

Coolidge Susan

Nine Little Goslings



Susan Coolidge
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Nine Little Goslings

When nursery lamps are veiled, and nurse is singing
In accents low,
Timing her music to the cradle's swinging,
Now fast, now slow, —

Singing of Baby Bunting, soft and furry
In rabbit cloak,
Or rock-a-byed amid the toss and flurry
Of wind-swept oak;

Of Boy-Blue sleeping with his horn beside him,
Of my son John,
Who went to bed (let all good boys deride him)
With stockings on;

Of sweet Bo-Peep following her lambkins straying;
Of Dames in shoes;
Of cows, considerate, 'mid the Piper's playing,
Which tune to choose;

Of Gotham's wise men bowling o'er the billow,
Or him, less wise,
Who chose rough bramble-bushes for a pillow,
And scratched his eyes, —

It may be, while she sings, that through the portal
Soft footsteps glide,
And, all invisible to grown-up mortal,
At cradle side

Sits Mother Goose herself, the dear old mother,
And rocks and croons,
In tones which Baby hearkens, but no other,
Her old-new tunes!

I think it must be so, else why, years after,
Do we retrace
And mix with shadowy, recollected laughter
Thoughts of that face;

Seen, yet unseen, beaming across the ages,
Brimful of fun
And wit and wisdom, baffling all the sages
Under the sun?

A grown-up child has place still, which no other
May dare refuse;
I, grown up, bring this offering to our Mother,
To Mother Goose;

And, standing with the babies at that olden,
Immortal knee,
I seem to feel her smile, benign and golden,
Falling on me.

CURLY LOCKS

WHEN a little girl is six and a little boy is six, they like pretty much the same things and enjoy pretty much the same games. She wears an apron, and he a jacket and trousers, but they are both equally fond of running races, spinning tops, flying kites, going down hill on sleds, and making a noise in the open air. But when the little girl gets to be eleven or twelve, and to grow thin and long, so that every two months a tuck has to be let down in her frocks, then a great difference becomes visible. The boy goes on racing and whooping and comporting himself generally like a young colt in a pasture; but she turns quiet and shy, cares no longer for rough play or exercise, takes droll little sentimental fancies into her head, and likes best the books which make her cry. Almost all girls have a fit of this kind some time or other in the course of their lives; and it is rather a good thing to have it early, for little folks get over such attacks more easily than big ones. Perhaps we may live to see the day when wise mammas, going through the list of nursery diseases which their children have had, will wind up triumphantly with, "Mumps, measles, chicken-pox, – and they are all over with 'Amy Herbert,' 'The Heir of Redclyffe,' and the notion that they are going to be miserable for the rest of their lives!"

Sometimes this odd change comes after an illness when a little girl feels weak and out of sorts, and does not know exactly what is the matter. This is the way it came to Johnnie Carr, a girl whom some of you who read this are already acquainted with. She had intermittent fever the year after her sisters Katy and Clover came from boarding-school, and was quite ill for several weeks. Everybody in the house was sorry to have Johnnie sick. Katy nursed, petted, and cosseted her in the tenderest way. Clover brought flowers to the bedside and read books aloud, and told Johnnie interesting stories. Elsie cut out paper dolls for her by dozens, painted their cheeks pink and their eyes blue, and made for them beautiful dresses and jackets of every color and fashion. Papa never came in without some little present or treat in his pocket for Johnnie. So long as she was in bed, and all these nice things were doing for her, Johnnie liked being ill very much, but when she began to sit up and go down to dinner, and the family spoke of her as almost well again, *then* a time of unhappiness set in. The Johnnie who got out of bed after the fever was not the Johnnie of a month before. There were two inches more of her for one thing, for she had taken the opportunity to grow prodigiously, as sick children often do. Her head ached at times, her back felt weak, and her legs shook when she tried to run about. All sorts of queer and disagreeable feelings attacked her. Her hair had fallen out during the fever so that Papa thought it best to have it shaved close. Katy made a pretty silk-lined cap for her to wear, but the girls at school laughed at the cap, and that troubled Johnnie very much. Then, when the new hair grew, thick and soft as the plumy down on a bird's wing, a fresh affliction set in, for the hair came out in small round rings all over her head, which made her look like a baby. Elsie called her "Curly," and gradually the others adopted the name, till at last nobody used any other except the servants, who still said "Miss Johnnie." It was hard to recognize the old Johnnie, square and sturdy and full of merry life, in poor, thin, whining Curly, always complaining of something, who lay on the sofa reading story-books, and begging Phil and Dorry to let her alone, not to tease her, and to go off and play by themselves. Her eyes looked twice as big as usual, because her face was so small and pale, and though she was still a pretty child, it was in a different way from the old prettiness. Katy and Clover were very kind and gentle always, but Elsie sometimes lost patience entirely, and the boys openly declared that Curly was a cross-patch, and hadn't a bit of fun left in her.

One afternoon she was lying on the sofa with the "Wide Wide World" in her hand. Her eyelids were very red from crying over Alice's death, but she had galloped on, and was now reading the part where Ellen Montgomery goes to live with her rich relatives in Scotland.

"Oh, dear," sighed Johnnie. "How splendid it was for her! Just think, Clover, riding lessons, and a watch, and her uncle takes her to see all sorts of places, and they call her their White Rose! Oh, dear! I wish *we* had relations in Scotland."

"We haven't, you know," remarked Clover, threading her needle with a fresh bit of blue worsted.

"I know it. It's too bad. Nothing ever does happen in this stupid place. The girls in books always do have such nice times. Ellen could leap, and she spoke French *beautifully*. She learned at that place, you know, the place where the Humphreys lived."

"Litchfield Co., Connecticut," said Clover mischievously. "Katy was there last summer, you recollect. I guess they don't *all* speak such good French. Katy didn't notice it."

"Ellen did," persisted Johnnie. "Her uncle and all those people were so surprised when they heard her. Wouldn't it be grand to be an adopted child, Clover?"

"To be adopted by people who gave you your bath like a baby when you were thirteen years old, and tapped your lips when they didn't want you to speak, and stole your Pilgrim's Progresses? No, thank you. I would much rather stay as I am."

"I wouldn't," replied Johnnie pensively. "I don't like this place very much. I should love to be rich and to travel in Europe."

At this moment Papa and Katy came in together. Katy was laughing, and Papa looked as if he had just bitten a smile off short. In his hand was a letter.

"Oh, Clovy," began Katy, but Papa interposed with "Katy, hold your tongue;" and though he looked quizzical as he said it, Katy saw that he was half in earnest, and stopped at once.

"We're about to have a visitor," he went on, picking Johnnie up and settling her in his lap, – "a distinguished visitor. Curly, you must put on your best manners, for she comes especially to see you."

"A visitor! How nice! Who is it?" cried Clover and Johnnie with one voice. Visitors were rare in Burnet, and the children regarded them always as a treat.

