Rudyard Kipling

Rewards and Fairies

Редьярд Киплинг

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Содержание

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A CHARM

Take of English earth as much
As either hand may rightly clutch.
In the taking of it breathe
Prayer for all who lie beneath —
Not the great nor well bespoke,
But the mere uncounted folk
Of whose life and death is none
Report or lamentation.
Lay that earth upon thy heart,
And thy sickness shall depart!

It shall sweeten and make whole
Fevered breath and festered soul;
It shall mightily restrain
Over-busy hand and brain;
It shall ease thy mortal strife
'Gainst the immortal woe of life,
Till thyself restored shall prove
By what grace the Heavens do move.

Take of English flowers these —
Spring's full-facéd primroses,
Summer's wild wide-hearted rose,
Autumn's wall-flower of the close,
And, thy darkness to illume,
Winter's bee-thronged ivy-bloom.
Seek and serve them where they bide
From Candlemas to Christmas-tide.
For these simples used aright
Shall restore a failing sight.

These shall cleanse and purify
Webbed and inward-turning eye;
These shall show thee treasure hid,
Thy familiar fields amid,
At thy threshold, on thy hearth,
Or about thy daily path;
And reveal (which is thy need)
Every man a King indeed!

INTRODUCTION

Once upon a time, Dan and Una, brother and sister, living in the English country, had the good fortune to meet with Puck, *alias* Robin Goodfellow, *alias* Nick o' Lincoln, *alias* Lob-lie-by-the-Fire, the last survivor in England of those whom mortals call Fairies. Their proper name, of course, is 'The People of the Hills.' This Puck, by means of the magic of Oak, Ash, and Thorn, gave the children power —

> To see what they should see and hear what they should hear,
> Though it should have happened three thousand year.

The result was that from time to time, and in different places on the farm and in the fields and the country about, they saw and talked to some rather interesting people. One of these, for instance, was a Knight of the Norman Conquest, another a young Centurion of a Roman Legion stationed in England, another a builder and decorator of King Henry VII.'s time; and so on and so forth; as I have tried to explain in a book called *Puck of Pook's Hill*.

A year or so later, the children met Puck once more, and though they were then older and wiser, and wore boots regularly instead of going bare-footed when they got the chance, Puck was as kind to them as ever, and introduced them to more people of the old days.

He was careful, of course, to take away their memory of their walks and conversations afterwards, but otherwise he did not interfere; and Dan and Una would find the strangest sort of persons in their gardens or woods.

In the stories that follow I am trying to tell something about those people.

Cold Iron

When Dan and Una had arranged to go out before breakfast, they did not remember it was Midsummer Morning. They only wanted to see the otter which, old Hobden said, had been fishing their brook for weeks; and early morning was the time to surprise him. As they tiptoed out of the house into the wonderful stillness, the church clock struck five. Dan took a few steps across the dew-blobbed lawn, and looked at his black footprints.

'I think we ought to be kind to our poor boots,' he said. 'They'll get horrid wet.'

It was their first Summer in boots, and they hated them, so they took them off, and slung them round their necks, and paddled joyfully over the dripping turf where the shadows lay the wrong way, like evening in the East.

The sun was well up and warm, but by the brook the last of the night mist still fumed off the water. They picked up the chain of otter's footprints on the mud, and followed it from the bank, between the weeds and the drenched mowing, while the birds shouted with surprise. Then the track left the brook and became a smear, as though a log had been dragged along.

They traced it into Three Cows meadow, over the mill-sluice to the Forge, round Hobden's garden, and then up the slope till it ran out on the short turf and fern of Pook's Hill, and they heard the cock-pheasants crowing in the woods behind them.

'No use!' said Dan, questing like a puzzled hound. 'The dew's drying off, and old Hobden says otters'll travel for miles.'

'I'm sure we've travelled miles.' Una fanned herself with her hat. 'How still it is! It's going to be a regular roaster.' She looked down the valley, where no chimney yet smoked.

'Hobden's up!' Dan pointed to the open door of the Forge cottage. 'What d'you suppose he has for breakfast?'

'One of *them*. He says they eat good all times of the year.' Una jerked her head at some stately pheasants going down to the brook for a drink.

A few steps farther on a fox broke almost under their bare feet, yapped, and trotted off.

'Ah, Mus' Reynolds – Mus' Reynolds' – Dan was quoting from old Hobden, – 'if I knowed all you knowed, I'd know something.'[1]

'I say,' Una lowered her voice, 'you know that funny feeling of things having happened before. I felt it when you said "Mus' Reynolds.'"

'So did I,' Dan began. 'What is it?'

They faced each other stammering with excitement.

'Wait a shake! I'll remember in a minute. Wasn't it something about a fox – last year. Oh, I nearly had it then!' Dan cried.

'Be quiet!' said Una, prancing excitedly.'There was something happened before we met the fox last year. Hills! Broken Hills – the play at the theatre – see what you see – '

'I remember now,' Dan shouted. 'It's as plain as the nose on your face – Pook's Hill – Puck's Hill – Puck!'

'I remember, too,' said Una. 'And it's Midsummer Day again!'

The young fern on a knoll rustled, and Puck walked out, chewing a green-topped rush.

'Good Midsummer Morning to you. Here's a happy meeting,' said he. They shook hands all round, and asked questions.

'You've wintered well,' he said after a while, and looked them up and down. 'Nothing much wrong with you, seemingly.'

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[1] See 'The Winged Hats' in *Puck of Pook's Hill*.

'They've put us into boots,' said Una. 'Look at my feet – they're all pale white, and my toes are squdged together awfully.'

'Yes – boots make a difference,' Puck wriggled his brown, square, hairy foot, and cropped a dandelion flower between the big toe and the next.

'I could do that – last year,' Dan said dismally, as he tried and failed. 'And boots simply ruin one's climbing.'

'There must be some advantage to them, I suppose,' said Puck, 'or folk wouldn't wear them. Shall we come this way?'

They sauntered along side by side till they reached the gate at the far end of the hillside. Here they halted just like cattle, and let the sun warm their backs while they listened to the flies in the wood.

'Little Lindens is awake,' said Una, as she hung with her chin on the top rail. 'See the chimney smoke?'

'To-day's Thursday, isn't it?' Puck turned to look at the old pink farmhouse across the little valley. 'Mrs. Vincey's baking day. Bread should rise well this weather.' He yawned, and that set them both yawning.

The bracken about rustled and ticked and shook in every direction. They felt that little crowds were stealing past.

'Doesn't that sound like – er – the People of the Hills?' said Una.

'It's the birds and wild things drawing up to the woods before people get about,' said Puck, as though he were Ridley the keeper.

'Oh, we know that. I only said it sounded like.'

'As I remember 'em, the People of the Hills used to make more noise. They'd settle down for the day rather like small birds settling down for the night. But that was in the days when they carried the high hand. Oh, me! The deeds that I've had act and part in, you'd scarcely believe!'

'I like that!' said Dan. 'After all you told us last year, too!'

'Only, the minute you went away, you made us forget everything,' said Una.

Puck laughed and shook his head. 'I shall this year, too. I've given you seizin of Old England, and I've taken away your Doubt and Fear, but your memory and remembrance between whiles I'll keep where old Billy Trott kept his night-lines – and that's where he could draw 'em up and hide 'em at need. Does that suit?' He twinkled mischievously.

'It's got to suit,' said Una, and laughed. 'We can't magic back at you.' She folded her arms and leaned against the gate. 'Suppose, now, you wanted to magic me into something – an otter? Could you?'

'Not with those boots round your neck.'

'I'll take them off.' She threw them on the turf. Dan's followed immediately. 'Now!' she said.

'Less than ever now you've trusted me. Where there's true faith, there's no call for magic.' Puck's slow smile broadened all over his face.

'But what have boots to do with it?' said Una, perching on the gate.

'There's cold iron in them,' said Puck, and settled beside her. 'Nails in the soles, I mean. It makes a difference.'

'How?'

'Can't you feel it does? You wouldn't like to go back to bare feet again, same as last year, would you? Not really?'

'No – o. I suppose I shouldn't – not for always. I'm growing up, you know,' said Una.

'But you told us last year, in the Long Slip – at the theatre – that you didn't mind Cold Iron,' said Dan.

'*I* don't; but folk in housen, as the People of the Hills call them, must be ruled by Cold Iron. Folk in housen are born on the near side of Cold Iron – there's iron in every man's house, isn't there?

They handle Cold Iron every day of their lives, and their fortune's made or spoilt by Cold Iron in some shape or other. That's how it goes with Flesh and Blood, and one can't prevent it.'

'I don't quite see. How do you mean?' said Dan.

'It would take me some time to tell you.'

'Oh, it's ever so long to breakfast,' said Dan. 'We looked in the larder before we came out.' He unpocketed one big hunk of bread and Una another, which they shared with Puck.

'That's Little Lindens' baking,' he said, as his white teeth sunk in it. 'I know Mrs. Vincey's hand.' He ate with a slow sideways thrust and grind, just like old Hobden, and, like Hobden, hardly dropped a crumb. The sun flashed on Little Lindens' windows, and the cloudless sky grew stiller and hotter in the valley.

'Ah – Cold Iron,' he said at last to the impatient children. 'Folk in housen, as the People of the Hills say, grow so careless about Cold Iron. They'll nail the Horseshoe over the front door, and forget to put it over the back. Then, some time or other, the People of the Hills slip in, find the cradle-babe in the corner, and – '

'Oh, I know. Steal it and leave a changeling,' Una cried.

'No,' said Puck firmly. 'All that talk of changelings is people's excuse for their own neglect. Never believe 'em. I'd whip 'em at the cart-tail through three parishes if I had my way.'

'But they don't do it now,' said Una.

'Whip, or neglect children? Umm! Some folks and some fields never alter. But the People of the Hills didn't work any changeling tricks. They'd tiptoe in and whisper, and weave round the cradle-babe in the chimney-corner – a fag-end of a charm here, or half a spell there – like kettles singing; but when the babe's mind came to bud out afterwards, it would act differently from other people in its station. That's no advantage to man or maid. So I wouldn't allow it with my folks' babies here. I told Sir Huon so once.'

'Who was Sir Huon?' Dan asked, and Puck turned on him in quiet astonishment.

'Sir Huon of Bordeaux – he succeeded King Oberon. He had been a bold knight once, but he was lost on the road to Babylon, a long while back. Have you ever heard, "How many miles to Babylon?"'

'Of course,' said Dan, flushing.

'Well, Sir Huon was young when that song was new. But about tricks on mortal babies. I said to Sir Huon in the fern here, on just such a morning as this: "If you crave to act and influence on folk in housen, which I know is your desire, why don't you take some human cradle-babe by fair dealing, and bring him up among yourselves on the far side of Cold Iron – as Oberon did in time past? Then you could make him a splendid fortune, and send him out into the world?"

