Little Red Riding Hood,' that Miss Hoodie got her name from."

"No, no, Martin. Hoodie didn't get her name from that," said Maudie eagerly. "It was this way. Mother got her a little hood *like* Red Riding Hood's in our picture – only it was pink and not scarlet,

and Hoodie liked it so, she screamed when they took it off, and once she was ill and she screamed so for it that they had to put it on her even in bed, and she had it on three days running."

"Zee days zunning," repeated Hoodie, nodding her head with great satisfaction. She was evidently very proud of this legend of her infancy.

"Dear me!" said Martin, "that was a funny fancy, to be sure. But the hood wouldn't be so pretty after that."

"No, of course," said Maudie. "It was all crumpled up and spoilt. And mamma got her a new one, but Hoodie wouldn't have it on, and so after that she didn't have hoods any more, only she was always called Hoodie."

"Always called Hoodie," reiterated the heroine of this remarkable anecdote, quite restored to good humour by finding herself looked upon as a historical character.

"And now, Martin, what did you do on your birthday?" said Magdalen.

"It was when I was eight," said Martin. "We lived in the country and we had a nice little farm. My father managed the farm and my mother had the dairy. And my old grandmother lived about three miles off in a little cottage near a wood – that was one thing that made me say it was like Red Riding Hood. I was very fond of going to see my grandmother, and I always counted it one of my treats. So the day before my birthday mother said to me, 'Janie, you shall go to your grandmother's to-morrow, if you like, as it is your birthday, and I'll pack a little basket for you to take to her, with some fresh eggs and butter. And I'll make a little cake for you to take too, and you shall stay to tea with her and have the cake to eat.'"

"Had it pums in?" said Hec.

"And laisins?" added Duke.

"Silly boy," said Hoodie from the elevation of her five years, "pums *is* laisins."

"Oh," said Duke submissively.

"Do on, Martin, do on, kick, kick, Martin," said Hoodie, "gee-up-ping" on her footstool as if Martin was a lazy horse she was trying to make go faster.

"Well," continued Martin, "I was pleased to go as you can fancy, and the next afternoon off I set. It was such a nice day. The flowers were just at their best – I stopped more than once to gather honeysuckle and twist it round the handle of the basket, it looked so pretty, and when I got to the little wood near which stood grandmother's cottage, I could hardly get on for stopping to look at the flowers that peeped out at the edge that skirted the road. And then I thought to myself how beautiful it must be further in the wood, and what a lovely bunch of cowslips I might gather. There was a little stile just where I was standing – I climbed over it and put the basket down on the ground, as I could not run with it in my hand, and then off I set, down a little path between the trees, glancing at every side as I ran, for the flowers I wanted. But I was disappointed – in the wood the flowers were not near so pretty as at the edge, and after picking a few, I threw them away again and turned back to the stile, where I had left my basket. But fancy my trouble when I found it was not there! I had been away such a short time, I could not believe it was really gone. I searched and I searched – all in vain – it was really *gone* – so at last I sat down and cried. I cried till I was tired of crying, and then I got up and walked slowly on to grandmother's. She was so kind I knew she would not scold me, but still she would be sorry and disappointed. And I really felt as if I would be too ashamed ever to go home and tell mother. When I got to grandmother's and walked up the little path to the cottage door – she had a nice little garden with roses and stocks and gilly-flowers and sweet-williams and lots of other nice old flowers – I was surprised to see it closed. It was not often grandmother was out of an afternoon, and besides, being my birthday, she might have known I would likely be coming to see her.

"'Everything's gone wrong with me to-day,' I said to myself, and vexed to think of the lost basket and the long hot walk back in the sun, I sat down on the little bench at the door and began to cry again. It seemed too bad that my birthday should be spoilt like that. I had cried so much that my eyes were sore, and I leant my head against the back of the bench – it stood in a sort of little

arbour – and closed them. I was not sleepy, I was only tired and stupid-like, but you can't fancy how startled I was when suddenly I felt something lick my hand, which was hanging down at my side. I opened my eyes and jumped up. There stood beside me a great big dog – a dog I had never seen before, looking up at me with his gentle, soft eyes, while on the ground at my feet was my lost basket! I was so delighted that I couldn't feel frightened, besides, who could have been frightened of such a dear, kind-looking dog? I threw my arms round his neck and hugged him, and told him he was a darling to have found my basket, and for a minute or two I really thought to myself he must be a sort of fairy – he seemed to have come so wonderful-like, all of a sudden. Just then I heard voices coming along the road. I ran to the gate to see who it was, and there, to my joy, was grandmother, and beside her a neighbour of hers, a gamekeeper I had seen now and then. I had my basket on my arm and the big doggie stood beside me."

CHAPTER II.

HOODIE GOES IN SEARCH OF A GRANDMOTHER

"I care for nobody, no, not I,
And nobody cares for me!"

Martin went on with her story:

"'Janie!' cried grandmother when she saw me. 'What a nice picture they make – my little granddaughter and your great dog – don't they?' she said to the gamekeeper.

"'And it was *your* basket, little Janie, that he found at the stile, then,' said the dog's master, and then he and grandmother explained, that walking along the road – grandmother was going up with him to see his wife who was ill – the dog who was following them had suddenly darted to one side and then crept from under the hedge with the basket in his mouth. They couldn't think whose it was, for no one was to be seen about, but when grandmother started to come home again the dog would follow her with it still in his mouth, so Roberts, that was the man's name, came along with her to see the end of it. Now wasn't it clever of the dog to know it was mine and bring it to me like that?"

"*Very*," said the children. "But mightn't your grandmother have known it was your mother's basket?" said Magdalen.

"It was a common enough one, but if she had looked inside she'd have known mother's butter and cake, I daresay," said Martin. "But the funny thing was, the dog would let no one touch it but me – he growled at grandmother when she tried to look in, but he stood by and saw me take out the things and just wagged his tail."

"And did you have nice tea, and cake, Martin?" said Hec.

"Oh yes, dears, very nice. But for all that it cured me of setting down baskets or anything like that when I had to take them anywhere. For you see it isn't every dog that would have had the sense of that one."

"And then he *might* have been a woof," suggested Hoodie. "The picture says a woof."

"Yes," said Maudie. "But this isn't the picture story, Hoodie. This was a real story of Martin herself, you know, for there aren't wolfs now."

"Not none?" said Hoodie.