"Her name is Miss Inches, – Marion Joanna Inches," replied Dr. Carr, glancing at the letter. "She's a sort of godmother of yours, Curly; you've got half her name."

"Was I really named after her?"

"Yes. She and Mamma were school-friends, and though they never met after leaving school, Mamma was fond of her, and when little No. 4 came, she decided to call her after her old intimate. That silver mug of yours was a present from her."

"Was it? Where does she live?"

"At a place called Inches Mills, in Massachusetts. She's the rich lady of the village, and has a beautiful house and grounds, where she lives all alone by herself. Her letter is written at Niagara. She is going to the Mammoth Cave, and writes to ask if it will be convenient for us to have her stop for a few days on the way. She wants to see her old friend's children, she says, and especially her namesake."

"Oh, dear!" sighed Johnnie, ruffling her short hairs with her fingers. "I wish my curls were longer. What *will* she think when she sees me?"

"She'll think said Dr. Carr, laughing. But Johnnie didn't laugh back. Her lip trembled, and she said, —

"There is a little girl, and she has a little curl
Right in the middle of her forehead;
When she is good she is very, very good,
And when she is bad she is horrid —"

"I'm not horrid *really*, am I?"

"Not a bit," replied her father; "you're only a little goose now and then, and I'm such an old gander that I don't mind that a bit."

Johnnie smiled and was comforted. Her thoughts turned to the coming visitor.

"Perhaps she'll be like the rich ladies in story-books," she said to herself.

Next day Miss Inches came. Katy was an experienced housekeeper now, and did not worry over coming guests as once she did. The house was always in pleasant, home-like order; and though

Debby and Alexander had fulfilled Aunt Izzie's prediction by marrying one another, both stayed on at Dr. Carr's and were as good and faithful as ever, so Katy had no anxieties as to the dinners and breakfasts. It was late in the afternoon when the visitor arrived. Fresh flowers filled the vases, for it was early June, and the garden-beds were sweet with roses and lilies of the valley. The older girls wore new summer muslins, and Johnnie in white, her short curls tied back with a blue ribbon, looked unusually pretty and delicate.

Miss Inches, a wide-awake, handsome woman, seemed much pleased to see them all.

"So this is my name-child," she said, putting her arm about Johnnie. "This is my little Joanna? You're the only child I have any share in, Joanna; I hope we shall love each other very deeply."

Miss Inches' hand was large and white, with beautiful rings on the fingers. Johnnie was flattered at being patted by such a hand, and cuddled affectionately to the side of her name-mamma.

"What eyes she has!" murmured Miss Inches to Dr. Carr. She lowered her voice, but Johnnie caught every word. "Such a lambent blue, and so full of soul. She is quite different from the rest of your daughters, Dr. Carr; don't you think so?"

"She has been ill recently, and is looking thin," replied the prosaic Papa.

"Oh, it isn't *that*! There is something else, – hard to put into words, but I feel it! You don't see it? Well, that only confirms a theory of mine, that people are often blind to the qualities of their nearest relations. We cannot get our own families into proper perspective. It isn't possible."

These fine words were lost on Johnnie, but she understood that she was pronounced nicer than the rest of the family. This pleased her: she began to think that she should like Miss Inches very much indeed.

Dr. Carr was not so much pleased. The note from Miss Inches, over which he and Katy had laughed, but which was not shown to the rest, had prepared him for a visitor of rather high-flown ideas, but he did not like having Johnnie singled out as the subject of this kind of praise. However, he said to himself, "It doesn't matter. She means well, and jolly little Johnnie won't be harmed by a few days of it."

Jolly little Johnnie would not have been harmed, but the pale, sentimental Johnnie left behind by the recently departed intermittent fever, decidedly *was*. Before Miss Inches had been four days in Burnet, Johnnie adored her and followed her about like a shadow. Never had anybody loved her as Miss Inches did, she thought, or discovered such fine things in her character. Ten long years and a half had she lived with Papa and the children, and not one of them had found out that her eyes were full of soul, and an expression "of mingled mirth and melancholy unusual in a childish face, and more like that of *Goethe's Mignon* than any thing else in the world of fiction!" Johnnie had never heard of "*Mignon*," but it was delightful to be told that she resembled her, and she made Miss Inches a present of the whole of her foolish little heart on the spot.

"Oh, if Papa would but give you to me!" exclaimed Miss Inches one day. "If only I could have you for my own, what a delight it would be! My whole theory of training is so different, – you should never waste your energies in house-work, my darling, (Johnnie had been dusting the parlor); it is sheer waste, with an intelligence like yours lying fallow and only waiting for the master's hand. Would you come, Johnnie, if Papa consented? Inches Mills is a quiet place, but lovely. There are a few bright minds in the neighborhood; we are near Boston, and not too far from Concord. Such a pretty room as you should have, darling, fitted up in blue and rose-buds, or – no, Morris green and Pompeian-red would be prettier, perhaps. What a joy it would be to choose pictures for it, – pictures, every one of which should be an impulse in the best Art direction! And how you would revel in the garden, and in the fruit! My strawberries are the finest I ever saw; I have two Alderney cows and quantities of cream. Don't you think you could be happy to come and be my own little Curly, if Papa would consent?"

"Yes, yes," said Johnnie eagerly. "And I could come home sometimes, couldn't I?"

"Every year," replied Miss Inches. "We'll take such lovely journeys together, Johnnie, and see all sorts of interesting places. Would you like best to go to California or to Switzerland next summer?"

I think, on the whole, Switzerland would be best. I want you to form a good French accent at once, but, above all, to study German, the language of *thought*. Then there is music. We might spend the winter at *Stuttgard*— "

Decidedly Miss Inches was counting on her chicken before hatching it, for Dr. Carr had yet to be consulted, and he was not a parent who enjoyed interference with his nest or nestlings. When Miss Inches attacked him on the subject, his first impulse was to whistle with amazement. Next he laughed, and then he became almost angry. Miss Inches talked very fast, describing the fine things she would do with Johnnie, and for her; and Dr. Carr, having no chance to put in a word, listened patiently, and watched his little girl, who was clinging to her new friend and looking very eager and anxious. He saw that her heart was set on being "adopted," and, wise man that he was, it occurred to him that it might be well to grant her wish in part, and let her find out by experiment what was really the best and happiest thing. So he did not say "No" decidedly, as he at first meant, but took Johnnie on his knee, and asked, —

"Well, Curly, so you want to leave Papa and Katy and Clover, and go away to be Miss Inches' little girl, do you?"

"I'm coming home to see you every single summer," said Johnnie.

"Indeed! That will be nice for us," responded Dr. Carr cheerfully. "But somehow I don't seem to feel as if I could quite make up my mind to give my Curly Locks away. Perhaps in a year or two, when we are used to being without her, I may feel differently. Suppose, instead, we make a compromise."

"Yes," said Miss Inches, eagerly.