'"Time past is past time," says Sir Huon. "I doubt if we could do it. For one thing, the babe would have to be taken without wronging man, woman, or child. For another, he'd have to be born on the far side of Cold Iron – in some house where no Cold Iron ever stood; and for yet the third, he'd have to be kept from Cold Iron all his days till we let him find his fortune. No, it's not easy," he said, and he rode off, thinking. You see, Sir Huon had been a man once.

'I happened to attend Lewes Market next Woden's Day even, and watched the slaves being sold there – same as pigs are sold at Robertsbridge Market nowadays. Only, the pigs have rings on their noses, and the slaves had rings round their necks.'

'What sort of rings?' said Dan.

'A ring of Cold Iron, four fingers wide, and a thumb thick, just like a quoit, but with a snap to it for to snap round the slave's neck. They used to do a big trade in slave-rings at the Forge here, and ship them to all parts of Old England, packed in oak sawdust. But, as I was saying, there was a farmer out of the Weald who had bought a woman with a babe in her arms, and he didn't want any encumbrances to her driving his beasts home for him.'

'Beast himself!' said Una, and kicked her bare heel on the gate.

‘So he blamed the auctioneer. “It’s none o’ my baby,” the wench puts in. “I took it off a woman in our gang who died on Terrible Down yesterday.” “I’ll take it off to the Church then,” says the farmer. “Mother Church’ll make a monk of it, and we’ll step along home."

‘It was dusk then. He slipped down to St. Pancras’ Church, and laid the babe at the cold chapel door. I breathed on the back of his stooping neck – and – I’ve *heard* he never could be warm at any fire afterwards. I should have been surprised if he could! Then I whipped up the babe, and came flying home here like a bat to his belfry.

‘On the dewy break of morning of Thor’s own day – just such a day as this – I laid the babe outside the Hill here, and the People flocked up and wondered at the sight.

“‘You’ve brought him, then?” Sir Huon said, staring like any mortal man.

“‘Yes, and he’s brought his mouth with him too,” I said. The babe was crying loud for his breakfast.

“‘What is he?” says Sir Huon, when the womenfolk had drawn him under to feed him.

“‘Full Moon and Morning Star may know,” I says. “*I* don’t. By what I could make out of him in the moonlight, he’s without brand or blemish. I’ll answer for it that he’s born on the far side of Cold Iron, for he was born under a shaw on Terrible Down, and I’ve wronged neither man, woman, nor child in taking him, for he is the son of a dead slave woman."

‘"All to the good, Robin,” Sir Huon said. “He’ll be the less anxious to leave us. Oh, we’ll give him a splendid fortune, and he shall act and influence on folk in housen as we have always craved.” His Lady came up then, and drew him under to watch the babe’s wonderful doings.’

‘Who was his Lady?’ said Dan.

‘The Lady Esclairmonde. She had been a woman once, till she followed Sir Huon across the fern, as we say. Babies are no special treat to me – I’ve watched too many of them – so I stayed on the Hill. Presently I heard hammering down at the Forge there,’ Puck pointed towards Hobden’s cottage. ‘It was too early for any workmen, but it passed through my mind that the breaking day was Thor’s own day. A slow North-East wind blew up and set the oaks sawing and fretting in a way I remembered; so I slipped over to see what I could see.’

‘And what did you see?’

‘A smith forging something or other out of Cold Iron. When it was finished, he weighed it in his hand (his back was towards me), and tossed it from him a longish quoit-throw down the valley. I saw Cold Iron flash in the sun, but I couldn’t quite make out where it fell. *That* didn’t trouble me. I knew it would be found sooner or later by some one.’

‘How did you know?’ Dan went on.

‘Because I knew the Smith that made it,’ said Puck quietly.

‘Wayland Smith?’[2] Una suggested.

‘No. I should have passed the time o’ day with Wayland Smith, of course. This other was different. So’ – Puck made a queer crescent in the air with his finger – ‘I counted the blades of grass under my nose till the wind dropped and he had gone – he and his Hammer.’

‘Was it Thor then?’ Una murmured under her breath.

‘Who else? It was Thor’s own day.’ Puck repeated the sign. ‘I didn’t tell Sir Huon or his Lady what I’d seen. Borrow trouble for yourself if that’s your nature, but don’t lend it to your neighbours. Moreover, I might have been mistaken about the Smith’s work. He might have been making things for mere amusement, though it wasn’t like him, or he might have thrown away an old piece of made iron. One can never be sure. So I held my tongue and enjoyed the babe. He was a wonderful child – and the People of the Hills were so set on him, they wouldn’t have believed me. He took to me wonderfully. As soon as he could walk he’d putter forth with me all about my Hill here. Fern makes soft falling! He knew when day broke on earth above, for he’d thump, thump, thump, like an old

[2] See ‘Weland’s Sword’ in *Puck of Pook’s Hill*.

buck-rabbit in a bury, and I'd hear him say "Opy!" till some one who knew the Charm let him out, and then it would be "Robin! Robin!" all round Robin Hood's barn, as we say, till he'd found me.'

'The dear!' said Una. 'I'd like to have seen him!'

'Yes, he was a boy. And when it came to learning his words – spells and such like – he'd sit on the Hill in the long shadows, worrying out bits of charms to try on passers-by. And when the bird flew to him, or the tree bowed to him for pure love's sake (like everything else on my Hill), he'd shout, "Robin! Look – see! Look, see, Robin!" and sputter out some spell or other that they had taught him, *all* wrong end first, till I hadn't the heart to tell him it was his own dear self and not the words that worked the wonder. When he got more abreast of his words, and could cast spells for sure, as we say, he took more and more notice of things and people in the world. People, of course, always drew him, for he was mortal all through.

'Seeing that he was free to move among folk in housen, under or over Cold Iron, I used to take him along with me night-walking, where he could watch folk, and I could keep him from touching Cold Iron. That wasn't so difficult as it sounds, because there are plenty of things besides Cold Iron in housen to catch a boy's fancy. He *was* a handful, though! I shan't forget when I took him to Little Lindens – his first night under a roof. The smell of the rushlights and the bacon on the beams – they were stuffing a feather-bed too, and it was a drizzling warm night – got into his head. Before I could stop him – we were hiding in the bakehouse – he'd whipped up a storm of wildfire, with flashlights and voices, which sent the folk shrieking into the garden, and a girl overset a hive there, and – of course *he* didn't know till then such things could touch him – he got badly stung, and came home with his face looking like kidney potatoes!

'You can imagine how angry Sir Huon and Lady Esclairmonde were with poor Robin! They said the Boy was never to be trusted with me night-walking any more – and he took about as much notice of their order as he did of the bee-stings. Night after night, as soon as it was dark, I'd pick up his whistle in the wet fern, and off we'd flit together among folk in housen till break of day – he asking questions, and I answering according to my knowledge. Then we fell into mischief again!' Puck shook till the gate rattled.

'We came across a man up at Brightling who was beating his wife with a bat in the garden. I was just going to toss the man over his own woodlump when the Boy jumped the hedge and ran at him. Of course the woman took her husband's part, and while the man beat him, the woman scratted his face. It wasn't till I danced among the cabbages like Brightling Beacon all ablaze that they gave up and ran indoors. The Boy's fine green-and-gold clothes were torn all to pieces, and he had been welted in twenty places with the man's bat, and scratted by the woman's nails to pieces. He looked like a Robertsbridge hopper on a Monday morning.

"'Robin," said he, while I was trying to clean him down with a bunch of hay, "I don't quite understand folk in housen. I went to help that old woman, and she hit me, Robin!"

"'What else did you expect?" I said. "That was the one time when you might have worked one of your charms, instead of running into three times your weight."

"'I didn't think," he says. "But I caught the man one on the head that was as good as any charm. Did you see it work, Robin?"

"'Mind your nose," I said. "Bleed it on a dockleaf – not your sleeve, for pity's sake." I knew what the Lady Esclairmonde would say.

'*He* didn't care. He was as happy as a gipsy with a stolen pony, and the front part of his gold coat, all blood and grass stains, looked like ancient sacrifices.

'Of course the People of the Hills laid the blame on me. The Boy could do nothing wrong, in their eyes.

"'You are bringing him up to act and influence on folk in housen, when you're ready to let him go," I said. "Now he's begun to do it, why do you cry shame on me? That's no shame. It's his nature drawing him to his kind."

"'But we don't want him to begin *that* way," the Lady Esclairmonde said. "We intend a splendid fortune for him – not your flitter-by-night, hedge-jumping, gipsy-work."

"'I don't blame you, Robin," says Sir Huon, "but I *do* think you might look after the Boy more closely."

"'I've kept him away from Cold Iron these sixteen years," I said. "You know as well as I do, the first time he touches Cold Iron he'll find his own fortune, in spite of everything you intend for him. You owe me something for that."

'Sir Huon, having been a man, was going to allow me the right of it, but the Lady Esclairmonde, being the Mother of all Mothers, over-persuaded him.

"'We're very grateful," Sir Huon said, "but we think that just for the present you are about too much with him on the Hill."

"'Though you have said it," I said, "I will give you a second chance." I did not like being called to account for my doings on my own Hill. I wouldn't have stood it even that far except I loved the Boy.

"'No! No!" says the Lady Esclairmonde. "He's never any trouble when he's left to me and himself. It's your fault."

"'You have said it," I answered. "Hear me! From now on till the Boy has found his fortune, whatever that may be, I vow to you all on my Hill, by Oak, and Ash, and Thorn, *and* by the Hammer of Asa Thor"' – again Puck made that curious double-cut in the air – "'that you may leave me out of all your counts and reckonings." Then I went out' – he snapped his fingers – 'like the puff of a candle, and though they called and cried, they made nothing by it. I didn't promise not to keep an eye on the Boy, though. I watched him close – close – close!

'When he found what his people had forced me to do, he gave them a piece of his mind, but they all kissed and cried round him, and being only a boy, he came over to their way of thinking (I don't blame him), and called himself unkind and ungrateful; and it all ended in fresh shows and plays, and magics to distract him from folk in housen. Dear heart alive! How he used to call and call on me, and I couldn't answer, or even let him know that I was near!'

'Not even once?' said Una. 'If he was very lonely?'

'No, he couldn't,' said Dan, who had been thinking. 'Didn't you swear by the Hammer of Thor that you wouldn't, Puck?'

'By that Hammer!' was the deep rumbled reply. Then he came back to his soft speaking voice. 'And the Boy *was* lonely, when he couldn't see me any more. He began to try to learn all learning (he had good teachers), but I saw him lift his eyes from the big black books towards folk in housen all the time. He studied song-making (good teacher he had too!), but he sung those songs with his back toward the Hill, and his face toward folk. *I* know! I have sat and grieved over him grieving within a rabbit's jump of him. Then he studied the High, Low, and Middle Magic. He had promised the Lady Esclairmonde he would never go near folk in housen; so he had to make shows and shadows for his mind to chew on.'