"No, of course not."

Hoodie nodded her head, but made no further remark, and the nursery party congratulated themselves on the astonishing success of their endeavours to "put her crying fit out of her head."

This happy state of things lasted nearly all day. Hoodie was really most agreeable. She was rather more silent than usual, but, for her, surprisingly amiable.

Martin was delighted.

"Take my word for it, Miss Maudie," she said, "the only way with a child like her, is to take no notice and talk of something else."

"But we can't always do that way, Martin," – Maudie was not of a sanguine temperament, – "sometimes, you know, she's naughty about things that you *must* go on talking to her about, till you get her to do them."

"I can't help it, Miss Maudie," said Martin. "Talk or no talk, it's my belief that no power on earth will get Miss Julian to do what she wants not to do. And folks can't live always quarrel – quarrelling. She may improve of herself like, when she gets older, but as she is now, I really think the less notice she gets the better."

Maudie felt rather puzzled. She was only nine years old herself, remember, and Hoodie's queer ways were enough to puzzle much wiser heads than hers.

"I don't think Martin's way would do," she said to herself, "but still I think there must be *some* way that would make her gooder if only we could find it."

The children all went to church in the afternoon. The morning service was too long for them, their mother sensibly thought, but the afternoon hour, or hour and a quarter at most, no one, not even wee Hec and Duke, found too much. And Hoodie was rather fond of going to church. What she thought of, perched up by herself in her own corner of the pew, no one ever knew; that she listened, or attempted to listen, to what was going on, was doubtful in the extreme. But still, as a rule, church had a soothing effect on her, the quiet and restfulness, the monotony itself, seemed to calm her fidgety querulousness; possibly even the sensation of her Sunday clothes and the admiring glances of the little school-children helped to smooth her down for the time being.

This special Sunday afternoon their mother was not with them. They went and returned under Martin's convoy, and till about half way on their way home again all went satisfactorily. Then unfortunately occurred the first ruffle. Maudie had been walking on in front with little Duke, Hoodie and Hec, each with a hand of Martin, behind, when Maudie stopped.

"Martin," she said, "may Duke walk with you a little? He says he's tired."

"Of course, poor dear," said Martin; "come here, Master Duke, and you, Miss Hoodie, go on a little with your sister."

Hoodie let go Martin's hand readily enough.

"Wonders will never cease," thought Martin, but alas, her rejoicing was premature. Hoodie let go her hand, but stood stock still without moving.

"No," she said deliberately, "I won't walk with Maudie. Why can't Hec walk with Maudie, and me stay here?"

"Because he's such a little boy, Miss Hoodie dear, and I daresay both he and Master Duke are getting tired. They've had a long walk you know."

Martin was forgetting her own advice to Maudie. He who stopped to reason with Hoodie was lost indeed!

"And so has me had a long walk, and so you might daresay me is tired too," returned Hoodie, standing her ground both actually and figuratively. Two fat little legs apart, two sturdy little feet planted firmly on the ground, there she stood looking up defiantly in Martin's face, armed for the fight.

"Was there ever such a child?" thought poor Martin. Maudie's words had indeed been quickly fulfilled – here already was a case in which the taking-no-notice system was impossible – the child could not be left by herself on the high-road, where according to present appearances it was evidently her intention to stay unless – she got her own way!

"Well, my dear, I daresay you are tired too," said Martin soothingly, "but still not *so* tired as poor little Duke. You're ever so much bigger you know. Think what tiny little feet your brothers have to trot all along the road on."

"Mines is tiny too. I heard you saying them was very tiny to Mamma one day. And them's just as tired as Duke's; 'cos I'm bigger, my feets have more heavy to carry. I *will* have your hand, Martin, and I won't walk with ugly Maudie."

"But you must, Miss Hoodie," said Martin, attempting firmness and decision as a last resource.

"But I mustn't, 'cos I *won't*," said Hoodie.

Martin glanced back along the road despairingly. Several groups of the country people on their way home from church were approaching the little party as they stood on the footpath.

"Do come on, Martin," said Maudie; "it is so horrid for the people to see such a fuss. And then they say all about that we are all naughty. Look, there's farmer Bright and his daughters coming. Do come on – you'll *have* to let Hoodie walk with you, and Hec'll come with me."

"Miss Hoodie," said Martin once more, "you are to walk on with Miss Maudie, do you hear?"

"Yes," said Hoodie, without moving an inch, "I hear, but I *won't* walk with ugly Maudie."

The Bright family were fast approaching. In despair Martin turned to Hoodie.

"I am obliged to let you walk with me, Miss Julian," she said, solemnly, "because I cannot have every one in the road see how naughty you are. But when we get home I shall speak to your Mamma, and ask her to let you go walks alone. You make us all miserable."

Hoodie took Martin's hand and marched on.

"I should like to go walks alone, werry much," she said, amiably, to which remark Martin did not make any reply.

The Bright family passed them with a friendly word to Martin, saying something in praise of the nice appearance of her little charges. And Hoodie smiled back to farmer Bright, as if she thought herself the best and sweetest-tempered of little girls. Then when they were out of sight, she suddenly dropped Martin's hand.

"I don't want to walk with you. You're an ugly 'sing too," she said. "I like to walk belone, but I would walk with you if I *said* I would."

And on she marched defiantly, well in front of the whole party. And again poor Martin murmured to herself, – "Was there *ever* such a child?"

What was Hoodie saying to herself on in front where no one could hear her?

"They don't love me. They like me to be away. Nobody loves poor Hoodie. Hoodie can't be good when nobody loves her. It isn't Hoodie's fault."

And through her babyish brain there ran misty, dreamy ideas of something she would do to make "them" all sorry – she would go away somewhere "far, far," and never come back again. But where? This she could not yet settle about, but fortunately for the peace of the rest of the walk her cogitations kept her quiet till they were all at home again.

Martin's threat of speaking to Hoodie's mother was not at once carried out. And Martin herself began to think better of it when at tea-time Hoodie behaved herself quite respectably. The naughty mood had passed again for the time, it seemed.

Sitting round the table in the intervals of bread-and-butter and honey – for it was Sunday evening, "honey evening" the little boys called it – the children chatted together pleasantly. Martin's story had greatly impressed them.

"Weren't you frightened at first when you saw the big, big doggie, Martin?" said Maudie.