"Yes," put in Johnnie, who had not the least idea of what a compromise might be.

"I can't *give* away my little girl, — not yet," — went on Dr. Carr fondly. "But if Miss Inches likes I'll *lend* her for a little while. You may go home with Miss Inches, Johnnie, and stay four months, — to the first of October, let us say." ("She'll miss two weeks' schooling, but that's no great matter," thought Papa to himself.) "This will give you, my dear lady, a chance to try the experiment of having a child in your house. Perhaps you may not like it so well as you fancy. If you do, and if Johnnie still prefers to remain with you, there will be time enough then to talk over further plans. How will this answer?"

Johnnie was delighted, Miss Inches not so much so.

"Of course," she said, "it isn't so satisfactory to have the thing left uncertain, because it retards the regular plan of development which I have formed for Johnnie. However, I can allow for a parent's feelings, and I thank you very much, Dr. Carr. I feel assured that, as you have five other children, you will in time make up your mind to let me keep Johnnie entirely as mine. It puts a new value into life, — this chance of having an immortal intelligence placed in my hands to train. It will be a real delight to do so, and I flatter myself the result will surprise you all."

Dr. Carr's eyes twinkled wickedly, but he made Miss Inches the politest of bows, and said: "You are very kind, I am sure, and I hope Johnnie will be good and not give you much trouble. When would you wish her visit to commence?"

"Oh — now, if you do not object. I should so enjoy taking her with me to the Mammoth Cave, and afterward straight home to Massachusetts. You would like to see the Cave and the eyeless fish, wouldn't you, darling?"

"Oh yes, Papa, yes!" cried Johnnie. Dr. Carr was rather taken aback, but he made no objection, and Johnnie ran off to tell the rest of the family the news of her good fortune.

Their dismay cannot be described. "I really do think that Papa is crazy," said Clover that night; and though Katy scolded her for using such an expression, her own confidence in his judgment was puzzled and shaken. She comforted herself with a long letter to Cousin Helen, telling her all about the affair. Elsie cried herself to sleep three nights running, and the boys were furious.

"The *idea* of such a thing," cried Dorry, flinging himself about, while Phil put a tablespoonful of black pepper and two spools of thread into his cannon, and announced that if Miss Inches dared to take Johnnie outside the gate, he would shoot her dead, he would, just as sure as he was alive!

In spite of this awful threat, Miss Inches persisted in her plan. Johnnie's little trunk was packed by Clover and Katy, who watered its contents with tears as they smoothed and folded the frocks and aprons, which looked so like their Curly as to seem a part of herself, – their Curly, who was so glad to leave them!

"Never mind the thick things," remarked Dr. Carr, as Katy came through the hall with Johnnie's winter jacket on her arm. "Put in one warmish dress for cool days, and leave the rest. They can be sent on *if* Johnnie decides to stay."

Papa looked so droll and gave such a large wink at the word "if," that Katy and Clover felt their hearts lighten surprisingly, and finished the packing in better spirits. The good-by, however, was a sorry affair. The girls cried; Dorry and Phil sniffed and looked fiercely at Miss Inches; old Mary stood on the steps with her apron thrown over her head; and Dr. Carr's face was so grave and sad that it quite frightened Johnnie. She cried too, and clung to Katy. Almost she said, "I won't go," but she thought of the eyeless fish, and didn't say it. The carriage drove off, Miss Inches petted her, everything was new and exciting, and before long she was happy again, only now and then a thought of home would come to make her lips quiver and her eyes fill.

The wonderful Cave, with its vaults and galleries hung with glittering crystals, its underground river and dark lake, was so like a fairy tale, that Johnnie felt as if she *must* go right back and tell the family at home about it. She relieved her feelings by a long letter to Elsie, which made them all laugh very much. In it she said, "Ellen Montgomery didn't have any thing half so nice as the Cave, and Mamma Marion never taps my lips." Miss Inches, it seemed, wished to be called "Mamma Marion." Every mile of the journey was an enjoyment to Johnnie. Miss Inches bought pretty presents for her wherever they stopped: altogether, it was quite like being some little girl taking a beautiful excursion in a story-book, instead of plain Johnnie Carr, and Johnnie felt that to be an "adopted child" was every bit as nice as she had supposed, and even nicer.

It was late in the evening when they reached Inches Mills, so nothing could be seen of the house, except that it was big and had trees around it. Johnnie went to sleep in a large bedroom with a huge double bed all to herself, and felt very grown-up and important.

The next day was given to unpacking and seeing the grounds; after that, Miss Inches said they must begin to lead a regular life, and Johnnie must study. Johnnie had been to school all winter, and in the natural course of things would have had holidays now. Mamma Marion, however, declared that so long an idle time would not do at all.

"Education, my darling, is not a thing of periods," she explained. "It should be like the air, absorbed, as it were, all the time, not like a meal, eaten just so often in the day. This idea of teaching by paroxysms is one of the fatal mistakes of the age."

So all that warm July Johnnie had French lessons and German, and lessons in natural philosophy, beside studying English literature after a plan of Miss Inches' own, which combined history and geography and geology, with readings from various books, and accounted for the existence of all the great geniuses of the world, as if they had been made after a regular recipe, – something like this: —

TO MAKE A POET

Take a political situation, add a rocky soil, and the western slope of a great water-shed, pour into a mould and garnish with laurel leaves. It will be found delicious!

The "lambent blue" of Johnnie's eyes grew more lambent than ever as she tried to make head and tail of this wonderful hash of people and facts. I am afraid that Mamma Marion was disappointed in the intelligence of her pupil, but Johnnie did her best, though she was rather aggrieved at being

obliged to study at all in summer, which at home was always play-time. The children she knew were having a delightful vacation there, and living out of doors from morning till night.

As the weeks went on she felt this more and more. Change of air was making her rosy and fat, and with returning strength a good deal of the old romping, hearty Johnnie came back; or would have come, had there been anybody to romp with. But there was nobody, for Miss Inches scarcely ever invited children to her house. They were brought up so poorly she said. There was nothing inspiring in their contact. She wanted Johnnie to be something quite different.

So Johnnie seldom saw anybody except "Mamma Marion" and her friends, who came to drink tea and talk about "Protoplasm," and the "Higher Education of Women," which wasn't at all interesting to poor Curly. She always sat by, quietly and demurely, and Miss Inches hoped was listening and being improved, but really she was thinking about something else, or longing to climb a tree or have a good game of play with real boys and girls. Once, in the middle of a tea-party, she stole upstairs and indulged in a hearty cry all to herself, over the thought of a little house which she and Dorry and Phil had built in Paradise the summer before; a house of stumps and old boards, lined with moss, in which they had had *such* a good time.