'What sort of shows?' said Dan.

'Just boy's magic as we say. I'll show you some, some time. It pleased him for the while, and it didn't hurt any one in particular except a few men coming home late from the taverns. But I knew what it was a sign of, and I followed him like a weasel follows a rabbit. As good a boy as ever lived! I've seen him with Sir Huon and the Lady Esclairmonde stepping just as they stepped to avoid the track of Cold Iron in a furrow, or walking wide of some old ash-tot because a man had left his swop-hook or spade there; and all his heart aching to go straightforward among folk in housen all the time. Oh, a good boy! They always intended a fine fortune for him – but they could never find it in their heart to let him begin. I've heard that many warned them, but they wouldn't be warned. So it happened *as* it happened.

'One hot night I saw the Boy roving about here wrapped in his flaming discontents. There was flash on flash against the clouds, and rush on rush of shadows down the valley till the shaws were full

of his hounds giving tongue, and the wood-ways were packed with his knights in armour riding down into the water-mists – all his own magic, of course. Behind them you could see great castles lifting slow and splendid on arches of moonshine, with maidens waving their hands at the windows, which all turned into roaring rivers; and then would come the darkness of his own young heart wiping out the whole slateful. But boy's magic doesn't trouble me – or Merlin's either for that matter. I followed the Boy by the flashes and the whirling wildfire of his discontent, and oh, but I grieved for him! Oh, but I grieved for him! He pounded back and forth like a bullock in a strange pasture – sometimes alone – sometimes waist-deep among his shadow-hounds – sometimes leading his shadow-knights on a hawk-winged horse to rescue his shadow-girls. I never guessed he had such magic at his command; but it's often that way with boys.

'Just when the owl comes home for the second time, I saw Sir Huon and the Lady ride down my Hill, where there's not much magic allowed except mine. They were very pleased at the Boy's magic – the valley flared with it – and I heard them settling his splendid fortune when they should find it in their hearts to let him go to act and influence among folk in housen. Sir Huon was for making him a great King somewhere or other, and the Lady was for making him a marvellous wise man whom all should praise for his skill and kindness. She was very kind-hearted.

'Of a sudden we saw the flashes of his discontent turned back on the clouds, and his shadow-hounds stopped baying.

"'There's Magic fighting Magic over yonder," the Lady Esclairmonde cried, reining up. "Who is against him?"

'I could have told her, but I did not count it any of my business to speak of Asa Thor's comings and goings.'

'How did you know?' said Una.

'A slow North-East wind blew up, sawing and fretting through the oaks in a way I remembered. The wildfire roared up, one last time in one sheet, and snuffed out like a rush-light, and a bucketful of stinging hail fell. We heard the Boy walking in the Long Slip – where I first met you.

"'Here, oh, come here!" said the Lady Esclairmonde, and stretched out her arms in the dark.

'He was coming slowly, but he stumbled in the footpath, being, of course, mortal man.

"'Why, what's this?" he said to himself. We three heard him.

"'Hold, lad, hold! 'Ware Cold Iron!" said Sir Huon, and they two swept down like night-jars, crying as they rode.

'I ran at their stirrups, but it was too late. We felt that the Boy had touched Cold Iron somewhere in the dark, for the Horses of the Hill shied off, and whipped round, snorting.

'Then I judged it was time for me to show myself in my own shape; so I did.

"'Whatever it is," I said, "he has taken hold of it. Now we must find out whatever it *is* that he has taken hold of; for that will be his fortune."

"'Come here, Robin," the Boy shouted, as soon as he heard my voice. "I don't know what I've hold of."

"'It is in your hands," I called back. "Tell us if it is hard and cold, with jewels atop. For that will be a King's Sceptre."

"'Not by a furrow-long," he said, and stooped and tugged in the dark. We heard him.

"'Has it a handle and two cutting edges?" I called. "For that'll be a Knight's Sword."

"'No, it hasn't," he says. "It's neither ploughshare, whittle, hook, nor crook, nor aught I've yet seen men handle." By this time he was scratting in the dirt to prize it up.

"'Whatever it is, you know who put it there, Robin," said Sir Huon to me, "or you would not ask those questions. You should have told me as soon as you knew."

"'What could you or I have done against the Smith that made it and laid it for him to find?" I said, and I whispered Sir Huon what I had seen at the Forge on Thor's Day, when the babe was first brought to the Hill.

"'Oh, good-bye, our dreams!" said Sir Huon. "It's neither sceptre, sword, nor plough! Maybe yet it's a bookful of learning, bound with iron clasps. There's a chance for a splendid fortune in that sometimes."

'But we knew we were only speaking to comfort ourselves, and the Lady Esclairmonde, having been a woman, said so.

"'Thur aie! Thur help us!" the Boy called. "It is round, without end, Cold Iron, four fingers wide and a thumb thick, and there is writing on the breadth of it."

"'Read the writing if you have the learning," I called. The darkness had lifted by then, and the owl was out over the fern again.

'He called back, reading the runes on the iron:

"Few can see
Further forth
Than when the child
Meets the Cold Iron."

And there he stood, in clear starlight, with a new, heavy, shining slave-ring round his proud neck.

"'Is this how it goes?" he asked, while the Lady Esclairmonde cried.

"'That is how it goes," I said. He hadn't snapped the catch home yet, though.

"'What fortune does it mean for him?" said Sir Huon, while the Boy fingered the ring. "You who walk under Cold Iron, you must tell us and teach us."

"'Tell I can, but teach I cannot," I said. "The virtue of the Ring is only that he must go among folk in housen henceforward, doing what they want done, or what he knows they need, all Old England over. Never will he be his own master, nor yet ever any man's. He will get half he gives, and give twice what he gets, till his life's last breath; and if he lays aside his load before he draws that last breath, all his work will go for naught."

"'Oh, cruel, wicked Thor!" cried the Lady Esclairmonde. "Ah, look, see, all of you! The catch is still open! He hasn't locked it. He can still take it off. He can still come back. Come back!" She went as near as she dared, but she could not lay hands on Cold Iron. The Boy could have taken it off, yes. We waited to see if he would, but he put up his hand, and the snap locked home.

"'What else could I have done?" said he.

"'Surely, then, you will do," I said. "Morning's coming, and if you three have any farewells to make, make them now, for, after sunrise, Cold Iron must be your master."

'So the three sat down, cheek by wet cheek, telling over their farewells till morning light. As good a boy as ever lived, he was.'

'And what happened to him?' asked Dan.

'When morning came, Cold Iron was master of him and his fortune, and he went to work among folk in housen. Presently he came across a maid like-minded with himself, and they were wedded, and had bushels of children, as the saying is. Perhaps you'll meet some of his breed, this year.'

'Thank you,' said Una. 'But what did the poor Lady Esclairmonde do?'

'What *can* you do when Asa Thor lays the Cold Iron in a lad's path? She and Sir Huon were comforted to think they had given the Boy good store of learning to act and influence on folk in housen. For he *was* a good boy! Isn't it getting on for breakfast time? I'll walk with you a piece.'

When they were well in the centre of the bone-dry fern, Dan nudged Una, who stopped and put on a boot as quickly as she could.

'Now,' she said, 'you can't get any Oak, Ash, and Thorn leaves from here, and' – she balanced wildly on one leg – 'I'm standing on Cold Iron. What'll you do if we don't go away?'

'E-eh? Of all mortal impudence!' said Puck, as Dan, also in one boot, grabbed his sister's hand to steady himself. He walked round them, shaking with delight. 'You think I can only work with a handful of dead leaves? This comes of taking away your Doubt and Fear! I'll show you!'

A minute later they charged into old Hobden at his simple breakfast of cold roast pheasant, shouting that there was a wasps' nest in the fern which they had nearly stepped on, and asking him to come and smoke it out.

'It's too early for wops-nestes, an' I don't go diggin' in the Hill, not for shillin's,' said the old man placidly. 'You've a thorn in your foot, Miss Una. Sit down, and put on your t'other boot. You're too old to be caperin' barefoot on an empty stomach. Stay it with this chicken o' mine.'

COLD IRON

'*Gold is for the mistress – silver for the maid!*
Copper for the craftsman cunning at his trade.'
'Good!' said the Baron, sitting in his hall,
'But Iron – Cold Iron – is master of them all!'

So he made rebellion 'gainst the King his liege,
Camped before his citadel and summoned it to siege —
'Nay!' said the cannoneer on the castle wall,
'But Iron – Cold Iron – shall be master of you all!'

Woe for the Baron and his knights so strong,
When the cruel cannon-balls laid 'em all along!
He was taken prisoner, he was cast in thrall,
And Iron – Cold Iron – was master of it all!

Yet his King spake kindly (Oh, how kind a Lord!)
'What if I release thee now and give thee back thy sword?'
'Nay!' said the Baron, 'mock not at my fall,
For Iron – Cold Iron – is master of men all.'

'*Tears are for the craven, prayers are for the clown —*
Halters for the silly neck that cannot keep a crown.'
'As my loss is grievous, so my hope is small,
For Iron – Cold Iron – must be master of men all!'

Yet his King made answer (few such Kings there be!)
'Here is Bread and here is Wine – sit and sup with me.
Eat and drink in Mary's name, the whiles I do recall
How Iron – Cold Iron – can be master of men all!'

He took the Wine and blessed It; He blessed and brake the Bread.
With His own Hands He served Them, and presently He said:
'Look! These Hands they pierced with nails outside my city wall
Show Iron – Cold Iron – to be master of men all!

'Wounds are for the desperate, blows are for the strong,
Balm and oil for weary hearts all cut and bruised with wrong.
I forgive thy treason – I redeem thy fall —
For Iron – Cold Iron – must be master of men all!'

'*Crowns are for the valiant – sceptres for the bold!*
Thrones and powers for mighty men who dare to take and hold.'
'Nay!' said the Baron, kneeling in his hall,
'But Iron – Cold Iron – is master of man all!
Iron, out of Calvary, is master of man all!'

Gloriana

THE TWO COUSINS

Valour and Innocence
Have latterly gone hence
To certain death by certain shame attended.
Envy – ah! even to tears! —
The fortune of their years
Which, though so few, yet so divinely ended.

Scarce had they lifted up
Life's full and fiery cup,
Than they had set it down untouched before them.
Before their day arose
They beckoned it to close —
Close in destruction and confusion o'er them.

They did not stay to ask
What prize should crown their task,
Well sure that prize was such as no man strives for;
But passed into eclipse,
Her kiss upon their lips —
Even Belphœbe's, whom they gave their lives for!

Gloriana

Willow Shaw, the little fenced wood where the hop-poles are stacked like Indian wigwams, had been given to Dan and Una for their very own kingdom when they were quite small. As they grew older, they contrived to keep it most particularly private. Even Phillips, the gardener, told them every time he came in to take a hop-pole for his beans, and old Hobden would no more have thought of setting his rabbit-wires there without leave, given fresh each spring, than he would have torn down the calico and marking-ink notice on the big willow which said: 'Grown-ups not allowed in the Kingdom unless brought.'