"*Might* have been a woof," remarked Duke, whose ideas had a knack of getting so well lodged in his brain that it was often difficult to get them out again.

"But there *are* no wolfs. I told you so before," said Maudie.

"No," said Duke, "you toldened Hoodie so. You didn't tolden me."

"Well, *dear* Duke, what does it matter?" said Magdalen, with a slight touch of impatience in her tone. "You heard me say it, and you do go on and on so about a thing."

Hoodie looked up with a twinkle in her eyes.

"Peoples always calls each other 'dear' whenever they doesn't like each other," she remarked.

Maudie flashed round upon her.

"That isn't true. I do like Duke – don't I, Duke? And Hec too – don't I love you dearly, Hec and Duke?"

The two little boys clambered down from their chairs, by slow and ponderous degrees, and a hugging match of the three ensued.

"Children, children," cried Martin, "you know it's against the rules for you to get down from your chairs at tea. Miss Maudie, dear, you shouldn't encourage it."

"But Hoodie said unkind 'sings to Maudie, and we had to kiss dear Maudie," said the little boys. "Naughty Hoodie," and they glanced round indignantly at Hoodie.

A hard look came over Hoodie's face.

"Always naughty Hoodie," she muttered to herself. "Nobody loves Hoodie. Nebber mind. Don't care."

"Little boys," said Martin, "you must go back to your seats and finish your tea. And don't call Miss Hoodie naughty for nothing at all but a little joke."

Hoodie gave a quick glance at Martin.

"Martin," she said, gravely, "if there is no woofs now, is there any grandmothers?"

"Any grandmothers, Miss Hoodie?" repeated Martin. "How do you mean, my dear? of course every one has a grandmother, or has had."

"Oh!" said Hoodie; "I didn't know. And is grandmothers always in cottages?"

"Oh, you silly girl," said Maudie, laughing; "of course not. Don't you remember *our* grandmother? She was here two years ago. But I suppose you're too little to remember."

"Don't laugh at her for not understanding, Miss Maudie," said Martin; "besides, don't you remember your grandmother's address is Parkwood Cottage? Very likely she's thinking of that."

"Yes," said Hoodie, "I was 'sinking of zat. I want a grandmother in a cottage. Grandmother in a cottage would be very kind, and there is no woofs."

"Oh no, Miss Hoodie, there are no wolves," said Martin; "all the wolves were sent away long, long ago. Now, dears, you must have your hands washed and your hairs brushed to go down to the drawing-room."

Hoodie was very quiet that evening. Her father noticed it after the children had gone up to bed again, and said to her mother that he was in hopes the child was going to turn over a new leaf. And her mother replied with a smile that she had been speaking to her very seriously that morning, and was glad to see how well the little girl had taken it. So both father and mother felt satisfied and happy about the child, little imagining the queer confused whirl of ideas at that very moment chasing each other round her busy brain.

For Hoodie did not go to sleep till much later than the others, though she lay so still that her wakefulness was unnoticed. Under her pillow, wrapped up firstly in a piece of newspaper, over that in the clean pocket-handkerchief Martin had given her for church, were three biscuits she had got at dessert, two pieces of bread-and-butter, and one of bread and honey, which unobserved she had "saved" from tea. What she meant to do with these provisions was by no means clear, even in her own mind. She only knew that the proper thing was to have a basket of eatables of some kind, provided for a voyage of discovery such as that on which she was resolved.

"The little Hoodie-girl in the picture has a bastwick, and Martin had a bastwick when she was a Hoodie-girl," she said to herself dreamily. "I will get more bead-and-butter to-morrow and then I can go. After dinner-time Martin wented when she was a Hoodie-girl. I will go after dinner-time too. The grandmother in the cottage will love Hoodie and there is no woofs. Peoples here doesn't love Hoodie."

And so thinking she fell asleep.

The next morning happened to be rainy. Hoodie ate her breakfast in silence, and what she did *not* eat she quietly added to the contents of the pocket-handkerchief parcel. Martin noticed her fumbling at something, but thankful for the quiet state of the atmosphere – otherwise Hoodie's temper – thought it wiser to make no remarks. For after all it was a very April sort of sunshine; and two or three times before dinner there were signs of possible storms – once in particular, when the little boy had got Prince up into the nursery to play with them and Hoodie insisted on turning him out.

"Him's not to come in here," she said; "Hoodie won't have him in here no more."

"*Really*, Hoodie," said Maudie, "this isn't all your room. Why won't you let poor Prince come in? It was only yesterday you were crying because he wouldn't come."

"Cos I loved him yesterday and I don't love him to-day," replied Hoodie coolly.

"And how would you like if people spoke that way to you?" said Maudie virtuously. "Suppose we said we wouldn't have you in the nursery 'cos we don't love you to-day?"

"Don't care," said Hoodie. "You can't send *me* out of the nursery. I'm not a dog. But if I like I can go of my own self," she added mysteriously. "And if peoples don't love me I *sall* go."

Maudie did not catch the sense of the last few words, but Prince, being in his own mind by no means partial to the nursery, where the children's affection expressed itself in clutches and caresses very unsettling to his nerves, had taken advantage of the discussion to go off "of his own self," and in the lamentation over his running away, no more was said, and it was not till afterwards that the elder girl remembered her little sister's threat.

But through dinner-time the hard, half-sullen look stayed on Hoodie's face, and again poor Martin shivered with fear that another storm was coming. Somewhat to her surprise things got no worse – not even when a message came up-stairs from "mother," that Maudie was to be ready to go out a drive with her at two, did Hoodie's rather curiously quiet manner desert her.

"I don't care. Nobody loves me," she repeated to herself, but so low that no one heard her.

"It'll be your turn next time, you know, Hoodie dear. Mother never forgets turns," said Magdalen consolingly, as, arrayed in her "best" white alpaca trimmed with blue, and white hat with blue feathers to match, she ran into the nursery to say good-bye to the stayers-at-home.

"And Miss Hoodie will be good and help me with the little boys, won't you, Miss Hoodie dear?" said Martin. "There's some ironing I do want to get done for your Mamma this afternoon, if I could leave you three alone for a little."

"Susan may stay with them," said Mrs. Caryll, who just then came into the nursery to see if Maudie was ready. "It is too damp still for the boys to go out, but Hoodie can play in the garden a little. She never catches cold and she will be the better for a run – eh, Hoodie?"