Almost as soon as they got home, Miss Inches sent to Boston for papers and furniture, and devoted her spare time to fitting up a room for her adopted child. Johnnie was not allowed to see it till all was done, then she was led triumphantly in. It was pretty – and queer – perhaps queerer than pretty. The walls were green-gray, the carpet gray-green, the furniture pale yellow, almost white, with brass handles and hinges, and lines of dull red tiles set into the wood. Every picture on the walls had a meaning, Miss Inches explained.

"Some of these I chose to strengthen your mind, Johnnie, dear," she said. "These portraits, for example. Here are Luther, Mahomet, and Theodore Parker, three of the great Protestants of the world. Life, to be worthy, must be more or less of a protest always. I want you to remember that. This photograph is of Michael Angelo's Moses. I got you that too, because it is so strong. I want you to be strong. Do you like it?"

"I think it would be prettier without the curl-papers," faltered the bewildered Johnnie.

"Curl-papers! My dear child, where are your eyes? Those are horns. He wore horns as a law-giver."

"Yes, ma'am," said Johnnie, not daring to ask any more questions for fear of making more mistakes.

"These splendid autotypes are from the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel in Rome, the glory of the world," went on Miss Inches. "And here, Johnnie, is the most precious of all. This I got expressly for you. It is an education to have such a painting as that before your eyes. I rely very much upon its influence on you."

The painting represented what seemed to be a grove of tall yellow-green sea-weeds, waving against a strange purple sky. There was a path between the stems of the sea-weeds, and up this path trotted a pig, rather soft and smudgy about his edges, as if he were running a little into the background. His quirly tail was smudgy also; and altogether it was more like the ghost of a pig than a real animal, but Miss Inches said *that* was the great beauty of the picture.

Johnnie didn't care much for the painted pig, but she liked him better than the great Reformers, who struck her as grim and frightful; while the very idea of going to sleep in the room with the horned Moses scared her almost to death. It preyed on her mind all day; and at night, after Johnnie had gone to bed, Miss Inches, passing the door, heard a little sob, half strangled by the pillows. She went in.

"What *is* the matter?" she cried.

"It's that awful man with horns," gasped Johnnie, taking her head out from under the bedclothes. "I can't go to sleep, he frightens me so."

"Oh, my darling, what, *what* weakness," cried Mamma Marion.

She was too kind, however, to persist in any plan which made Johnnie unhappy, so Moses came down, and Johnnie was allowed to choose a picture to fill his place. She selected a chromo of three little girls in a swing, a dreadful thing, all blue and red and green, which Miss Inches almost wept over. But it was a great comfort to Johnnie. I think it was the chromo which put it into Mamma Marion's head that the course of instruction chosen for her adopted child was perhaps a little above her years. Soon after she surprised Johnnie by the gift of a doll, a boy doll, dressed in a suit of Swedish gray, with pockets. In one hand the doll carried a hammer, and under the other arm was tucked a small portfolio.

"I like to make your sports a little instructive when I can," she said, "so I have dressed this doll in the costume of Linnæus, the great botanist. See what a nice little herbarium he has got under his arm. There are twenty-four tiny specimens in it, with the Latin and English names of each written underneath. If you could learn these perfectly, Johnnie, it would give you a real start in botany, which is the most beautiful of the sciences. Suppose you try. What will you name your doll, darling?"

"I don't know," replied Johnnie, glaring at the wax-boy with very hostile feelings.

"Linnæus? No, I don't quite like to give that name to a doll. Suppose, Johnnie, we christen him *Hortus Siccus*. That's the Latin name for a herbal, and will help you to remember it when you form one of your own. Now take him and have a good play."

How was it possible to have a good play with a doll named *Hortus Siccus*? Johnnie hated him, and could not conceal the fact. Miss Inches was grieved and disappointed. But she said to herself, "Perhaps she is just too old for dolls and just too young to care for pictures. It isn't so easy to fix a child's mental position as I thought it would be. I must try something else."

She really loved Johnnie and wished to make her happy, so the thought occurred of giving her a child's party. "I don't approve of them," she told her friends. "But perhaps it may be possible to combine some instruction with the amusements, and Johnnie is *so* pleased. Dear little creature, she is only eleven, and small things are great at that age. I suppose it is always so with youth."

Twenty children were asked to the party. They were to come at four, play for two hours in the garden, then have supper, and afterward games in the parlor.

Johnnie felt as if she had taken a dose of laughing-gas, at the sight of twenty boys and girls all at once, real boys, real girls! How long it was since she had seen any! She capered and jumped in a way which astonished Miss Inches, and her high spirits so infected the rest that a general romp set in, and the party grew noisy to an appalling degree.

"Oh, Johnnie dear, no more 'Tag,'" cried poor Mamma Marion, catching her adopted child and wiping her hot face with a handkerchief. "It is really too rude, such a game as that. It is only fit for boys."

"Oh, please! – please! —*please!*" entreated Johnnie. "It is splendid. Papa always let us; he did indeed, he always did."

"I thought you were my child now, and anxious for better things than tag," said Miss Inches gravely. Johnnie had to submit, but she pouted, shrugged her shoulders, and looked crossly about her, in a way which Mamma Marion had never seen before, and which annoyed her very much.

"Now it is time to go to supper," she announced. "Form yourselves into a procession, children. Johnnie shall take this tambourine and Willy Parker these castanets, and we will march in to the sound of music."

Johnnie liked to beat the tambourine very much, so her sulks gave place at once to smiles. The boys and girls sorted themselves into couples, Miss Inches took the head of the procession with an accordion, Willy Parker clashed the castanets as well as he could, and they all marched into the house. The table was beautifully spread with flowers and grapes and pretty china. Johnnie took the head, Willy the foot, and Dinah the housemaid helped them all round to sliced peaches and cream.

Miss Inches meanwhile sat down in the corner of the room and drew a little table full of books near her. As soon as they were all served, she began, —

"Now, dear children, while you eat, I will read aloud a little. I should like to think that each one of you carried away one thought at least from this entertainment, – a thought which would stay by you, and be, as it were, seed-grain for other thoughts in years to come. First, I will read 'Abou Ben Adhem,' by Leigh Hunt, an English poet."

The children listened quietly to Abou Ben Adhem, but when Miss Inches opened another book and began to read sentences from Emerson, a deep gloom fell upon the party. Willy Parker kicked his neighbor and made a face. Lucy Hooper and Grace Sherwood whispered behind their napkins, and got to laughing till they both choked. Johnnie's cross feelings came back; she felt as if the party was being spoiled, and she wanted to cry. A low buzz of whispers, broken by titters, went round the table, and through it all Miss Inches' voice sounded solemn and distinct, as she slowly read one passage after another, pausing between each to let the meaning sink properly into the youthful mind.

Altogether the supper was a failure, in spite of peaches and cream and a delicious cake full of plums and citron. When it was over they went into the parlor to play. The game of "Twenty Questions" was the first one chosen. Miss Inches played too. The word she suggested was "iconoclast."

"We don't know what it means," objected the children.