Now you can understand their indignation when, one blowy July afternoon, as they were going up for a potato-roast, they saw somebody moving among the trees. They hurled themselves over the gate, dropping half the potatoes, and while they were picking them up Puck came out of a wigwam.

'Oh, it's you, is it?' said Una. 'We thought it was people.'

'I saw you were angry – from your legs,' he answered with a grin.

'Well, it's our own Kingdom – not counting you, of course.'

'That's rather why I came. A lady here wants to see you.'

'What about?' said Dan cautiously.

'Oh, just Kingdoms and things. She knows about Kingdoms.'

There was a lady near the fence dressed in a long dark cloak that hid everything except her high red-heeled shoes. Her face was half covered by a black silk fringed mask, without goggles. And yet she did not look in the least as if she motored.

Puck led them up to her and bowed solemnly. Una made the best dancing-lesson curtsy she could remember. The lady answered with a long, deep, slow, billowy one.

'Since it seems that you are a Queen of this Kingdom,' she said, 'I can do no less than acknowledge your sovereignty.' She turned sharply on staring Dan. 'What's in your head, lad? Manners?'

'I was thinking how wonderfully you did that curtsy,' he answered.

She laughed a rather shrill laugh. 'You're a courtier already. Do you know anything of dances, wench – or Queen, must I say?'

'I've had some lessons, but I can't really dance a bit,' said Una.

'You should learn then.' The lady moved forward as though she would teach her at once.'It gives a woman alone among men or her enemies time to think how she shall win or – lose. A woman can only work in man's playtime. Heigho!' She sat down on the bank.

Old Middenboro, the lawn-mower pony, stumped across the paddock and hung his sorrowful head over the fence.

'A pleasant Kingdom,' said the lady, looking round. 'Well enclosed. And how does your Majesty govern it? Who is your Minister?'

Una did not quite understand. 'We don't play that,' she said.

'Play?' The lady threw up her hands and laughed.

'We have it for our own, together,' Dan explained.

'And d'you never quarrel, young Burleigh?'

'Sometimes, but then we don't tell.'

The lady nodded. 'I've no brats of my own, but I understand keeping a secret between Queens and their Ministers. *Ay de mi!* But with no disrespect to present majesty, methinks your realm is small, and therefore likely to be coveted by man and beast. For example' – she pointed to Middenboro – 'yonder old horse, with the face of a Spanish friar – does he never break in?'

'He can't. Old Hobden stops all our gaps for us,' said Una, 'and we let Hobden catch rabbits in the Shaw.'

The lady laughed like a man. 'I see! Hobden catches conies – rabbits – for himself, and guards your defences for you. Does he make a profit out of his coney-catching?'

'We never ask,' said Una. 'Hobden's a particular friend of ours.'

'Hoity-toity!' the lady began angrily. Then she laughed. 'But I forget. It is your Kingdom. I knew a maid once that had a larger one than this to defend, and so long as her men kept the fences stopped, she asked 'em no questions either.'

'Was she trying to grow flowers?' said Una.

'No, trees – perdurable trees. Her flowers all withered.' The lady leaned her head on her hand.

'They do if you don't look after them. We've got a few. Would you like to see? I'll fetch you some.' Una ran off to the rank grass in the shade behind the wigwam, and came back with a handful of red flowers. 'Aren't they pretty?' she said. 'They're Virginia stock.'

'Virginia?' said the lady, and lifted them to the fringe of her mask.

'Yes. They come from Virginia. Did your maid ever plant any?'

'Not herself – but her men adventured all over the earth to pluck or to plant flowers for her crown. They judged her worthy of them.'

'And was she?' said Dan cheerfully.

'*Quien sabe?* (who knows?) But at least, while her men toiled abroad she toiled in England, that they might find a safe home to come back to.'

'And what was she called?'

'Gloriana – Belphœbe – Elizabeth of England.' Her voice changed at each word.

'You mean Queen Bess?' The lady bowed her head a little towards Dan.

'You name her lightly enough, young Burleigh. What might you know of her?' said she.

'Well, I – I've seen the little green shoes she left at Brickwall House – down the road, you know. They're in a glass case – awfully tiny things.'

'Oh, Burleigh, Burleigh!' she laughed. 'You are a courtier too soon.'

'But they are,' Dan insisted. 'As little as dolls' shoes. Did you really know her well?'

'Well. She was a – woman. I've been at her Court all my life. Yes, I remember when she danced after the banquet at Brickwall. They say she danced Philip of Spain out of a brand-new kingdom that day. Worth the price of a pair of old shoes – hey?'

She thrust out one foot, and stooped forward to look at its broad flashing buckle.

'You've heard of Philip of Spain – long-suffering Philip,' she said, her eyes still on the shining stones. 'Faith, what some men will endure at some women's hands passes belief! If *I* had been a man, and a woman had played with me as Elizabeth played with Philip, I would have – ' She nipped off one of the Virginia stocks and held it up between finger and thumb. 'But for all that' – she began to strip the leaves one by one – 'they say – and I am persuaded – that Philip loved her.' She tossed her head sideways.

'I don't quite understand,' said Una.

'The high heavens forbid that you should, wench!' She swept the flowers from her lap and stood up in the rush of shadows that the wind chased through the wood.

'I should like to know about the shoes,' said Dan.

'So ye shall, Burleigh. So ye shall, if ye watch me. 'Twill be as good as a play.'

'We've never been to a play,' said Una.

The lady looked at her and laughed. 'I'll make one for you. Watch! You are to imagine that she – Gloriana, Belphœbe, Elizabeth – has gone on a progress to Rye to comfort her sad heart (maids are often melancholic), and while she halts at Brickwall House, the village – what was its name?' She pushed Puck with her foot.

'Norgem,' he croaked, and squatted by the wigwam.

'Norgem village loyally entertains her with a masque or play, and a Latin oration spoken by the parson, for whose false quantities, if I'd made 'em in my girlhood, I should have been whipped.'

'You whipped?' said Dan.

'Soundly, sirrah, soundly! She stomachs the affront to her scholarship, makes her grateful, gracious thanks from the teeth outwards, thus' – (the lady yawned) – 'Oh, a Queen may love her subjects in her heart, and yet be dog-wearied of 'em in body and mind – and so sits down' – her skirts foamed about her as she sat – 'to a banquet beneath Brickwall Oak. Here for her sins she is waited upon by – What were the young cockerels' names that served Gloriana at table?'

'Frewens, Courthopes, Fullers, Husseys,' Puck began.

She held up her long jewelled hand. 'Spare the rest! They were the best blood of Sussex, and by so much the more clumsy in handling the dishes and plates. Wherefore' – she looked funnily over her shoulder – 'you are to think of Gloriana in a green and gold-laced habit, dreadfully expecting that the jostling youths behind her would, of pure jealousy or devotion, spatter it with sauces and wines. The gown was Philip's gift, too! At this happy juncture a Queen's messenger, mounted and mired, spurs up the Rye road and delivers her a letter' – she giggled – 'a letter from a good, simple, frantic Spanish gentleman called – Don Philip.'

'That wasn't Philip, King of Spain?' Dan asked.

'Truly, it was. 'Twixt you and me and the bedpost, young Burleigh, these kings and queens are very like men and women, and I've heard they write each other fond, foolish letters that none of their ministers should open.'

'Did her ministers ever open Queen Elizabeth's letters?' said Una.

'Faith, yes! But she'd have done as much for theirs, any day. You are to think of Gloriana, then (they say she had a pretty hand), excusing herself thus to the company – for the Queen's time is never her own – and, while the music strikes up, reading Philip's letter, as I do.' She drew a real letter from her pocket, and held it out almost at arm's length, like the old post-mistress in the village when she reads telegrams.

'*Hm! Hm! Hm!* Philip writes as ever most lovingly. He says his Gloriana is cold, for which reason he burns for her through a fair written page.' She turned it with a snap. 'What's here? Philip complains that certain of her gentlemen have fought against his generals in the Low Countries. He prays her to hang 'em when they re-enter her realms. (Hm, that's as may be.) Here's a list of burnt shipping slipped between two vows of burning adoration. Oh, poor Philip! His admirals at sea – no less than three of 'em – have been boarded, sacked, and scuttled on their lawful voyages by certain English mariners (gentlemen, he will not call them), who are now at large and working more piracies in *his* American ocean, which the Pope gave him. (He and the Pope should guard it, then!) Philip hears, but his devout ears will not credit it, that Gloriana in some fashion countenances these villains' misdeeds, shares in their booty, and – oh, shame! – has even lent them ships royal for their sinful thefts. Therefore he requires (which is a word Gloriana loves not), *requires* that she shall hang 'em when they return to England, and afterwards shall account to him for all the goods and gold they have plundered. A most loving request! If Gloriana will not be Philip's bride, she shall be his broker and his butcher! Should she still be stiff-necked, he writes – see where the pen digged the innocent paper! – that he hath both the means and the intention to be revenged on her. Aha! Now we come to the Spaniard in his shirt!' (She waved the letter merrily.) 'Listen here! Philip will prepare for Gloriana a destruction from the West – a destruction from the West – far exceeding that which Pedro de Avila wrought upon the Huguenots. And he rests and remains, kissing her feet and her hands, her slave, her enemy, or her conqueror, as he shall find that she uses him.'

She thrust back the letter under her cloak, and went on acting, but in a softer voice. 'All this while – hark to it – the wind blows through Brickwall Oak, the music plays, and, with the company's eyes upon her, the Queen of England must think what this means. She cannot remember the name of Pedro de Avila, nor what he did to the Huguenots, nor when, nor where. She can only see darkly some dark motion moving in Philip's dark mind, for he hath never written before in this fashion. She

must smile above the letter as though it were good news from her ministers – the smile that tires the mouth and the poor heart. What shall she do?' Again her voice changed.

'You are to fancy that the music of a sudden wavers away. Chris Hatton, Captain of her bodyguard, quits the table all red and ruffled, and Gloriana's virgin ear catches the clash of swords at work behind a wall. The mothers of Sussex look round to count their chicks – I mean those young game-cocks that waited on her. Two dainty youths have stepped aside into Brickwall garden with rapier and dagger on a private point of honour. They are haled out through the gate, disarmed and glaring – the lively image of a brace of young Cupids transformed into pale, panting Cains. Ahem! Gloriana beckons awfully – thus! They come up for judgment. Their lives and estates lie at her mercy whom they have doubly offended, both as Queen and woman. But la! what will not foolish young men do for a beautiful maid?'

'Why? What did she do? What had they done?' said Una.