No answer. Mrs. Caryll turned to Martin with a question in her face. "Anything wrong again?" it seemed to say.

Martin shook her head.

"I think not, ma'am," she said in a very low voice, "but really there's no saying. But I think she'll be all right once you're started with Miss Magdalen."

Mrs. Caryll said no more. She took Maudie by the hand and left the nursery, only nodding good-bye to the little boys as she passed through the doorway.

"Good-bye, darlings," said Maudie. "I'll bring you back something nice for tea."

"Dood-bye, dear Maudie," called out Hec and Duke in return. Then they flew – no, I can hardly use that word with regard to their sturdy little legs' trot across the room – they trotted off to the window to see the carriage as it passed the corner of the drive and to kiss their little hands to Mamma and Maudie. And Hoodie remained determinedly looking out of the other window, from which no drive and no carriage were to be seen.

"Nobody calls me darling. Nobody cares for Hoodie," she said to herself. "Nebber mind. Hoodie will go far, far."

When Martin called to her a few minutes afterwards, to put her hat and jacket on for the run in the garden, which her mother had spoken of, she came at once, and stood quite still while her nurse dressed her. The submission struck Martin as rather suspicious.

"Now Miss Hoodie, my dear," she said, "you'll not go on the grass or where it's wet. Just run about on the nice dry gravel for half an hour or so, and if you see the gardener about, you may ask him to show you the rabbits."

Hoodie looked up in Martin's face with a rather curious expression.

"I won't run in the grass," was all she said. Martin let her go off without any misgiving. For all Hoodie's strange temper she was in some ways a particularly sensible child for her age. She was quite to be trusted to play alone in the garden, for instance – she might have been safely left within reach of the most beautiful flowers in the conservatory without any special warning; not one would have been touched. She was truly, as Martin said, a strange mixture and contradiction.

She had made her way half down the staircase, when she suddenly remembered her basket.

"Oh, my bastwick," she exclaimed. "I was nearly forgetting my bastwick," and up-stairs again she climbed to the cupboard, in one dark corner of which she had hidden it. Luckily it was still there; no one had touched it; so feeling herself quite equipped for the journey, Hoodie walked out of the front door, crossed the gravel drive, and made her way down a little path with a rustic gate at the end leading straight out on to the high road. When she got there she stood still and looked about her. Which way should she go? It had turned out a beautiful afternoon, though the morning had been so stormy. The road was nearly dry already, the sky overhead was blue, save here and there where little feathery clouds were flying about in some agitation; it might rain again before night, for though not exactly cold, there was no summer glow as yet, and the sunshine, though bright, had a very April feeling about it.

Hoodie stood still and looked about her, up and down the road. It was a pretty, peaceful scene – the broad well-kept highway, bordered at one side with beautiful old trees just bursting into bloom, and across, on the other side of the low hedge, the fresh green fields, all the fresher for the morning's rain, in some of which already the tender little lambkins were sporting about or cuddling in by the side of their warm woolly ewe-mothers.

"I wish I was a lamb," thought Hoodie, as her glance fell on them. Then as she looked away beyond the fields to where in the distance the land sloped upwards into softly rising hills, a flight of birds attracted her attention. How prettily they flew, waving, now upwards, now downwards, like one long ribbon against the sky. "Or a little bird," she added. "If I was up there I could see so nicely where to go, and I could fly, fly, till I got to the sun."

But just then the sound of wheels coming near brought her thoughts down to earth again. Which way should she go?

She *must* pass through a wood. That was the only thing that at present she felt sure of, and there was a wood she remembered some way down the road, past Mr. Bright's farm. So down the road Hoodie trotted, her basket firmly clasped in her hand, her little figure the only moving thing to be seen along the queen's highway. For the cart to which the wheels belonged had passed quickly – it was only the grocer from the neighbouring town, so on marched Hoodie undisturbed. A little on this side of farmer Bright's a lane turned off to the left. This lane, Hoodie decided, must be the way to the wood, so she left the road and went along the lane for about a quarter of a mile, till, to her perplexity, it ended in a sort of little croft with a stile at each side. Hoodie climbed up both stiles in turns and looked about her. The wood was not to be seen from either, but across a field from the second stile she saw the tops of some trees standing on lower ground.

"That must be the wood," thought Hoodie, and down she clambered again to fetch her basket which she had left on the other side. With some difficulty she hoisted it and herself up again, with greater difficulty got it and herself down the steps on the further side, and then set off triumphantly at a run in the direction of the trees she had seen.

So far she was right. These trees were the beginning of a wood – a pretty little wood with a tiny stream running through the middle, and little nests of ferns and mosses in among the stones and tree-stumps on its banks – a very pretty little wood it must be in summer-time with the trees more fully out and the ground dry and crisp, and clear of the last year's leaves which still gave it a desolate appearance. Hoodie's spirits rose. She was getting on famously. Soon she might expect to see the grandmother's cottage, where no doubt the kettle would be boiling on the fire to make tea for her, and the table all nicely spread. For already she was beginning to feel hungry; she had journeyed, it seemed to her, a very long way, and more than once she eyed her basket wistfully, wondering if she might eat just one piece of the bread-and-butter.

"The little Hoodie-girl in the picture didn't, and Martin didn't," she said to herself. "So I 'ppose I'd better not. And perhaps if the woofs saw me eating, it would make them come."

The idea made her shiver.

"But Maudie said there was no woofs," she added. "Maudie said there wasn't no woofs. But I *wish* I could see the cottage."

On and on she made her way, – here and there with really great difficulty, for there was no proper path, and sometimes the big tree-stumps were almost higher than her fat, rather short legs could either stride across or climb over. More than once she scratched these same bare legs pretty badly, and but for the resolution which was a strong part of her character, the queer little girl would have sat down on the ground and burst into tears. But she struggled on, and at last, to her delight, the trees in front of her cleared suddenly, and she saw before her a little hilly path surmounted by a stile. Hoodie clapped her hands, or would have done so but for the interference of the basket.

"Hoodie's out of the wood," she said joyfully, "and up there perhaps I'll see the cottage."

It happened that she was right. When she reached the stile, there, sure enough, across another little field the cottage, *a* cottage any way, was to be seen. A neat little cottage, something like the description Martin had given of *her* grandmother's cottage, which, jumbled up with the picture of long ago Red Riding Hood the first, on the nursery walls, was in Hoodie's mind as a sort of model of that in quest of which she had set out on her voyage of discovery. This cottage too had a little garden with a path up the middle, and at each side were beds, neatly bordered, which in summer-time no doubt would be gay with simple flowers. Hoodie glanced round the little garden approvingly as she made her way up to the door.