"Oh, don't you, dears? It means a breaker of idols. However, if you are not familiar with it we will choose something else. How would 'Michael Angelo' do?"

"But we never heard any thing about him."

Miss Inches was shocked at this, and began a little art-lecture on the spot, in the midst of which Willy Parker broke in with, "I've thought of a word, – 'hash'?"

"Oh, yes! Capital! Hash is a splendid word!" chorussed the others, and poor Miss Inches, who had only got as far as Michael Angelo's fourteenth year, found that no one was listening, and stopped abruptly. Hash seemed to her a vulgar word for the children to choose, but there was no help for it, and she resigned herself.

Johnnie thought hash an excellent word. It was so funny when Lucy asked whether the thing chosen was animal, vegetable, or mineral? and Willy replied, "All three," for he explained in a whisper, there was always salt in hash, and salt was a mineral. "Have you all seen it?" questioned Lucy. "Lots of times," shouted the children, and there was much laughing. After "Twenty Questions," they played "Sim says wiggle-waggle," and after that, "Hunt the Slipper." Poor, kind, puzzled Miss Inches was relieved when they went away, for it seemed to her that their games were all noisy and a fearful waste of time. She resolved that she would never give Johnnie any more parties; they upset the child completely, and demoralized her mind.

Johnnie *was* upset. After the party she was never so studious or so docile as she had been before. The little taste of play made her dislike work, and set her to longing after the home-life where play and work were mixed with each other as a matter of course. She began to think that it would be only pleasant to make up her bed, or dust a room again, and she pined for the old nursery, for Phil's whistle, for Elsie and the paper-dolls, and to feel Katy's arms round her once more. Her letters showed the growing home-sickness. Dr. Carr felt that the experiment had lasted long enough. So he discovered that he had business in Boston, and one fine September day, as Johnnie was forlornly poring over her lesson in moral philosophy, the door opened and in came Papa. Such a shriek as she gave! Miss Inches happened to be out, and they had the house to themselves for a while.

"So you are glad to see me?" said Papa, when Johnnie had dried her eyes after the violent fit of crying which was his welcome, and had raised her head from his shoulder. His own eyes were a little moist, but he spoke gaily.

"Oh, Papa, *so* glad! I was just longing for you to come. How did it happen?"

"I had business in this part of the world, and I thought you might be wanting your winter clothes."

Johnnie's face fell.

"*Must* I stay all winter?" she said in a trembling voice. "Aren't you going to take me home?"

"But I thought you wanted to be 'adopted,' and to go to Europe, and have all sorts of fine things happen to you."

"Oh, Papa, don't tease me. Mamma Marion is ever so kind, but I want to come back and be your little girl again. Please let me. If you don't, I shall *die*—" and Johnnie wrung her hands.

"We'll see about it," said Dr. Carr. "Don't die, but kiss me and wash your face. It won't do for Miss Inches to come home and find you with those impolite red rims to your eyes."

"Come upstairs, too, and see my room, while I wash 'em," pleaded Johnnie.

All the time that Johnnie was bathing her eyes, Papa walked leisurely about looking at the pictures. His mouth wore a furtive smile.

"This is a sweet thing," he observed, "this one with the pickled asparagus and the donkey, or is it a cat?"

"Papa! it's a pig!"

Then they both laughed.

I think there was a little bit of relief mixed with Miss Inches' disappointment at hearing of Johnnie's decision. The child of theory was a delightful thing to have in the house, but this real child, with moods and tempers and a will of her own, who preferred chromos to Raphael, and pined after "tag," tried her considerably. They parted, however, most affectionately.

"Good-by, dear Mamma Marion," whispered Johnnie. "You've been just as good as good to me, and I love you so much, — but you know I am *used* to the girls and Papa."

"Yes, dear, I know. You're to come back often, Papa says, and I shall call you my girl always." So, with kisses, they separated, and Miss Inches went back to her old life, feeling that it was rather comfortable not to be any longer responsible for a "young intelligence," and that she should never envy mammas with big families of children again, as once she had done.

"So we've got our Curly Locks back," said Katy, fondly stroking Johnnie's hair, the night after the travellers' return. "And you'll never go away from us any more, will you?"

"Never, never, never!" protested Johnnie, emphasizing each word by a kiss.

"Not even to be adopted, travel in Europe, or speak Litchfield Co. French?" put in naughty Clover.

"No. I've been adopted once, and that's enough. Now I'm going to be Papa's little girl always, and when the rest of you get married I shall stay at home and keep house for him."

"That's right," said Dr. Carr.

GOOSEY, GOOSEY GANDER

"BUT why must I go to bed? It isn't time, and I'm not sleepy yet," pleaded Dickie, holding fast by the side of the door.

"Now, Dickie, don't be naughty. It's time because I say that it's time."

"Papa never tells me it's time when it's light like this," argued Dickie. "*He* doesn't ever send me to bed till seven o'clock. I'm not going till it's a great deal darker than this. So there, Mally Spence."

"Oh, yes, you are, Dickie darling," replied Mally coaxingly. "The reason it's light is because the days are so long now. It's quite late really, – almost seven o'clock, – that is," she added hastily, "it's past six (two minutes past!), and sister wants to put Dickie to bed, because she's going to take tea with Jane Foster, and unless Dick is safe and sound she can't go. Dickie would be sorry to make sister lose her pleasure, wouldn't he?"

"I wiss you didn't want me to go," urged Dick, but he was a sweet-tempered little soul, so he yielded to Mally's gentle pull, and suffered her to lead him in-doors. Upstairs they went, past Mally's room, Papa's, – up another flight of stairs, and into the attic chamber where Dick slept alone. It was a tiny chamber. The ceiling was low, and the walls sloped inward like the sides of a tent. It would have been too small to hold a grown person comfortably, but there was room in plenty for Dickie's bed, one chair, and the chest of drawers which held his clothes and toys. One narrow window lighted it, opening toward the West. On the white plastered wall beside it, lay a window-shaped patch of warm pink light. The light was reflected from the sunset. Dickie had seen this light come and go very often. He liked to have it there; it was so pretty, he thought.

Malvina undressed him. She did not talk as much as usual, for her head was full of the tea-party, and she was in a hurry to get through and be off. Dickie, however, was not the least in a hurry. Slowly he raised one foot, then the other, to have his shoes untied, slowly turned himself that Mally might unfasten his apron. All the time he talked. Mally thought she had never known him ask so many questions, or take so much time about every thing.

"What makes the wall pink?" he said. "It never is 'cept just at bedtime."

"It's the sun."

"Why doesn't the sun make it that color always?"

"The sun is setting now. He is not setting always."

"That's an improper word. You mustn't say it."

"What's an improper word?"

"Papa *said*, when I said 'setting on the door-steps,' that it wasn't proper to say that. He said I must say *sitting* on the door steps."

"That isn't the same thing, Goosey Gander," cried Mally laughing. "The sun sets and little boys sit."