'Hsh! You mar the play! Gloriana had guessed the cause of the trouble. They were handsome lads. So she frowns a while and tells 'em not to be bigger fools than their mothers had made 'em, and warns 'em, if they do not kiss and be friends on the instant, she'll have Chris Hatton horse and birch 'em in the style of the new school at Harrow. (Chris looks sour at that.) Lastly, because she needed time to think on Philip's letter burning in her pocket, she signifies her pleasure to dance with 'em and teach 'em better manners. Whereat the revived company call down Heaven's blessing on her gracious head; Chris and the others prepare Brickwall House for a dance, and she walks in the clipped garden between those two lovely young sinners who are both ready to sink for shame. They confess their fault. It appears that midway in the banquet the elder – they were cousins – conceived that the Queen looked upon him with special favour. The younger, taking the look to himself, after some words gives the elder the lie; hence, as she guessed, the duel.'

'And which had she really looked at?' Dan asked.

'Neither – except to wish them farther off. She was afraid all the while they'd spill dishes on her gown. She tells 'em this, poor chicks – and it completes their abasement. When they had grilled long enough, she says: "And so you would have fleshed your maiden swords for me – for me?" Faith, they would have been at it again if she'd egged 'em on! but their swords – oh, prettily they said it! – had been drawn for her once or twice already.

"'And where?" says she. "On your hobby-horses before you were breeched?"

"'On my own ship," says the elder. "My cousin was vice-admiral of our venture in his pinnace. We would not have you think of us as brawling children."

"'No, no," says the younger, and flames like a very Tudor rose. "At least the Spaniards know us better."

"'Admiral Boy – Vice-Admiral Babe," says Gloriana, "I cry your pardon. The heat of these present times ripens childhood to age more quickly than I can follow. But we are at peace with Spain. Where did you break your Queen's peace?"

"'On the sea called the Spanish Main, though 'tis no more Spanish than my doublet," says the elder. Guess how that warmed Gloriana's already melting heart! She would never suffer any sea to be called Spanish in her private hearing.

"'And why was I not told? What booty got you, and where have you hid it? Disclose," says she. "You stand in some danger of the gallows for pirates."

"'The axe, most gracious lady," says the elder, "for we are gentle born." He spoke truth, but no woman can brook contradiction. "Hoity-toity," says she, and, but that she remembered that she was a Queen, she'd have cuffed the pair of 'em. "It shall be gallows, hurdle, and dung-cart if I choose."

"'Had our Queen known of our going beforehand, Philip might have held her to blame for some small things we did on the seas," the younger lisps.

"'As for treasure," says the elder, "we brought back but our bare lives. We were wrecked on the Gascons' Graveyard, where our sole company for three months was the bleached bones of De Avila's men."

'Gloriana's mind jumped back to Philip's last letter.

"'De Avila that destroyed the Huguenots? What d'dou know of him?" she says. The music called from the house here, and they three turned back between the yews.

"'Simply that De Avila broke in upon a plantation of Frenchmen on that coast, and very Spaniardly hung them all for heretics – eight hundred or so. The next year Dominique de Gorgues, a Gascon, broke in upon De Avila's men, and very justly hung 'em all for murderers – five hundred or so. No Christians inhabit there now," says the elder lad, "though 'tis a goodly land north of Florida."

"'How far is it from England?" asks prudent Gloriana.

"'With a fair wind, six weeks. They say that Philip will plant it again soon." This was the younger, and he looked at her out of the corner of his innocent eye.

'Chris Hatton, fuming, meets and leads her into Brickwall Hall, where she dances – thus. A woman can think while she dances – can think. I'll show you. Watch!'

She took off her cloak slowly, and stood forth in dove-coloured satin, worked over with pearls that trembled like running water in the running shadows of the trees. Still talking – more to herself than to the children – she swam into a majestical dance of the stateliest balancings, the haughtiest wheelings and turnings aside, the most dignified sinkings, the gravest risings, all joined together by the elaboratest interlacing steps and circles.

They leaned forward breathlessly to watch the splendid acting.

'Would a Spaniard,' she began, looking on the ground, 'speak of his revenge till his revenge were ripe? No. Yet a man who loved a woman might threaten her in the hope that his threats would make her love him. Such things have been.' She moved slowly across a bar of sunlight. 'A destruction from the West may signify that Philip means to descend on Ireland. But then my Irish spies would have had some warning. The Irish keep no secrets. No – it is not Ireland. Now why – why – why' – the red shoes clicked and paused – 'does Philip name Pedro Melendez de Avila, a general in his Americas, unless' – she turned more quickly – 'unless he intends to work his destruction from the Americas? Did he say De Avila only to put her off her guard, or for this once has his black pen betrayed his black heart? We' – she raised herself to her full height – 'England must forestall Master Philip. But not openly,' she sank again – 'we cannot fight Spain openly – not yet – not yet.' She stepped three paces as though she were pegging down some snare with her twinkling shoe-buckles. 'The Queen's mad gentlemen may fight Philip's poor admirals where they find 'em, but England, Gloriana, Harry's daughter, must keep the peace. Perhaps, after all, Philip loves her – as many men and boys do. That may help England. Oh, *what* shall help England?'

She raised her head – the masked head that seemed to have nothing to do with the busy feet – and stared straight at the children.

'I think this is rather creepy,' said Una with a shiver. 'I wish she'd stop.'

The lady held out her jewelled hand as though she were taking some one else's hand in the Grand Chain.

'Can a ship go down into the Gascons' Graveyard and wait there?' she asked into the air, and passed on rustling.

'She's pretending to ask one of the cousins, isn't she?' said Dan, and Puck nodded.

Back she came in the silent, swaying, ghostly dance. They saw she was smiling beneath the mask, and they could hear her breathing hard.

'I cannot lend you any my ships for the venture; Philip would hear of it,' she whispered over her shoulder; 'but as much guns and powder as you ask, if you do not ask too – ' her voice shot up and she stamped her foot thrice. 'Louder! Louder, the music in the gallery! Oh, me, but I have burst out of my shoe!'

She gathered her skirts in each hand, and began a curtsy. 'You will go at your own charges,' she whispered straight before her. 'Oh, enviable and adorable age of youth!' Her eyes shone through the mask-holes. 'But I warn you you'll repent it. Put not your trust in princes – or Queens. Philip's ships'll blow you out of water. You'll not be frightened? Well, we'll talk on it again, when I return from Rye, dear lads.'

The wonderful curtsy ended. She stood up. Nothing stirred on her except the rush of the shadows.

'And so it was finished,' she said to the children. 'Why d'you not applaud?'

'What was finished?' said Una.

'The dance,' the lady replied offendedly. 'And a pair of green shoes.'

'I don't understand a bit,' said Una.

'Eh? What did *you* make of it, young Burleigh?'

'I'm not quite sure,' Dan began, 'but – '

'You never can be – with a woman. But – '

'But I thought Gloriana meant the cousins to go back to the Gascons' Graveyard, wherever that was.'

"Twas Virginia afterwards. Her plantation of Virginia.'

'Virginia afterwards, and stop Philip from taking it. Didn't she say she'd lend 'em guns?'

'Right so. But not ships —*then*.'

'And I thought you meant they must have told her they'd do it off their own bat, without getting her into a row with Philip. Was I right?'

'Near enough for a Minister of the Queen. But remember she gave the lads full time to change their minds. She was three long days at Rye Royal – knighting of fat Mayors. When she came back to Brickwall, they met her a mile down the road, and she could feel their eyes burn through her riding-mask. Chris Hatton, poor fool, was vexed at it.

"'You would not birch them when I gave you the chance," says she to Chris. "Now you must get me half an hour's private speech with 'em in Brickwall garden. Eve tempted Adam in a garden. Quick, man, or I may repent!"'

'She was a Queen. Why did she not send for them herself,' said Una.

The lady shook her head. 'That was never her way. I've seen her walk to her own mirror by bye-ends, and the woman that cannot walk straight *there* is past praying for. Yet I would have you pray for her! What else – what else in England's name could she have done?' She lifted her hand to her throat for a moment. 'Faith,' she cried, 'I'd forgotten the little green shoes! She left 'em at Brickwall – so she did. And I remember she gave the Norgem parson – John Withers, was he? – a text for his sermon – "Over Edom have I cast out my shoe." Neat, if he'd understood!'

'I don't understand,' said Una. 'What about the two cousins?'

'You are as cruel as a woman,' the lady answered. '*I* was not to blame. I told you I gave 'em time to change their minds. On my honour (*ay de mi!*), she asked no more of 'em at first than to wait a while off that coast – the Gascons' Graveyard – to hover a little if their ships chanced to pass that way – they had only one tall ship and a pinnace – only to watch and bring me word of Philip's doings. One must watch Philip always. What a murrain right had he to make any plantation there, a hundred leagues north of his Spanish Main, and only six weeks from England? By my dread father's soul, I tell you he had none – none!' She stamped her red foot again, and the two children shrunk back for a second.

'Nay, nay. You must not turn from me too! She laid it all fairly before the lads in Brickwall garden between the yews. I told 'em that if Philip sent a fleet (and to make a plantation he could not well send less), their poor little cock-boats could not sink it. They answered that, with submission, the fight would be their own concern. She showed 'em again that there could be only one end to it – quick death on the sea, or slow death in Philip's prisons. They asked no more than to embrace death

for my sake. Many men have prayed to me for life. I've refused 'em, and slept none the worse after; but when my men, my tall, fantastical young men beseech me on their knees for leave to die for me, it shakes me – ah, it shakes me to the marrow of my old bones.'

Her chest sounded like a board as she hit it.

'She showed 'em all. I told 'em that this was no time for open war with Spain. If by miracle inconceivable they prevailed against Philip's fleet, Philip would hold me accountable. For England's sake, to save war, I should e'en be forced (I told 'em so) to give him up their young lives. If they failed, and again by some miracle escaped Philip's hand, and crept back to England with their bare lives, they must lie – oh, I told 'em all – under my sovereign displeasure. She could not know them, see them, nor hear their names, nor stretch out a finger to save them from the gallows, if Philip chose to ask it.

"'Be it the gallows, then," says the elder. (I could have wept, but that my face was made for the day.)

"'Either way – any way – this venture is death, which I know you fear not. But it is death with assured dishonour," I cried.

"'Yet our Queen will know in her heart what we have done," says the younger.

"'Sweetheart," I said. "A queen has no heart."

"'But she is a woman, and a woman would not forget," says the elder. "We will go!" They knelt at my feet.

"'Nay, dear lads – but here!" I said, and I opened my arms to them and I kissed them.

"'Be ruled by me," I said. "We'll hire some ill-featured old tarry-breeks of an admiral to watch the Graveyard, and you shall come to Court."

"'Hire whom you please," says the elder; "we are ruled by you, body and soul"; and the younger, who shook most when I kissed 'em, says between his white lips, "I think you have power to make a god of a man."

"'Come to Court and be sure of it," I says.