"It's just like Martin's cottage," she thought. "But the Hoodie-girl in the picture was pulling somesing for the door to open and I don't see nosing to pull. I must knock I 'appose. I am *so* glad there's been none woofs."

Knock – knock – no answer. Knock, knock, *knock* a little louder this time. Hoodie began to wonder if the grandmother was going to be out, like the one in Martin's story – no – a sound at last of some one coming to open.

CHAPTER III. LITTLE BABY AND ITS MOTHER

"Polly put the kettle on,
And let's have tea."

The latch was lifted from the inside, and there stood before Hoodie – not an old woman with either "big" or little eyes, not a "grandmother" with a frilly cap all round her face, such as she had been vaguely expecting, yet certainly not a "woof" either! The person who stood in the doorway smiling down on the little girl was a very pretty and pleasant-looking young woman, with a fresh rosy face and merry eyes, and a sleeping baby in her arms!

For the first moment Hoodie was too surprised to understand what she saw.

At last, "I want my grandmother," she said. "*You* aren't my grandmother. I thought this was her cottage."

The young woman smiled again.

"No, Missy, you must have made a mistake. But *your* grandmother doesn't live in a little cottage like this, Missy, I'm sure. You must have quite come out of your road. Whose little lady are you?"

Hoodie shook her head.

"I want to live with my grandmother," she replied. "I don't want to be anybody's little lady. I've come such a long way – I know the cottage should be aside a wood, just like this. And I'm *so* tired and firsty."

The quiver in her voice told that the self-control was coming to an end. The young woman's sympathy awoke at once.

"Poor dear," she said. "Tired, of course you must be tired. Come in, dearie, and sit you down, and you shall have something to drink and to eat too, if you please. What would you like?" she went on, after she had established Hoodie on a funny little arm-chair by the fire – a chair bought last fair-day by her husband in his extreme delight at being the possessor of a fortnight old baby – "what would you like, Missy – a cup of milk – or some tea? Kettle's boiling, and 'tis just upon tea-time."

"What a nice little chair," said Hoodie, making the observation that first came into her head before replying to the questions asked her, as was a habit of hers. "What a nice little chair! It just fits me," turning her fat little body – to confess the truth, a rather tight fit – and the chair about together, like a snail congratulating itself on its shell.

"Yes, Missy, and you're the first as has ever sat in it. It's to be for baby, the dear, as soon as she's old enough to sit up in it. But about what you'd like to drink, Missy?"

"I were going to tell you," said Hoodie, with a touch of her usual authoritative manner. "I were going to tell you. I'd like tea – proper tea on a table, 'cos I've got my bicsits and 'sings in my bastwick, and we could put them out nicely. And if it's so far away to my grandmother's perhaps I'd better stay here and fancy you're her" – she glanced up in the young woman's face with such a queer, half-puzzled, half-comical look in her eyes that her new friend really began to wonder if the child was quite "right" in her head – "it would seem more like it, if we had proper tea on a table. But asides that, I'm so firsty I'd like a cup of milk first – just cold milk belone you know, to take away the firsty. Martin *sometimes* gives me a drink of milk like that just afore tea when I'm very firsty, even though she says it spoils my tea."

"But I don't think it'll spoil your tea to-day, Missy," said the young woman, as she fetched the cup of milk. "You've come a long way, you see," she added, with a view to drawing Hoodie out as to her home and belongings.

"And you'll give me *real* tea, won't you, little baby's mother? Not just milk and pertence?" inquired Hoodie, anxiously, as she watched the preparations for the meal.

"Of course, Missy, you must have real tea, as you've come so far to see me. Which way did you come? I don't think I've ever seen you before, but then we've only been here a few weeks, since Thomas engaged with Farmer Bright."

"I didn't come to see you, little baby's mother," said Hoodie, "I came to look for a grandmother in a cottage. But you're very nice, only – oh, do let me hold the little baby!" she exclaimed, seeing that the still sleeping child was about to be deposited in its cradle, as it was rather in its mother's way when lifting the kettle and so on; – "*do* let me hold it!"

She held out her arms and smoothed a place on her knees for it, all ready. "Little baby's mother" had not the heart to refuse, though somewhat misdoubting but that poor baby would have been better in its cradle. But baby did not seem to think so; she gave one or two funny little yawns, half opened her eyes, and then composed herself to sleep again most philosophically in Hoodie's embrace. She was a nice baby and daintily cared for, even though her home was only a stone-floored cottage. She was number one in the first place, which says a good deal, and she was an extremely healthy and satisfactory baby in herself – and altogether as sweet and fresh and loveable as a wee baby buttercup under a hedge.

The young mother eyed the little couple with great admiration.

"How cleverly she holds it, to be sure!" she said to herself; adding to Hoodie, "You must have a baby at home, Miss, surely?" the remark as she made it reminding her of her anxiety to find out where the "home" of her mysterious little visitor was. "I cannot but give her her tea," she said to herself; "but I hope I sha'n't get into blame for keeping her here, if she's run away from her nurse unbeknown-like."

"No," said Hoodie, with a melancholy tone in her voice. "There isn't no baby at home. Only Hec and Duke, and they're too big to be pettened, and they like Maudie better than me."

"Do they really, Missy!" said the young woman. "Well, I'm sure I think you're a very nice young lady, and baby thinks so too, it's plain to see. See, she's waking, the darling."

Hoodie stared solemnly at the baby as if some extraordinary marvel were about to happen. What did happen was this. Baby stretched itself, doubled up its little pink fists, as if to box some one, yawned, half opened its eyes, and then closed them again, having apparently considered the question of waking up and thought better of it – rolled over again, and again yawned, and finally opening its nice, baby blue eyes and gazing up inquiringly into Hoodie's face, slowly and deliberately *smiled* at her – a sweet baby smile, half-patronizing, half-mysterious, as if it had been away in some wonderful baby fairy-land which it would have liked to tell her about if it could, and rather pitied her for not having seen for herself. Hoodie gazed, enraptured. A pretty bright smile, a smile, it must be confessed, not too often seen there, broke over her own little face, and at the sight baby's satisfaction expressed itself in a regular chuckle. Hoodie turned to the young woman with a curious triumph.