"I'm not a goosey gander," responded Dickie. "And Papa *said* it wasn't proper."

"Never mind," said Mally, whipping on his night-gown: "you're a darling, if you are a goosey. Now say your prayers nicely."

"Yes," replied Dick, dreamily. He knelt down and began his usual prayer. "Please, God, bless Papa and Mally and Gwandmamma and – " "make Dick a good boy" should have come next, but his thoughts wandered. "Why don't the sun sit as well as little boys?" he asked.

"Oh, Dickie, Dickie!" cried the scandalized Malvina. "You're saying your prayers, you know. Good children don't stop to ask questions when they're saying their prayers."

Dickie felt rebuked. He finished the little prayer quickly. Mally lifted him into bed. "It's so warm that you won't want this," she said, folding back the blanket. Then she stooped to kiss him.

"Tell me a story before you go," pleaded Dickie, holding her tight.

"Oh, not to-night, darling, because I shall be late to Jane's if I do." She kissed him hastily.

"I don't think it's nice at all to go to bed when the sun hasn't set, and I'm not sleepy a bit, and there isn't nothing to play with," remarked Dick, plaintively.

"You'll fall asleep in a minute or two, Goosey, then you won't want any thing to play with," said Mally, hurrying away.

"I'm *not* a goosey," shouted Dick after her. Ten minutes later, as she was tying her bonnet strings, she heard him calling from the top of the stairs.

"What is it, Dickie?"

"I'm not a goose. Goosies has feathers. They say 'quack.'"

"You're the kind that hasn't feathers and doesn't say quack," replied Mally from below. "No, darling, you're not a goose; you're Mally's good boy. Now, run back to bed."

"Yes, I will," replied Dick, satisfied by this concession. He climbed into bed again, and lay watching the pink patch on the wall. Yellow bars began to appear and to dance in the midst of the pink.

"Like teeny-weeney little ladders," thought Dick. There was a ladder outside his door, at top of which was a scuttle opening on to the roof. Dickie turned his head to look at the ladder. The scuttle-door stood open; from above, the pink light streamed in and lay on the rungs of the ladder.

"I did go up that ladder once," soliloquized Dick. "Papa took me. It was velly nice up there. I wiss Papa would take me again. Mally, she said it was dangewous. I wonder why she said it was dangewous? Mally's a very funny girl, I think. She didn't ought to put me to bed so early. I can't go to sleep at all. Perhaps I sha'n't ever go to sleep, not till morning, – then she'd feel sorry.

"If I was a bird I could climb little bits of ladders like that," was his next reflection. "Or a fly. I'd like to be a fly, and eat sugar, and say b-u-z-z-z all day long. Only then perhaps some little boy would get me into the corner of the window and squeeze me all up tight with his fum." Dickie cast a rueful look at his own guilty thumb as he thought this. "I wouldn't like that! But I'd like very much indeed to buzz and tickle Mally's nose when she was twying to sew. She'd slap and slap, and not hit me, and I'd buzz and tickle. How I'd laugh! But perhaps flies don't know how to laugh, only just to buzz.

""Pretty, curious, buzzy fly.'"

That's what my book says."

The pink glow was all gone now, and Dick shifted his position.

"I wiss I could go to sleep," he thought. "It isn't nice at all to be up here and not have any playthings. Mally's gone, else she'd get me something to amoose myself with. I'd like my dwum best. It's under the hall table, I guess. P'waps if I went down I could get it."

As this idea crossed his mind, Dickie popped quickly out of bed. The floor felt cool and pleasant to his bare little feet as he crossed to the door. He had almost reached the head of the stairs when, looking up, something so pretty met his eyes that he stopped to admire. It was a star, shining against the pure sky like a twinkling silver lamp. It seemed to beckon, and the ladder to lead straight up to it. Almost without stopping to think, Dickie put his foot on the first rung and climbed nimbly to the top of the ladder. The star was just as much out of reach when he got there as it had been before, but there were other beautiful sights close at hand which were well worth the trouble of climbing after.

Miles and miles and miles of sky for one thing. It rose above Dickie's head like a great blue dome pierced with pin-pricks of holes, through which little points of bright light quivered and danced. Far away against the sky appeared a church spire, like a long sharp finger pointing to Heaven. One little star exactly above, seemed stuck on the end of the spire. Dickie wondered if it hurt the star to be there. He stepped out on to the roof and wandered about. The evening was warm and soft. No dew fell. The shingles still kept the heat of the sun, and felt pleasant and comfortable under his feet. By-and-by a splendid rocker-shaped moon came from behind the sky's edge where she had been hiding away, and sailed slowly upward. She was a great deal bigger than the stars, but they didn't seem afraid of her in the least. Dickie reflected that if he were a star he should hurry to get out of her way; but

the stars didn't mind the moon's being there at all, they kept their places, and shone calmly on as they had done before she came.

He was standing, when the moon appeared, by the low railing which guarded the edge of the roof. The railing was of a very desirable height. Dickie could just rest his chin on top of it, which was nice. Suddenly a loud "Maau-w!" resounded from above. Dickie jumped, and gave his poor chin a knock against the railing. It couldn't be the moon, could it? Moons didn't make noises like that.

He looked up. There, on the ridge pole of the next roof, sat a black cat, big and terrible against the sky. "Ma-a-uw," said the cat again, louder than before.

"Why, pussy, what's the matter?" cried Dick. His voice quavered a little, but he tried to speak boldly. Pussy was displeased at the question. She hissed, put up her back, swelled her tail to a puff, and fled to a distant part of the roof, where, from some hidden ambush, Dick could hear her scolding savagely.

"She's a cwiss cat, I guess," he remarked philosophically. "Why, this chimney is warm," he cried, as his arm touched the bricks. "It's 'cause there used to be a fire in there. But there isn't any smoke coming out. I wonder if all the chimneys are warm too, like this one."

There was another chimney not far off, and Dick hastened to try the experiment. To do this he was obliged to climb a railing, but it was low and easy to get over. The second chimney was cold, but a little farther on appeared a third, and Dick proceeded to climb another railing.

But before he reached this third chimney, a surprising and interesting sight attracted his attention. This was a scuttle door just like the one at home, standing open, with a ladder leading down into a garret below.

Dick peered over the edge of the scuttle. There was no little chamber in this attic like his at home. It was all an open space, crammed with trunks, furniture, boxes, and barrels. He caught sight of a rocking-horse standing in a corner; a rocking-horse with a blue saddle on his wooden back, and a fierce bristling mane much in need of brush and comb. Drawn by irresistible attraction, Dickie put, first one foot, then the other, over the scuttle's edge, crept down the ladder, and in another moment stood by the motionless steed. Thick dust lay on the saddle, on the rockers, and on the stiffly stretched-out tail, from which most of the red paint had been worn away. It was evidently a long time since any little boy had mounted there, chattered to the horse, and ridden gloriously away, pursuing a fairy fox through imaginary fields. The eye of the wooden horse was glazed and dim. Life had lost its interest to the poor animal, turned out, as it were, to pasture as best he might in the dull, silent garret.