'They shook their heads and I knew – I knew, that go they would. If I had not kissed them – perhaps I might have prevailed.'

'Then why did you do it?' said Una. 'I don't think you knew really what you wanted done.'

'May it please your Majesty,' the lady bowed her head low, 'this Gloriana whom I have represented for your pleasure was a woman and a Queen. Remember her when you come to your kingdom.'

'But did the cousins go to the Gascons' Graveyard?' said Dan, as Una frowned.

'They went,' said the lady.

'Did they ever come back?' Una began; but – 'Did they stop King Philip's fleet?' Dan interrupted.

The lady turned to him eagerly.

'D'you think they did right to go?' she asked.

'I don't see what else they could have done,' Dan replied, after thinking it over.

'D'you think she did right to send 'em?' The lady's voice rose a little.

'Well,' said Dan, 'I don't see what else she could have done, either – do you? How did they stop King Philip from getting Virginia?'

'There's the sad part of it. They sailed out that autumn from Rye Royal, and there never came back so much as a single rope-yarn to show what had befallen them. The winds blew, and they were not. Does that make you alter your mind, young Burleigh?'

'I expect they were drowned, then. Anyhow, Philip didn't score, did he?'

'Gloriana wiped out her score with Philip later. But if Philip had won, would you have blamed Gloriana for wasting those lads' lives?'

'Of course not. She was bound to try to stop him.'

The lady coughed. ‘You have the root of the matter in you. Were I Queen, I’d make you Minister.’

‘We don’t play that game,’ said Una, who felt that she disliked the lady as much as she disliked the noise the high wind made tearing through Willow Shaw.

‘Play!’ said the lady with a laugh, and threw up her hands affectedly. The sunshine caught the jewels on her many rings and made them flash till Una’s eyes dazzled, and she had to rub them. Then she saw Dan on his knees picking up the potatoes they had spilled at the gate.

‘There wasn’t anybody in the Shaw, after all,’ he said. ‘Didn’t you think you saw some one?’

‘I’m most awfully glad there isn’t,’ said Una. Then they went on with the potato-roast.

THE LOOKING-GLASS

Queen Bess was Harry's daughter!

The Queen was in her chamber, and she was middling old,
Her petticoat was satin and her stomacher was gold.
Backwards and forwards and sideways did she pass,
Making up her mind to face the cruel looking-glass.
The cruel looking-glass that will never show a lass
As comely or as kindly or as young as once she was!

The Queen was in her chamber, a-combing of her hair,
There came Queen Mary's spirit and it stood behind her chair,
Singing, 'Backwards and forwards and sideways may you pass,
But I will stand behind you till you face the looking-glass.
The cruel looking-glass that will never show a lass
As lovely or unlucky or as lonely as I was!'

The Queen was in her chamber, a-weeping very sore,
There came Lord Leicester's spirit and it scratched upon the door,
Singing, 'Backwards and forwards and sideways may you pass,
But I will walk beside you till you face the looking-glass.
The cruel looking-glass that will never show a lass
As hard and unforgiving or as wicked as you was!'

The Queen was in her chamber; her sins were on her head;
She looked the spirits up and down and statelily she said:
'Backwards and forwards and sideways though I've been,
Yet I am Harry's daughter and I am England's Queen!'
And she faced the looking-glass (and whatever else there was),
And she saw her day was over and she saw her beauty pass
In the cruel looking-glass that can always hurt a lass
More hard than any ghost there is or any man there was!

The Wrong Thing

A TRUTHFUL SONG

I

The Bricklayer: —
I tell this tale which is strictly true,
Just by way of convincing you
How very little since things were made
Things have altered in the building trade.

A year ago, come the middle o' March,
We was building flats near the Marble Arch,
When a thin young man with coal-black hair
Came up to watch us working there.

Now there wasn't a trick in brick or stone
That this young man hadn't seen or known;
Nor there wasn't a tool from trowel to maul
But this young man could use 'em all!

Then up and spoke the plumbyers bold,
Which was laying the pipes for the hot and cold:
'Since you with us have made so free,
Will you kindly say what your name might be?'

The young man kindly answered them:
'It might be Lot or Methusalem,
Or it might be Moses (a man I hate),
Whereas it is Pharaoh surnamed the Great.

'Your glazing is new and your plumbing's strange,
But otherwise I perceive no change,
And in less than a month if you do as I bid
I'd learn you to build me a Pyramid.'

II

The Sailor: —
I tell this tale which is stricter true,
Just by way of convincing you

How very little since things was made
Things have altered in the shipwright's trade.

In Blackwall Basin yesterday
A China barque re-fitting lay,
When a fat old man with snow-white hair
Came up to watch us working there.

Now there wasn't a knot which the riggers knew
But the old man made it – and better too;
Nor there wasn't a sheet, or a lift, or a brace,
But the old man knew its lead and place.

Then up and spake the caulkyers bold,
Which was packing the pump in the after-hold:
'Since you with us have made so free,
Will you kindly tell what your name might be?'

The old man kindly answered them:
'It might be Japhet, it might be Shem,
Or it might be Ham (though his skin was dark),
Whereas it is Noah, commanding the Ark.

'Your wheel is new and your pumps are strange,
But otherwise I perceive no change,
And in less than a week, if she did not ground,
I'd sail this hooker the wide world round!'

Both: *We tell these tales which are strictest true, etc.*

The Wrong Thing

Dan had gone in for building model boats; but after he had filled the schoolroom with chips, which he expected Una to clear away, they turned him out of doors and he took all his tools up the hill to Mr. Springett's yard, where he knew he could make as much mess as he chose. Old Mr. Springett was a builder, contractor, and sanitary engineer, and his yard, which opened off the village street, was always full of interesting things. At one end of it was a long loft, reached by a ladder, where he kept his iron-bound scaffold planks, tins of paints, pulleys, and odds and ends he had found in old houses. He would sit here by the hour watching his carts as they loaded or unloaded in the yard below, while Dan gouged and grunted at the carpenter's bench near the loft window. Mr. Springett and Dan had always been particular friends, for Mr. Springett was so old he could remember when railways were being made in the southern counties of England, and people were allowed to drive dogs in carts.

One hot, still afternoon – the tar-paper on the roof smelt like ships – Dan, in his shirt sleeves, was smoothing down a new schooner's bow, and Mr. Springett was talking of barns and houses he had built. He said he never forgot any stick or stone he had ever handled, or any man, woman, or child he had ever met. Just then he was very proud of the village Hall at the entrance to the village, which he had finished a few weeks before.

'An' I don't mind tellin' you, Mus' Dan,' he said, 'that the Hall will be my last job top of this mortal earth. I didn't make ten pounds – no, nor yet five – out o' the whole contrac', but my name's lettered on the foundation stone —*Ralph Springett, Builder*– and the stone she's bedded on four foot good concrete. If she shifts any time these five hundred years, I'll sure-ly turn in my grave. I told the Lunnon architec' so when he come down to oversee my work.'

'What did he say?' Dan was sandpapering the schooner's port bow.

'Nothing. The Hall ain't more than one of his small jobs for *him*, but 'tain't small to me, an' my name is cut and lettered, frontin' the village street, I do hope an' pray, for time everlastin.' You'll want the little round file for that holler in her bow. Who's there?' Mr. Springett turned stiffly in his chair.

A long pile of scaffold-planks ran down the centre of the loft. Dan looked, and saw Hal of the Draft's touzled head beyond them.[3]

'Be you the builder of the village Hall?' he asked of Mr. Springett.

'I be,' was the answer. 'But if you want a job – '

Hal laughed. 'No, faith!' he said. 'Only the Hall is as good and honest a piece of work as I've ever run a rule over. So, being born hereabouts, and being reckoned a master among masons, and accepted as a master mason, I made bold to pay my brotherly respects to the builder.'

'Aa – um!' Mr. Springett looked important. 'I be a bit rusty, but I'll try ye!'

He asked Hal several curious questions, and the answers must have pleased him, for he invited Hal to sit down. Hal moved up, always keeping behind the pile of planks so that only his head showed, and sat down on a trestle in the dark corner at the back of Mr. Springett's desk. He took no notice of Dan, but talked at once to Mr. Springett about bricks, and cement, and lead and glass, and after a while Dan went on with his work. He knew Mr. Springett was pleased, because he tugged his white sandy beard, and smoked his pipe in short puffs. The two men seemed to agree about everything, but when grown-ups agree they interrupt each other almost as much as if they were quarrelling. Hal said something about workmen.

'Why, that's what *I* always say,' Mr. Springett cried. 'A man who can only do one thing, he's but next-above-fool to the man that can't do nothing. That's where the Unions make their mistake.'

[3] See 'Hal o' the Draft' in *Puck of Pook's Hill*.

'My thought to the very dot.' Dan heard Hal slap his tight-hosed leg. 'I've suffered in my time from these same Guilds – Unions d'you call 'em? All their precious talk of the mysteries of their trades – why, what does it come to?'

'Nothin'! You've just about hit it,' said Mr. Springett, and rammed his hot tobacco with his thumb.

'Take the art of wood-carving,' Hal went on. He reached across the planks, grabbed a wooden mallet, and moved his other hand as though he wanted something. Mr. Springett without a word passed him one of Dan's broad chisels. 'Ah! Wood-carving, for example. If you can cut wood and have a fair draft of what ye mean to do, a Heaven's name take chisel and mall and let drive at it, say I! You'll soon find all the mystery, forsooth, of wood-carving under your proper hand!' Whack, came the mallet on the chisel, and a sliver of wood curled up in front of it. Mr. Springett watched like an old raven.

'All art is one, man – one!' said Hal between whacks; 'and to wait on another man to finish out – '

'To finish out your work ain't no sense,' Mr. Springett cut in. 'That's what I'm always saying to the boy here.' He nodded towards Dan. 'That's what I said when I put the new wheel into Brewster's Mill in Eighteen hundred Seventy-two. I reckoned I was millwright enough for the job 'thout bringin' a man from Lunnon. An' besides, dividin' work eats up profits, no bounds.'

Hal laughed his beautiful deep laugh, and Mr. Springett joined in till Dan laughed too.

'You handle your tools, I can see,' said Mr. Springett. 'I reckon, if you're any way like me, you've found yourself hindered by those – Guilds, did you call 'em? – Unions, we say.'

'You may say so!' Hal pointed to a white scar on his cheek-bone. 'This is a remembrance from the master watching Foreman of Masons on Magdalen Tower, because, please you, I dared to carve stone without their leave. They said a stone had slipped from the cornice by accident.'

'I know them accidents. There's no way to disprove 'em. An' stones ain't the only things that slip,' Mr. Springett grunted. Hal went on:

'I've seen a scaffold-plank keckle and shoot a too-clever workman thirty foot on to the cold chancel floor below. And a rope can break – '

'Yes, natural as nature; an' lime'll fly up in a man's eyes without any breath o' wind sometimes,' said Mr. Springett. 'But who's to show 'twasn't a accident?'