"Little baby's mother," she said, half awe-struck as it were, "I do believe she *loves* me."

"Of course she does, and why shouldn't she?" replied the young mother heartily, yet feeling conscious of not altogether understanding the little girl. "Why shouldn't she love you, Missy? Little tiny babies like her always does love those as is kind to them. Don't you love your dear mamma, Missy? and your sisters if you have any – and what made you love them first, before you could understand like, if it wasn't that they loved you and were kind to you?"

Hoodie shook her head – her usual refuge in perplexity.

"I don't know," she said. "I like peoples to love me lots – gate lots. I don't 'zink anybody loves me lots. If I was always to sit here holding baby so nice, do you think she'd love me lots?"

Baby's mother laughed outright.

"I don't know that, Missy," she said, "she'd get very hungry and cry. And you'd be hungry, too. Aren't you hungry now? The tea's all ready, see, Missy, and your bread and butter's laid out."

But I'm afraid it's rather hard. Won't you have some of mine instead – its nice and fresh. Has yours been packed up a long time?"

Hoodie's attention being drawn to the bread and butter, she allowed baby's mother to regain possession of her treasure, and clambered up herself to the chair placed for her. When safely installed she eyed the provisions suspiciously.

"I 'zink yours is nicer, little baby's mother," she said graciously, having first bitten a piece of her own rather uninviting bread. "It was only packened up last night – but perhaps it was the taking it to bed. I took it to bed acos I didn't want nobody to see. But the bicsits is nice. Mayn't baby have a bicsit, little baby's mother? If I had got to the grandmother's cottage there'd have been cake. You hasn't none cake, has you?"

"No, Missy. You see I didn't know you were coming. If your mamma would let you come another day and I knew in time, I could bake a nice cake."

"Yes," said Hoodie, "and baby might have some. Does baby like cake?"

"She hasn't no teeth to bite it with yet, Missy dear," said the young woman.

"No teess!" exclaimed Hoodie, "what a funny baby. Did God forget zem?" she added, in a lower voice.

The young woman turned away to hide her laughter; and just at this moment there came a rap at the door – a well-known rap evidently, for up jumped the young woman with a pleased face.

"David!" she exclaimed, as she opened the door, "I thought you wouldn't be back till late, or I'd have waited tea."

"I came in to say as I've got to go out again," said the man – a good-humoured looking young labourer – "little baby" had every reason to be good-humoured with such pleasant tempered father and mother! – "I've to drive over to Greenoaks to fetch some little pigs, so I mayn't be in till late. But bless us!" he exclaimed, as he just then caught sight of Hoodie seated in perfect satisfaction and evidently quite at home, at the tea-table, "who ever's this you've got with you, Liz?"

His surprise was so comical that it set "Liz" off laughing again.

"Bless *me* if I can tell you, David," she said. "She's the most old-fashioned little piece of goods I ever came across. But such a nice little lady too, and that taken with our baby! She won't tell me her name nor nothing," and then she went on to describe to David, Hoodie's arrival and all she had said.

David scratched his head, as, half hidden in the doorway, where Hoodie had not yet caught sight of him, he glanced at the child, still deeply interested in her "tea."

"It's my opinion," he said solemnly, as if what he was about to say was something that could not possibly have struck any one else; "it's my opinion as her nurse or some one has been cross to her and she's runned away."

"But what shall we do?" said Mrs. Liz, a little anxiously. "How shall we find out where she belongs to?"

"Oh, easy enough," said David. "She's but a baby. And even if she wouldn't tell, you may be sure they'll soon be sending after her. I could take her home on my way to Greenoaks if I knew where it was. Can't be far off – maybe it's one of the clergyman's children down by Springley."

"They've none so little," said Mrs. David. "But there's Squire Caryll's – I heard say there's a sight o' little ones there. 'Twill be there."

"Likely enough," said David. "But I'd like a cup o' tea, Liz, if the young lady'll excuse my being rather rough like."

Lizzie laughed.

"She's but a baby," she said; and so David came forward and sat down at the table.

Hoodie looked up from her tea and stopped half way through a "bicsit" to take a good stare at the new comer.

"Who is zou, please?" she said at last.

David looked rather awkward. It was somewhat embarrassing to be calmly challenged in this way at his own table, poor man, by a mite of a creature like this! He relieved his feelings by a glance at his wife and a faint whistle.

"Well, to be sure!" he exclaimed.

Lizzie understood the small questioner better.

"Why, Missy," she said, "'Tis David. He's baby's father, and this is his house, and he's very pleased to see you here."

Hoodie looked again at David; this time he seemed to find more favour in her eyes.

"At the grandmother's cottage there wouldn't have been no Davids," she remarked. "His hands is rather dirty, isn't they, little baby's mother?"

This was too much for David – he went off into a roar. Hoodie looked up doubtfully – was he laughing at *her*? – in her opinion, an unpardonable crime – but David's funny, good-natured face gained the day, and after a moment's hesitation Hoodie joined in the fun and laughed too, though at what she certainly didn't know.

Friendly feeling thus established, David thought it time to begin his inquiries.

"Hope you've enjoyed your tea, Miss," he said. "You must a been hungry after such a long walk. Round by Springley way was it?"

"*What* did you say?" said Hoodie, opening her eyes. David's tone and accent were puzzling to her.

"He says, was it round by Springley way you came, Missy – the way the church is?"

"Oh no, not the church way. I comed srough the wood and past Farmer Bright's. Home is not the church way," said Hoodie unsuspectingly.

David and his wife nodded at each other. "Squire Caryll's," whispered Lizzie.

"I'll be passing that way in the cart," said David. "Would you like a ride, Miss?"

Hoodie shook her head.

"No," she said decidedly, "I want to stay and nurse baby. May I take her now?" she added, preparing to descend from her chair.

David could not help bursting out laughing again.

"What wages is her to get, Liz?" he inquired.

Hoodie turned upon him indignantly.

"Ugly man," she exclaimed; "you'se not to laugh at me. I don't love you. I love baby —*please* give me baby," she said beseechingly to the young woman. "I'm all zeady," for by this time she was again settled in the little chair and had smoothed a place for baby.

Lizzie good-humouredly laid baby again in her arms.

"Hold her tight, please, Missy," she said, turning towards the door with her husband at a sign from him, and Hoodie sat in perfect content for some minutes till baby's mother returned.