Dickie patted the red neck, a timid, affectionate pat, but it startled the horse a little, for he shook visibly, and swayed to and fro. There was evidently some "go" left in him, in spite of his dejected expression of countenance. The shabby stirrup hung at his side. Dickie could just reach it with his foot. He seized the mane, and, pulling hard, clambered into the saddle. Once there, reins in hand, he clucked and encouraged the time-worn steed to his best paces. To and fro, to and fro they swung, faster, slower, Dickie beating with his heels, the wooden horse curvetting and prancing. It was famous! The dull thud of the rockers echoed through the garret, and somebody sitting in the room below raised his head to listen to the strange sound.

This somebody was an old man with white hair and a gray, stern face, who sat beside a table on which were paper and lighted candles. A letter lay before him, but he was not reading it. When the sound of the rocking began, he started and turned pale. A little boy once used to rock in that way in the garret overhead, but it was long ago, and for many years past the garret had been silent and deserted. "Harry's horse!" muttered the old man with a look of fear as he heard the sound. He half rose from his chair, then he sat down again. But soon the noise ceased. Dickie had caught sight of another thing in the garret which interested him, and had dismounted to examine it. The old man sank into his chair again with a look of relief, muttering something about the wind.

The thing which Dickie had gone to examine was a little arm-chair cushioned with red. It was just the size for him, and he seated himself in it with a look of great satisfaction.

"I wiss this chair was mine," he said. "P'waps Mally'll let me take it home if I ask her."

A noise below attracted his attention. He peeped over the balusters and saw an elderly woman, with a candle in her hand, coming up from the lower story. She went into a room at the foot of the attic stair, leaving the door open. "Hester! Hester!" called a voice from below. The woman came from the room and went down again. She did not take the candle with her: Dick could see it shining through the open door.

Like a little moth attracted by a flame, Dick wandered down the stair in the direction of the light. The candle was standing on the table in a bedroom, – a pretty room, Dickie thought, though it did not seem as if anybody could have lived in it lately. He didn't know why this idea came into his mind, but it did. It was a girl's bedroom, for a small blue dress hung on the wall, and on the bureau were brushes, combs, and hair-pins. Beside the bureau was a wooden shelf full of books. A bird-cage swung in the window, but there was no bird in it, and the seed glass and water cup were empty. The narrow bed had a white coverlid and a great white pillow. It looked all ready for somebody, but it was years since the girl who once owned the room had slept there. The old housekeeper, who still loved the girl, came every day to dust and smooth and air and sweep. She kept all things in their places just as they used to be in the former time, but she could not give to the room the air of life which once it had, and, do what she would, it looked deserted always – empty – and dreary.

On the chimney-piece were ranged a row of toys, plaster cats, barking dogs, a Noah's ark, and an enormous woolly lamb. This last struck Dick with admiration. He stood on tip-toe with his hands clasped behind his back to examine it.

"Oh, dear," he sighed, "I wiss I had that lamb." Then he gave a jump, for close to him, in a small chair, he saw what seemed to be a little girl, staring straight at him.

It was a big, beautiful doll, in a dress of faded pink, and a pink hat and feather. Dick had never seen such a fine lady before; she quite fascinated him. He leaned gently forward and touched the waxen hand. It was cold and clammy; Dick did not like the feel, and retreated. The unwinking eyes of the doll followed him as he sidled away, and made him uncomfortable.

In the opposite room the old man still sat with his letter before him. The letter was from the girl who once played with the big doll and slept in the smooth white bed. She was not a child now. Years before she had left her father's house against his will, and in company with a person he did not like. He had said then that he should never forgive her, and till now she had not asked to be forgiven. It was a long time since he had known any thing about her. Nobody ever mentioned her name in his hearing, not even the old housekeeper who loved her still, and never went to bed without praying that Miss Ellen might one day come back. Now Ellen had written to her father. The letter lay on the table.

"I was wrong," she wrote, "but I have been punished. We have suffered much. My husband is dead. I will not speak of him, for I know that his name will anger you; but, father, I am alone, ill, and very poor. Can you not forgive me now? Do not think of me as the wild, reckless girl who disobeyed you and brought sorrow to your life. I am a weary, sorrowful woman, longing, above all other things, to be pardoned before I die, – to come home again to the house where all my happy years were spent. Let me come, father. My little Hester, named after our dear nurse, mine and Harry's, is a child whom you would love. She is like me as I used to be, but far gentler and sweeter than I ever was. Let me put her in your arms. Let me feel that I am forgiven for my great fault, and I will bless you every day that I live. Dear father, say yes. Your penitent Ellen."

Two angels stood behind the old man as he read this letter. He did not see them, but he heard their voices as first one and then the other bent and whispered in his ear.

"Listen," murmured the white angel with radiant moonlit wings. "Listen. You loved her once so dearly. You love her still. I know you do."

"No," breathed the darker angel. "You swore that you would not forgive her. Keep your word. You always said that she would come back as soon as she was poor or unhappy, or that scamp treated her badly. It makes no difference in the facts. Let her suffer; it serves her right."

"Remember what a dear child she used to be," said the fair angel, "so bright, so loving. How she used to dance about the house and sing; the sun seemed to shine always when she came into the room. She loved you truly then. Her little warm arms were always about your neck. She loves you still."

"What is love worth," came the other voice, "when it deceives and hurts and betrays? All these long years you have suffered. It is her turn now."

"Remember that it was partly your fault," whispered the spirit of good. "You were harsh and stern. You did not appeal to her love, but to her obedience. She had a high spirit; you forgot that. And she was only sixteen."

"Quite old enough to know better," urged the spirit of evil. "Remember the hard life you have led ever since. The neighbors speak of you as a stern, cruel man; the little children run away when you appear. Whose fault is that? Hers. She ought to pay for it."

"Think of the innocent child who never did you wrong, and who suffers too. Think of the dear Lord who forgives your sins. Pray to him. He will help you to forgive her," – urged the good angel, but in fainter tones, for the black angel spoke louder, and thrust between with his fierce voice.

"The thing is settled. Why talk of prayer or pardon? Let her go her way."

As this last whisper reached his ear the old man raised his bent head. A hard, vindictive look was in his eyes. He seized the letter and tore it in two. "Alas! alas!" sighed the sweet angel, while the evil one rejoiced and waved his dark wings in triumph.

It was at this moment that Dickie, attracted by the rustle of paper, appeared at the door. His eyes were beginning to droop a little. He rubbed them hard as he crossed the entry. The pit-pat of his bare feet made no sound on the carpeted floor, so that the old man had no warning of his presence till, turning, he saw the little night-gowned figure standing motionless in the door-way.