'Who do these things?' Dan asked, and straightened his back at the bench as he turned the schooner end-for-end in the vice to get at her counter.

'Them which don't wish other men to work no better nor quicker than they do,' growled Mr. Springett. 'Don't pinch her so hard in the vice, Mus' Dan. Put a piece o' rag in the jaws, or you'll bruise her. More than that' – he turned towards Hal – 'if a man has his private spite laid up against you, the Unions give him his excuse for working it off.'

'Well I know it,' said Hal.

'They never let you go, them spiteful ones. I knowed a plasterer in Eighteen hundred Sixty-one – down to the Wells. He was a Frenchy – a bad enemy he was.'

'I had mine too. He was an Italian, called Benedetto. I met him first at Oxford on Magdalen Tower when I was learning my trade – or trades, I should say. A bad enemy he was, as you say, but he came to be my singular good friend,' said Hal as he put down the mallet and settled himself comfortably.

'What might his trade have been – plasterin'?' Mr. Springett asked.

'Plastering of a sort. He worked in stucco – fresco we call it. Made pictures on plaster. Not but what he had a fine sweep of the hand in drawing. He'd take the long sides of a cloister, trowel on his stuff, and roll out his great all-abroad pictures of saints and croppy-topped trees quick as a webster unrolling cloth almost. Oh, Benedetto could draw, but a was a little-minded man, professing to be full of secrets of colour or plaster – common tricks, all of 'em – and his one single talk was how Tom, Dick or Harry had stole this or t'other secret art from him.'

'I know that sort,' said Mr. Springett. 'There's no keeping peace or making peace with such. An' they're mostly born an' bone idle.'

'True. Even his fellow-countrymen laughed at his jealousy. We two came to loggerheads early on Magdalen Tower. I was a youngster then. Maybe I spoke my mind about his work.'

'You shouldn't never do that.' Mr. Springett shook his head. 'That sort lay it up against you.'

'True enough. This Benedetto did most specially. Body o' me, the man lived to hate me! But I always kept my eyes open on a plank or a scaffold. I was mighty glad to be shut of him when he quarrelled with his Guild foreman, and went off, nose in air, and paints under his arm. But' – Hal leaned forward – 'if you hate a man or a man hates you – '

'*I* know. You're everlastin' running acrost him,' Mr. Springett interrupted. 'Excuse me, sir.' He leaned out of the window, and shouted to a carter who was loading a cart with bricks.

'Ain't you no more sense than to heap 'em up that way?' he said. 'Take an' throw a hundred of 'em off. It's more than the team can compass. Throw 'em off, I tell you, and make another trip for what's left over. Excuse me, sir. You was saying – '

'I was saying that before the end of the year I went to Bury to strengthen the lead-work in the great Abbey east window there.'

'Now that's just one of the things I've never done. But I mind there was a cheap excursion to Chichester in Eighteen hundred Seventy-nine, an' I went an' watched 'em leading a won'erful fine window in Chichester Cathedral. I stayed watchin' till 'twas time for us to go back. Dunno as I had two drinks p'raps, all that day.'

Hal smiled. 'At Bury then, sure enough, I met my enemy Benedetto. He had painted a picture in plaster on the south wall of the Refectory – a noble place for a noble thing – a picture of Jonah.'

'Ah! Jonah an' his whale. I've never been as fur as Bury. You've worked about a lot,' said Mr. Springett, with his eyes on the carter below.

'No. Not the whale. This was a picture of Jonah and the pompion that withered. But all that Benedetto had shown was a peevish greybeard huggled up in angle-edged drapery beneath a pompion on a wooden trellis. This last, being a dead thing, he'd drawn it as 'twere to the life. But fierce old Jonah, bared in the sun, angry even to death that his cold prophecy was disproven – Jonah, ashamed, and already hearing the children of Nineveh running to mock him – ah, that was what Benedetto had *not* drawn!'

'He better ha' stuck to his whale, then,' said Mr. Springett.

'He'd ha' done no better with that. He draws the damp cloth off the picture, an' shows it to me. I was a craftsman too, d'ye see?

"'"'Tis good," I said, "but it goes no deeper than the plaster."

"'"What?" he said in a whisper.

"'"Be thy own judge, Benedetto," I answered. "Does it go deeper than the plaster?"

'He reeled against a piece of dry wall. "No," he says, "and I know it. I could not hate thee more than I have done these five years, but if I live, I will try, Hal. I will try." Then he goes away. I pitied him, but I had spoken truth. His picture went no deeper than the plaster.'

'Ah!' said Mr. Springett, who had turned quite red. 'You was talkin' so fast I didn't understand what you was drivin' at. I've seen men – good workmen they was – try to do more than they could do, and – and they couldn't compass it. They knowed it, and it nigh broke their hearts like. You was in your right, o' course, sir, to say what you thought o' his work; but if you'll excuse me, was you in your duty?'

'I was wrong to say it,' Hal replied. 'God forgive me – I was young! He was workman enough himself to know where he failed. But it all came evens in the long run. By the same token, did ye ever hear o' one Torrigiano – Torrisany we called him?'

'I can't say I ever did. Was he a Frenchy like?'

'No, a hectoring, hard-mouthed, long-sworded Italian builder, as vain as a peacock and as strong as a bull, but, mark you, a master workman. More than that – he could get his best work out of the worst men.'

'Which it's a gift. I had a foreman-bricklayer like him once,' said Mr. Springett. 'He used to prod 'em in the back like with a pointing-trowel, and they did wonders.'

'I've seen our Torrisany lay a 'prentice down with one buffet and raise him with another – to make a mason of him. I worked under him at building a chapel in London – a chapel and a tomb for the king.'

'I never knew kings went to chapel much,' said Mr. Springett. 'But I always hold with a man, don't care who he be, seein' about his own grave before he dies. Tidn't the sort of thing to leave to your family after the will's read. I reckon 'twas a fine vault.'

'None finer in England. This Torrigiano had the contract for it, as you'd say. He picked master craftsmen from all parts – England, France, Italy, the Low Countries – no odds to him so long as they knew their work, and he drove them like – like pigs at Brightling Fair. He called us English all pigs. We suffered it because he was a master in his craft. If he misliked any work that a man had done, with his own great hands he'd rive it out, and tear it down before us all. "Ah, you pig – you English pig!" he'd scream in the dumb wretch's face. "You answer me? You look at me? You think at me? Come out with me into the cloisters. I will teach you carving myself. I will gild you all over!" But when his passion had blown out, he'd slip his arm round the man's neck, and impart knowledge worth gold. 'Twould have done your heart good, Mus' Springett, to see the two hundred of us – masons, jewellers, carvers, gilders, iron workers and the rest – all toiling like cock-angels, and this mad Italian hornet fleeing from one to next up and down the chapel. 'Done your heart good, it would!'

'I believe you,' said Mr. Springett. 'In Eighteen hundred Fifty-four, I mind, the railway was bein' made into Hastin's. There was two thousand navvies on it – all young – all strong – an' I was one of 'em. Oh, dearie me! Excuse me, sir, but was your enemy workin' with you?'

'Benedetto? Be sure he was. He followed me like a lover. He painted pictures on the chapel ceiling – slung from a chair. Torrigiano made us promise not to fight till the work should be finished. We were both master craftsmen, do ye see, and he needed us. None the less, I never went aloft to carve 'thout testing all my ropes and knots each morning. We were never far from each other. Benedetto 'ud sharpen his knife on his sole while he waited for his plaster to dry —*wheet, wheet, wheet*. I'd hear it where I hung chipping round a pillar-head, and we'd nod to each other friendly-like. Oh, he was a craftsman, was Benedetto, but his hate spoiled his eye and his hand. I mind the night I had finished the models for the bronze saints round the tomb; Torrigiano embraced me before all the chapel, and bade me to supper. I met Benedetto when I came out. He was slavering in the porch like a mad dog.'

'Working himself up to it?' said Mr. Springett. 'Did he have it in at ye that night?'

'No, no. That time he kept his oath to Torrigiano. But I pitied him. Eh, well! Now I come to my own follies. I had never thought too little of myself; but after Torrisany had put his arm round my neck, I – I' – Hal broke into a laugh – 'I lay there was not much odds 'twixt me and a cock-sparrow in his pride.'

'I was pretty middlin' young once on a time,' said Mr. Springett.

'Then ye know that a man can't drink and dice and dress fine, and keep company above his station, but his work suffers for it, Mus' Springett.'

'I never held much with dressin' up, but – you're right! The worst mistakes *I* ever made they was made on a Monday morning,' Mr. Springett answered. 'We've all been one sort of fool or t'other. Mus' Dan, Mus' Dan, take the smallest gouge, or you'll be spluttin' her stern works clean out. Can't ye see the grain of the wood don't favour a chisel?'

'I'll spare you some of my follies. But there was a man called Brygandyne – Bob Brygandyne – Clerk of the King's Ships, a little, smooth, bustling atomy, as clever as a woman to get work done for nothin' – a won'erful smooth-tongued pleader. He made much o' me, and asked me to draft him

out a drawing, a piece of carved and gilt scroll-work for the bows of one of the King's ships – the *Sovereign* was her name.'

'Was she a man-of-war?' asked Dan.

'She was a war-ship, and a woman called Catherine of Castile desired the King to give her the ship for a pleasure-ship of her own. *I* did not know at the time, but she'd been at Bob to get this scroll-work done and fitted that the King might see it. I made him the picture, in an hour, all of a heat after supper – one great heaving play of dolphins and a Neptune or so reining in webby-footed sea-horses, and Arion with his harp high atop of them. It was twenty-three foot long, and maybe nine foot deep – painted and gilt.'

'It must ha' just about looked fine,' said Mr. Springett.

'That's the curiosity of it. 'Twas bad – rank bad. In my conceit I must needs show it to Torrigiano, in the chapel. He straddles his legs; hunches his knife behind him, and whistles like a storm-cock through a sleet-shower. Benedetto was behind him. He were never far apart, I've told you.

"'That is pig's work," says our Master. "Swine's work. You make any more such things, even after your fine Court suppers, and you shall be sent away."

'Benedetto licks his lips like a cat. "Is it so bad then, Master?" he says. "What a pity!"

"'Yes," says Torrigiano. "Scarcely *you* could do things so bad. I will condescend to show."

'He talks to me then and there. No shouting, no swearing (it was too bad for that); but good, memorable counsel, bitten in slowly. Then he sets me to draft out a pair of iron gates, to take, as he said, the taste of my naughty dolphins out of my mouth. Iron's sweet stuff if you don't torture her, and hammered work is all pure, truthful line, with a reason and a support for every curve and bar of it. A week at that settled my stomach handsomely, and the Master let me put the work through the smithy, where I sweated out more of my foolish pride.'