"Has zat ugly man gone?" inquired Hoodie coolly. "I'll stay with you and baby, but I don't like zat man."

"But he's a nice man, Missy," said Mrs. David. "I don't know about his being very pretty, but he's very kind to baby and me, and that's better than being pretty, isn't it, Missy?"

"I don't know," said Hoodie.

After a time, in spite of her devotion, baby's unaccustomed weight made her little arms ache.

"When does baby go to bed?" she asked.

Baby's mother seized the opportunity.

"Now, I think," she said. "I'll put her in her cradle for a bit, and then you and I can talk a little. – Don't you think, Missy?" she went on, when baby was safely deposited and Hoodie was free to stretch her tired little arms, "don't you think your poor mamma will be wondering where you are all this time?"

"She's out d'iving in the calliage with Maudie. She won't know where I'm gonod," replied Hoodie.

"But your nurse, Missy —*she'll* have missed you?" said Mrs. David.

"We haven't no nurse. We've only Martin," replied Hoodie, "and Martin loves Hec and Duke and Maudie best. She 'zinks Hoodie's naughty. She *always* says Hoodie's naughty."

"Little baby's mother" did not know very well what to reply to this, so she contented herself with a general reflection.

"All little girls are naughty sometimes," she said.

"Yes," said Hoodie, "but not *always*. I'd like to stay here with you and baby, little baby's mother, 'cos baby loves me, if you wouldn't have zat ugly man here."

"But it's his house, Missy. We couldn't turn him out of his own house, could we? And I'm afearod there'd be many things you'd want we couldn't give you? At home you've a nice little room now, all carpeted and curtained, haven't you? And a pretty little bed all for yourself? We've nothing like that – we've only one room besides the kitchen."

Hoodie did not at once reply. She appeared to be thinking things over.

"I'd *like* to stay," she remarked after a while, "but I'd rather be let alone with you and baby. I don't like zat man. But if you haven't a room for me perhaps I'd better go and look for a grandmother's cottage again, and I'll come and see you sometimes, and baby, little baby's mother."

"Yes, that you must, Missy, and bring little brothers too. You won't think of going off to look for your grandmother again just yet. Perhaps it's quite a long way off by the railway she lives. Couldn't you ask your mamma to write her a letter and tell her how much you'd like to see her?"

"But I want to go to her *cottage*," persisted Hoodie. "I know it is a cottage, Martin said so. I shouldn't want her if she wasn't in a cottage. And I saw it in the Hoodie-girl picture too."

This was getting beyond poor Mrs. David; and finding herself not understood, added to Hoodie's irritation. She was half way, more than half way, fully three-quarters of the way into one of her hopeless crying fits, when fortunately there came an interruption.

Hasty steps were heard coming up the garden path, followed by a hasty knock at the door. And almost before Lizzie could get to open it, two people hurried into the room. They were Martin and Cross the coachman. Hoodie looked up calmly.

"Has you come to fetch me?" she inquired. "I didn't *want* to go home, but little baby's mother hasn't got enough little beds, but I'm going to come back here again. I *will*, whatever you say."

Well as Martin knew the child, this was a degree too much for her. To have spent between two and three hours in really terrible anxiety about the little girl; to have had to bear some amount of reproach for not having sooner discovered Hoodie's escape; to have rushed off to fetch her on receiving the joyful news from the young labourer as he drove past Mr. Caryll's house, her heart full of the tenderest pity for her stray nursling who she never doubted had somehow lost her way, – all this had been trying enough for poor Martin. But to be met in this heartless way by the child – before strangers, too – to be coolly defied beforehand, as it were – it was too much. It was a toss-up between tears and temper. Unfortunately Martin chose the latter.

"Miss Hoodie," she exclaimed, "you're a naughty, ungrateful little girl, a really naughty-hearted little girl – to have upset us all at home so; your poor mamma nearly ill with fright, and then to meet me like that. Speaking about not wanting to come home, and you will and you won't. I never heard anything like it. And to think of all the trouble you must have given to this – this young woman," she added, turning civilly enough, but with some little hesitation in her manner, to Mrs. Lizzie, as if not *quite* sure whether she did not deserve some share of the blame.

Poor Lizzie had stood a little apart, looking rather frightened. In her eyes Martin was a dignified and important person. But now she came forward eagerly.

"Trouble," she repeated, "oh dear no, ma'am. Little Miss hasn't given me one bit of trouble, and nothing but a pleasure 'twould have been, but for thinking you'd all be put out so about her at

home. But you'll let her come again some day when she's passing, to see me and baby. She's been so taken up with the baby, has Missy."

Martin hesitated. She wanted to be civil and kind – Mrs. Caryll had expressly desired her to thank the cottager's wife for taking care of the little truant, and Martin was by nature sensible and gentle, and not the least inclined to give herself airs as if she thought herself better than other people. But Hoodie's behaviour had quite upset her. She did not feel at all ready to reply graciously to Lizzie's meek invitation. So she stood still and hesitated. And seeing her hesitation, naughty Hoodie darted forward and threw her arms round Lizzie's neck, hugging and kissing her.

"I *sall* come to see you, I will, I *sall*," she cried. "Never mind what that naughty, ugly 'sing says. I *will* come, dear little baby's mother."

Martin was almost speechless with indignation. Poor Lizzie saw that she was angry, yet she had not the heart to put away the child clinging to her so affectionately, and David's words "perhaps her nurse is cross to her at home," came back to her mind. Things might really have become very uncomfortable indeed, but for Cross, the coachman, who unexpectedly came to the rescue. He had been standing by, rather, to tell the truth – now that the anxiety which he as well as the rest of the household had felt, was relieved – enjoying the scene.

"Miss Hoodie's a rare one, to be sure," he said to himself, chuckling quietly. But when he saw that Martin was really taking things seriously, and that the young woman too looked distressed and anxious, he came forward quietly, and before Hoodie knew what he was doing he had lifted her up with a spring on to his shoulder, where she sat perched like a little queen.

"Now, Miss Hoodie," he said, "if you'll be good, perhaps I'll carry you home."

Hoodie, though extremely well pleased with her new and exalted position, was true to her colours.

"*Carry* me home, Coss," she said imperiously; "hasn't you brought the calliage for me?"