He sprang from his chair and stretched out his hands. He tried to speak, but no voice came at first; then in a hoarse whisper he said, – "Harry – is it you? Ellen –"

Dickie, terrified, fled back into the hall as if shod with wings. In one moment he was in the attic, up the ladder, on the roof. The old man ran blindly after him.

"Come back, Ellen – come back!" he cried. "I will forgive you, – come back to your poor old father, dear child." His foot slipped as he spoke. It was at the stair-head. He fell forward heavily, and lump, bump, bump, down stairs he tumbled, and landed heavily in the hall below.

Hester and the housemaid ran hastily from the kitchen at the sound of the fall. When they saw the old man lying in a heap at the foot of the stair, they were terribly frightened. Blood was on his face. He was quite unconscious.

"He is dead. Mr. Kirton is dead!" cried the housemaid, wringing her hands.

"No, – his heart beats," said Hester. "Run for Doctor Poster, Hannah, and ask Richard Wallis to come at once and help me lift the poor old gentleman."

Hannah flew to do this errand. A moment after, Mr. Kirton opened his eyes.

"Where is Ellen?" he said. Then he shut them again. Hester glanced at the torn letter, which through all his fall the old man had held tightly clasped in his hand, and gave a loud cry.

"Miss Ellen, come back!" she exclaimed. "My own Miss Ellen. God has heard my prayers."

When Mr. Kirton's senses returned, late in the night, he found himself in his own bed. His head felt strangely; one arm was tied up in a queer stiff bandage, so that he could not move it. A cloth wet with water lay on his forehead. When he stirred and groaned, a hand lifted the cloth, dipped it in ice-water, and put it back again fresh and cool. He looked up. Some one was bending over him, some one with a face which he knew and did not know. It puzzled him strangely. At last, a look of recognition came into his eyes. "Ellen?" he said, in a tone of question.

"Yes, dear father, it is I."

"Why did you come dressed as a little child to frighten me? You are a woman," he said wonderingly; "your hair is gray!"

"I did not come as a little child, father. I am an old woman now. I have come to be your nurse."

"I don't understand," muttered the old man, but he asked no more, and presently dropped asleep. Ellen watched him for a long time, then she went across the hall to her old room, where Hester stood looking at a little girl, who lay on the bed sleeping soundly, with the pink doll hugged tight in her arms.

"She is just like yourself, Miss Ellen," said Hester, with joyful tears in her eyes, – "just like your old self, with a thought more brown in the hair. Ah! good times have begun again for my poor old master; the light has come back to the house."

But neither Hester nor Ellen saw the white-robed angel, who bent over the old man's bed with a face of immortal joy, and sang low songs of peace to make sleep deep and healing. The dark spirit has fled away.

Meantime Dickie, unconscious messenger of Fate, scrambling easily over the roofs, had gained his own room, and was comfortably tucked up in his little bed. His dreams were of dolls, rocking-horses, black cats. So soundly did he sleep, that, when morning came, Mally had to shake him and call loudly in his ear before she could wake him up.

"Why, Dick!" she cried, "look at your night-gown. It's all over dust, and there are one – two – three tears in the cotton. What *have* you been doing?"

But Dickie could not tell.

"I dweamed that I walked about on the woof," he said. "But I guess I didn't weally, did I?"

LITTLE BO PEEP

THE sun was setting at the end of an August day. Everybody was glad to see the last of him, for the whole world felt scorched and hot, – the ground, the houses, – even the ponds looked warm as they stretched in the steaming distance. On the edge of the horizon the sun winked with a red eye, as much as to say, "Don't flatter yourselves, I shall be back again soon;" then he slowly sank out of sight. It was comforting to have him go, if only for a little while. "Perhaps," thought the people, "a thunder-storm or something may come along before morning, and cool him off."

Little Mell Davis was as glad as anybody when the sun disappeared. It had been a hard day. Her step-mother had spent it in making soap. Soap-making is ill-smelling, uncomfortable work at all times, and especially in August. Mrs. Davis had been cross and fractious, had scolded a great deal, and found many little jobs for Mell to do in addition to her usual tasks of dish-washing, table-setting, and looking after the children. Mell was tired of the heat; tired of the smell of soap, of being lectured; and when supper was over was very glad to sit at peace on the door-steps and read her favorite book, a tattered copy of the Fairy Tales. Soon she forgot the trials of the day. "Once upon a time there lived a beautiful Princess," she read, but just then came a sharp call. "Mell, Mell, you tiresome girl, see what Tommy is about;" and Mrs. Davis, dashing past, snatched Tommy away from the pump-handle, which he was plying vigorously for the benefit of his small sisters, who stood in a row under the spout, all dripping wet. Tommy was wetter still, having impartially pumped on himself first of all. Frocks, aprons, jacket, all were soaked, shoes and stockings were drenched, the long pig tails of the girls streamed large drops, as if they had been little rusty-colored water-pipes.

"Look at that!" cried Mrs. Davis, exhibiting the half-drowned brood. "You might as well be deaf and blind, Mell, for any care you take of 'em. Give you a silly book to read, and the children might perish before your eyes for all you'd notice. Look at Isaphine, and Gabella Sarah. Little lambs, – as likely as not they've taken their deaths. It shan't happen again, though. Give me that book – " And, snatching Mell's treasure from her hands, Mrs. Davis flung it into the fire. It flamed, shrivelled: the White Cat, Cinderella, Beauty and the Beast, – all, all were turned in one moment into a heap of unreadable ashes! Mell gave one clutch, one scream; then she stood quite still, with a hard, vindictive look on her face, which so provoked her step-mother that she gave her a slap as she hurried the children upstairs. Mrs. Davis did not often slap Mell. "I punish my own children," she would say, "not other people's." "Other people's children" meant poor Mell.

It was not a very happy home, this of the Davis's. Mell's father was captain of a whaler, and almost always at sea. It was three years now since he sailed on his last voyage. No word had come from him for a great many months, and his wife was growing anxious. This did not sweeten her temper, for in case he never returned, Mell's would be another back to clothe, another mouth to fill, when food, perhaps, would not be easily come by. Mell was not anxious about her father. She was used to having him absent. In fact, she seldom thought of him one way or another. If Mrs. Davis had been kinder, and had given her more time to read the Fairy Tales, she would have been quite a happy little girl, for she lived in dreams, and it did not take much to content her. Half her time was spent in a sort of inward play which never came out in words. Sometimes in these plays she was a Princess with a gold crown, and a delightful Prince making love to her all day long. Sometimes she kept a candy-shop, and lived entirely on sugar-almonds and sassafras-stick. These plays were so real to her mind that it seemed as if they *must* some day come true. Her step-mother and the children did not often figure in them, though once in a while she made believe that they were all changed into agreeable people, and shared her good luck. There was one thing in the house, however, which invariably took part in her visions. This was a large wooden chest with brass handles which stood upstairs in Mrs. Davis's room, and was always kept locked.

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