'Good stuff is good iron,' said Mr. Springett. 'I done a pair of lodge gates once in Eighteen hundred Sixty-three.'

'Oh, I forgot to say that Bob Brygandyne whipped away my draft of the ship's scroll-work, and would not give it back to me to re-draw. He said 'twould do well enough. Howsoever, my lawful work kept me too busied to remember him. Body o' me, but I worked that winter upon the gates and the bronzes for the tomb as I'd never worked before! I was leaner than a lath, but I lived – I lived then!' Hal looked at Mr. Springett with his wise, crinkled-up eyes, and the old man smiled back.

'Ouch!' Dan cried. He had been hollowing out the schooner's after-deck, the little gouge had slipped and gashed the ball of his left thumb, – an ugly, triangular tear.

'That came of not steadying your wrist,' said Hal calmly. 'Don't bleed over the wood. *Do* your work with your heart's blood, but no need to let it show.' He rose and peered into a corner of the loft.

Mr. Springett had risen too, and swept down a ball of cobwebs from a rafter.

'Clap that on,' was all he said, 'and put your handkerchief atop. 'Twill cake over in a minute. It don't hurt now, do it?'

'No,' said Dan indignantly. 'You know it has happened lots of times. I'll tie it up myself. Go on, sir.'

'And it'll happen hundreds of times more,' said Hal with a friendly nod as he sat down again. But he did not go on till Dan's hand was tied up properly. Then he said:

'One dark December day – too dark to judge colour – we was all sitting and talking round the fires in the chapel (you heard good talk there), when Bob Brygandyne bustles in and – "Hal, you're sent for," he squeals. I was at Torrigiano's feet on a pile of put-locks, as I might be here, toasting a herring on my knife's point. 'Twas the one English thing our Master liked – salt herring.

"'I'm busy, about my art," I calls.

"'Art?" says Bob. "What's Art compared to your scroll-work for the *Sovereign*. Come."

"'Be sure your sins will find you out," says Torrigiano. "Go with him and see." As I followed Bob out I was aware of Benedetto, like a black spot when the eyes are tired, sliddering up behind me.

‘Bob hurries through the streets in the raw fog, slips into a doorway, up stairs, along passages, and at last thrusts me into a little cold room vilely hung with Flemish tapestries, and no furnishing except a table and my draft of the *Sovereign’s* scroll-work. Here he leaves me. Presently comes in a dark, long-nosed man in a fur cap.

“‘Master Harry Dawe?” said he.

“‘The same,” I says. “Where a plague has Bob Brygandyne gone?"

‘His thin eyebrows surged up a piece and come down again in a stiff bar. "He went to the King,” he says.

“‘All one. What’s your pleasure with me?” I says shivering, for it was mortal cold.

‘He lays his hand flat on my draft. “Master Dawe,” he says, “do you know the present price of gold leaf for all this wicked gilding of yours?”

‘By that I guessed he was some cheese-paring clerk or other of the King’s Ships, so I gave him the price. I forget it now, but it worked out to thirty pounds – carved, gilt, and fitted in place.

“‘Thirty pounds!” he said, as though I had pulled a tooth of him. "You talk as though thirty pounds was to be had for the asking. None the less,” he says, “your draft’s a fine piece of work.”

‘I’d been looking at it ever since I came in, and ’twas viler even than I judged it at first. My eye and hand had been purified the past months, d’you see, by my iron work.

“‘I could do it better now,” I said. The more I studied my squabby Neptunes the less I liked ’em; and Arion was a pure flaming shame atop of the unbalanced dolphins.

“‘I doubt it will be fresh expense to draft it again,” he says.

“‘Bob never paid me for the first draft. I lay he’ll never pay me for the second. ‘Twill cost the King nothing if I re-draw it,” I says.

“‘There’s a woman wishes it to be done quickly,” he says. “We’ll stick to your first drawing, Mus’ Dawe. But thirty pounds is thirty pounds. You must make it less.”

‘And all the while the faults in my draft fair leaped out and hit me between the eyes. At any cost, I thinks to myself, I must get it back and re-draft it. He grunts at me impatiently, and a splendid thought comes to me, which shall save me. By the same token, ’twas quite honest.’

‘They ain’t always,’ said Mr. Springett. ‘How did you get out of it?’

‘By the truth. I says to Master Fur Cap, as I might to you here, I says, “I’ll tell you something, since you seem a knowledgeable man. Is the *Sovereign* to lie in Thames river all her days, or will she take the high seas?”

“‘Oh,” he says quickly, “the King keeps no cats that don’t catch mice. She must sail the seas, Master Dawe. She’ll be hired to merchants for the trade. She’ll be out in all shapes o’ weathers. Does that make any odds?”

“‘Why, then,” says I, “the first heavy sea she sticks her nose into ’ll claw off half that scroll-work, and the next will finish it. If she’s meant for a pleasure-ship give me my draft again, and I’ll porture you a pretty, light piece of scroll-work, good, cheap. If she’s meant for the open sea, pitch the draft into the fire. She can never carry that weight on her bows.”

‘He looks at me squintlings and plucks his under-lip.

“‘Is this your honest, unswayed opinion?” he says.

“‘Body o’ me! Ask about!” I says. “Any seaman could tell you ’tis true. I’m advising you against my own profit, but why I do so is my own concern.”

“‘Not altogether,” he says. “It’s some of mine. You’ve saved me thirty pounds, Master Dawe, and you’ve given me good arguments to use against a wilful woman that wants my fine new ship for her own toy. We’ll not have any scroll-work." His face shined with pure joy.

“‘Then see that the thirty pounds you’ve saved on it are honestly paid the King,” I says, “and keep clear o’ womenfolk.” I gathered up my draft and crumpled it under my arm. “If that’s all you need of me I’ll be gone,” I says, “for I’m pressed.”

'He turns him round and fumbles in a corner. "Too pressed to be made a knight, Sir Harry?" he says, and comes at me smiling, with three-quarters of a rusty sword.

'I pledge you my Mark I never guessed it was the King till that moment. I kneeled, and he tapped me on the shoulder.

'"Rise up, Sir Harry Dawe," he says, and, in the same breath, "I'm pressed, too," and slips through the tapestries, leaving me like a stuck calf.

'It come over me, in a bitter wave like, that here was I, a master craftsman, who had worked no bounds, soul or body, to make the King's tomb and chapel a triumph and a glory for all time; and here, d'you see, I was made knight, not for anything I'd slaved over, or given my heart and guts to, but expressedly because I'd saved him thirty pounds and a tongue-lashing from Catherine of Castile – she that had asked for the ship. That thought shrivelled me withinsides while I was folding away my draft. On the heels of it – maybe you'll see why – I began to grin to myself. I thought of the earnest simplicity of the man – the King, I should say – because I'd saved him the money; his smile as though he'd won half France! I thought of my own silly pride and foolish expectations that some day he'd honour me as a master craftsman. I thought of the broken-tipped sword he'd found behind the hangings; the dirt of the cold room, and his cold eye, wrapped up in his own concerns, scarcely resting on me. Then I remembered the solemn chapel roof and the bronzes about the stately tomb he'd lie in, and – d'ye see? – the unreason of it all – the mad high humour of it all – took hold on me till I sat me down on a dark stair-head in a passage, and laughed till I could laugh no more. What else could I have done?

'I never heard his feet behind me – he always walked like a cat – but his arm slid round my neck, pulling me back where I sat, till my head lay on his chest, and his left hand held the knife plumb over my heart – Benedetto! Even so I laughed – the fit was beyond my holding – laughed while he ground his teeth in my ear. He was stark crazed for the time.

'"Laugh," he said. "Finish the laughter. I'll not cut ye short. Tell me now" – he wrenched at my head – "why the King chose to honour you – you – you – you lickspittle Englishman? I am full of patience now. I have waited so long." Then he was off at score about his Jonah in Bury Refectory, and what I'd said of it, and his pictures in the chapel which all men praised and none looked at twice (as if that was *my* fault!) and a whole parcel of words and looks treasured up against me through years.

'"Ease off your arm a little," I said. "I cannot die by choking, for I am just dubbed knight, Benedetto."

'"Tell me, and I'll confess ye, Sir Harry Dawe, knight. There's a long night before ye. Tell," says he.

'So I told him – his chin on my crown – told him all; told it as well and with as many words as I have ever told a tale at a supper with Torrigiano. I knew Benedetto would understand, for, mad or sad, he was a craftsman. I believed it to be the last tale I'd ever tell top of mortal earth, and I would not put out bad work before I left the lodge. All art's one art, as I said. I bore Benedetto no malice. My spirits, d'you see, were catched up in a high, solemn exaltation, and I saw all earth's vanities foreshortened and little, laid out below me like a town from a cathedral scaffolding. I told him what befell, and what I thought of it. I gave him the King's very voice at "Master Dawe, you've saved me thirty pounds!" his peevish grunt while he looked for the sword; and how the badger-eyed figures of Glory and Victory leered at me from the Flemish hangings. Body o' me, 'twas a fine, noble tale, and, as I thought, my last work on earth.

'"That is how I was honoured by the King," I said. "They'll hang ye for killing me, Benedetto. And, since you've killed in the King's Palace, they'll draw and quarter you; but you're too mad to care. Grant me, though, ye never heard a better tale."

'He said nothing, but I felt him shake. My head on his chest shook; his right arm fell away, his left dropped the knife, and he leaned with both hands on my shoulder – shaking – shaking! I turned me round. No need to put my foot on his knife. The man was speechless with laughter – honest

craftsman's mirth. The first time I'd ever seen him laugh. You know the mirth that cuts off the very breath, while ye stamp and snatch at the short ribs? That was Benedetto's case.

'When he began to roar and bay and whoop in the passage, I haled him out into the street, and there we leaned against the wall and had it all over again – waving our hands and wagging our heads – till the watch came to know if we were drunk.

'Benedetto says to 'em, solemn as an owl: "You have saved me thirty pound, Mus' Dawe," and off he pealed. In some sort we were mad drunk – I because dear life had been given back to me, and he because, as he said afterwards, because the old crust of hatred round his heart was broke up and carried away by laughter. His very face had changed too.

'"Hal," he cries, "I forgive thee. Forgive me too, Hal. Oh, you English, you English! Did it gall thee, Hal, to see the rust on the dirty sword? Tell me again, Hal, how the King grunted with joy. Oh, let us tell the Master."

'So we reeled back to the chapel, arms round each other's necks, and when we could speak – he thought we'd been fighting – we told the Master. Yes, we told Torrigiano, and he laughed till he rolled on the new cold pavement. Then he knocked our heads together.

'"Ah, you English," he cried. "You are more than pigs. You are English. Now you are well punished for your dirty fishes. Put the draft in the fire, and never do so any more. You are a fool, Hal, and you are a fool, Benedetto, but I need your works to please this beautiful English King – "

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.