"No, indeed I haven't," replied Cross; "little Misses as runs away from home can't expect to be fetched back in a carriage and pair. I think you're very well off as it is. But we must make haste home – just think how frightened your poor mamma has been."

Hoodie tossed her head. Some very naughty imp seemed to have got her in his possession just then.

"Gee-up, gee-who, get along, horsey," she cried, pummelling Cross's shoulders unmercifully with her feet. "Gallop away, old horse Coss, gee-up, gee-up. Good night, little baby's mother, I *sall* come back;" and Cross, thankful to get her away on any terms, turned to the door, humouring her by pretending to trot and gallop. But half way down the little garden path Hoodie suddenly pulled him up, literally pulled him up, by claspng him with her two arms so tightly round the throat that he was nearly strangled.

"Stop, stop, horsey," she cried, "I haven't kissed the baby. I must kiss the baby."

Even Cross's good nature was nearly at an end, but he dared not oppose her. He stood still, very red in the face, with some muttered exclamation, while Hoodie screamed to Lizzie to bring out the baby to be kissed, perfectly regardless of Martin's remonstrances.

And in this fashion at last Hoodie was brought home – Martin walking home in silent despair alongside. Only when they got close to the lodge gate Hoodie pulled up Cross again, but this time in much gentler fashion.

"Let me down, Coss, please," she said, meekly enough, "I'd rather walk now."

And walk in she did, as demurely and comfortably as if she had just returned from an ordinary walk with her nurse.

"Was there ever such a child?" said Martin to herself again.

And poor Cross, as he walked away wiping his forehead, decided in his own mind that he'd rather have the breaking in of twenty young horses than of such a queer specimen as little Miss Hoodie.

CHAPTER IV. MAUDIE'S GODMOTHER

"If you'd have children safe abroad,
Just keep them safe at home."

They were all standing at the door – Maudie, Hec and Duke, that is to say, and mother in the background, and farther back still, half the servants of the household. But Hoodie marched in demurely by Martin's side – nay, more, she had taken hold of Martin's hand. And when Mrs. Caryll came forward hurriedly to meet them, of the two, Martin looked much the more upset and uncomfortable.

"You have brought her back safe and sound, Martin!" exclaimed Hoodie's mother. "Oh, Hoodie, what a fright you have given us! What was she doing? How was it, Martin?"

Martin hesitated.

"If you please, ma'am," she said, "I think I'd rather tell you all about it afterwards. It's not late, but Miss Hoodie *must* be tired. Won't it be as well, ma'am, for her to go to bed at once?"

Mrs. Caryll understood Martin's manner.

"Yes," she said. "I think it will. Say good night to me, Hoodie, and to Maudie and your brothers. And to-morrow morning you must come early to my room. I want to talk to you."

Hoodie looked up curiously in her mother's face. Was she vexed, or sorry, or what? Hoodie could not decide.

"Good night, mother," she said, quietly. "Good night, Hec and Duke and Maudie," and she coolly turned away, and followed Martin up-stairs.

The three other children crept round their mother. She looked pale and troubled.

"Mamma," said one of the little boys, "has Hoodie been *naughty*? Aren't you glad she's come home?"

Mrs. Caryll stroked his head.

"Yes, dear," she said. "Of course I'm glad, *very* glad. But it wasn't good of her to frighten us all so, and I must make her understand that."

"*Of course*," said Maudie, virtuously. "You don't understand, Hec."

"But if we had all kissened Hoodie, she'd have known we were glad she had comed back," said Hec, still with a tone of being only half satisfied.

A shadow crossed Mrs. Caryll's face. Was her little son's instinct right?

"Shall us all go and kissen her now?" suggested Duke in a whisper to Maudie.

"No, of course not," replied Magdalen. "You're too little to understand, and you're teasing poor mamma. Come with me and we'll play at something in the study till Martin comes for you. Don't be unhappy, dear mamma," she added, turning to kiss her mother. "I am sure Hoodie didn't mean to vex you, only she is so strange."

That was just it – Hoodie was so strange, so self-willed, and yet babyish, so heartless, and yet so impressionable. A sharp word or tone even would make her cry, and she was sensitive to even less than that, yet seemingly quite careless of the trouble and distress she caused to others.

"My good little Maudie," said Mrs. Caryll, "why should not Hoodie too be a good and understandable little girl?" she added to herself.

And what were the thoughts in Hoodie's queer little brain; what were the feelings in her queer little heart, when Martin had safely tucked her into her own nice little cot, and, rather shortly, bidden her lie quite still and not disturb her brothers when they came up to bed?

"I wish I had stayed with little baby's mother," she said to herself. "Nobody was glad for me to come home. They is all ugly 'sings. Nobody kissened me. If it wasn't for zat ugly man I'd go back there, I would, whatever Martin said."

"I really think sometimes that there's something wanting in her nature," said Hoodie's mother, sadly, that same evening. She had been listening to Martin's account of the meeting at the cottage, and was now telling over the whole affair in the drawing-room, for Mr. Caryll had only returned home late that evening, as he had been some way by train to meet a visitor who was coming to stay for a time at his house. This was a cousin of his wife's, a young lady named Magdalen King, who occupied the important position of Maudie's godmother. It was some years since Cousin Magdalen had seen the children, but she had so often received descriptions of them from their mother that she seemed to know them quite well. She listened with great interest to the account of Hoodie's escapade.

"She must be a strange little girl," she remarked, quietly.

"Yes," said Mrs. Caryll, "so strange that, as I said, I really think sometimes there is something wanting in her nature."

"Or unawakened," said Magdalen. "I don't pretend to understand children well – you know I was an only child – but still a little child's nature cannot be very easy to understand at the best of times. It must be so folded up, as it were, like a little half-opened bud. And then children's power of expressing themselves is so small – they must often feel themselves misunderstood and yet not know how to say even that. And oh, dear, what a puzzle life and the world and everything must seem to them!"

"Not to them only, my dear Magdalen," said Mr. Caryll, drily.

"And," said Mrs. Caryll, "it really isn't always the case that children are difficult to understand. None of ours are but Hoodie. There's Maudie now – she has always been a delicious child, and the little boys are very nice, except when Hoodie upsets them. But for her, as she is constantly told, there never would be the least ruffle in the nursery."

"But does it do any good to tell her so?" said Miss King.

Hoodie's mother smiled, "My dear Magdalen," she said, "wait till you see her. What *would*

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