

Crockett Samuel Rutherford

Sweethearts at Home



Samuel Crockett

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Crockett S. R. Samuel Rutherford

Sweethearts at Home

THE EDITOR'S CHAPTERS

HE TELLS HOW IT ALL CAME ABOUT

I

A sleepy Sunday morning – and no need for any one to go to church.

It was at Neuchâtel, under the trees by the lake, that I first became conscious of what wonderful assistance Sweetheart might be to me in my literary work. She corrected me as to the date upon which we had made our pilgrimage to Chaumont, as to the color of the hair of the pretty daughter of the innkeeper whom we had seen there – in her way quite a Swiss Elizabeth Fortinbras. In a word, I became aware that she had kept a diary. Sweetheart, like her nearest literary relative, began with "poetry." That was what we called it then. We have both revised our judgments since. Only Sweetheart has been more wise than I should have been at her age. She has resisted temptation, and rigorously ruled out all verse from the Diary as at present published! This is wonderful. I published mine.

Since then, she and I have been preparing the present volume, just as eagerly as if we had "yielded to the solicitations of numerous friends," as the privately-printed books say.

No, it was quite the contrary with us. Nobody, except one nice publisher, knows anything about it. He asked us to let him print it, and even he has not seen the very least little scrap. All he knows is that Sweetheart has a good many thousand friends scattered up and down two hemispheres, and he believes (as we also are vain enough to believe) that they will not let *Sweetheart's Diary* go a-begging to be bought.

There is something curiously dreamy about the Lake of Neuchâtel. I knew it and the school down by the pier long ago, when the little town still preserved distinct traces of the hundred and fifty years of Prussian drill-sergeants. Here and there the arms of Brandenburg were to be seen curiously mixed, and almost entwined, with the strong red cross of the Swiss Confederation.

Specially interesting is the opposite side of the lake, for there the Cantons push forward their narrow necks of territory to the very lake shore – possibly as the price of their support against the Eagles of the North, whose claws have never let go their hold but this once. There, within a day's easy walk, you can pass from Canton Vaud into Canton Friburg and back again into Vaud. Then, Morat-way, you come on a little inset square of Canton Berne, whose emblematic bears also have their claws in every pie thereabout. And all the way, never a hotel for the fleecing of the foreigner! Here and there, indeed, one passes a country inn with sanded floor. More often it is only a rather superior house with a bush hung out French-fashion over the threshold.

It is best, as Sweetheart and I found, to make for one of these. Generally I had known them of old, and though since then the years had done some stiff route-marching, most of their hosts and hostesses remembered me.

How do you get there? Well, you cross the lake almost at its narrowest part. A little stream drains into it, slowly and in Dutch fashion, as if it were smoking a peaceful pipe by the way. Indeed, for a little while you might fancy yourself actually in Holland, so thickly are the flowers set. Only – only (and oh! the difference!) they are all wild. For I cannot help my heart beating faster when I set foot on any of the untrodden places of the earth, when I know that the next person I meet will be different from anybody I have ever met before – that he will be as frankly interested and very likely

amused by me as I am by the moldy and the quaint about him – things that nobody in his senses has ever thought of looking at in that countryside for a hundred years! Privately there is often a quiet, widespread, wholly unspoken doubt of my entire sanity. That dry smile hovering about the mouth of the courteous mayor of the commune says as much. Just the same with the quick, intelligent glance that shoots betwixt husband and wife when you ask to see their barn – once the chapel of a long-destroyed monastery (Carthusians from the Italian valleys driven out by the religious wars). To them it is a barn, commodious – only a little damp. But it is nothing more. A new model one, now – all burnt brick, floor of concrete, with iron roof pillars – now *that* would be something worth crossing the lake to look at. Hold – there is one at Estavayer! The farmer there would be glad to show it, if only Monsieur and the young lady...? No! Well, there is no accounting for tastes, and that shrug from Master Pierre said quite plainly that he had the poorest opinion of our mental capacity. But all the same Master Pierre is kind to the infirm – to those (as the Catechism says) "of weaker understanding."

Yes, there is the key. We can take our own time, and when we have done we can hang it up where we got it.

But good Master Pierre is curious too. Where might we be going? If it is a fair question – or, indeed, whether or not! "To Madame Marie Brigue's!" "Yes, but certainly!" "Had we known Madame Marie long?" The Elder of us had known her for some twenty years or more.

"When she was with old Monsieur Alexander – yes, at the Upper Riffel House, and everything in her charge?" Sanity was returned to us like a passport examined doubtfully. We should not this time be committed to a House of Retreat for the mentally infirm – no, not if fifty doctors, all specialists, had so certified. *We knew Madame Marie!* Master Pierre would lay aside everything and come with us. It was not possible that we could know the way.

I thanked Master Pierre, but for my own reasons preferred to go alone – that is to say, alone with Sweetheart, which is the best kind of loneliness.

"There is going to be a storm!" I said to my Maid, as we paced along side by side. Sweetheart looked at the cloudless September sky, at the boldly-designed splashes of the leaf-shadows making Japanese patterns on the narrow path through the wood. Then she regarded me inquiringly. Of a storm in the heaven above or on the earth beneath there was certainly no visible sign.

Then I explained that the tempest was a moral one, and would certainly break when we met in with Madame Marie. And I set her this riddle to read, for she is fond of such.

I had always been first favorite with Madame Marie. She had spoiled me as a wandering boy. She has assisted me as a callow youth to the sweetmeats under her control. In my earlier manhood she had taken me to see her brother, who was a *curé* of a great parish in the Valais.

Yes, boy and man, she had always scolded me, railed upon me, declared to my face that I was of a surety "the Last of the Last," and that, altogether apart from my being a heretic, my misdeeds would inevitably render my future far from enviable! According to Madame Marie I was certainly bound for an ice-free port!

"And what had you done to her, father, to make her so angry with you – or at least scold you so much?"

"Only come in late for my meals!" I said. Sweetheart took one look at me, as one who would say, "Pray remember that I am no more a simple child!" But what she said aloud was, "Did all this happen before I was born?"

And I knew instantly that I was underlying an unjust suspicion, from which the very first glimpse of Madame Marie would instantly free me. For even when I knew her Madame had long passed the canonical age, and must now be verging on the three-score years and ten.

It was, however, quiet unlikely that she would ever refrain from scolding me, even in the presence of my eldest daughter.

By and by we came in sight of a little white house, and upon the path which passed beneath it. Over the door, half hidden by the yellow splashes of *Canariensis*, was the sign, "*Madame Marie*"

Brigue ... Restaurant." There was a great quiet everywhere about the place. Some pigeons were cooing in the Basse Cour. A cat regarded us with the sleepy dispassion of its race. However, there was certainly a stirring among earthenware somewhere towards the entrance of the cellar. We could make out the grating of carrots, or, as it might be, the scraping of potatoes. I motioned Sweetheart to get behind me – which she did, eager to take a hand in one of "father's ploys."

Then I went to the front door, and in the loud, confident voice of one who, after a short absence, has come back at the proper hour, to find his dinner not ready, I called out, "Marie, are those chops not done yet?"

A dish clattered on the floor. We could hear the splash of the fragments on the cool flagstones of the inner kitchen.

"Marie, old Lazybones! Here have I been twelve hours on the mountains, and not even an omelette ready!"

"It is the Herr-with-the-Long-Legs – the Herr who kept my good dinner waiting while he ran about the '*bergen*'! And now – oh, the Good-for-Nothing, the *Vaurien*, he come back to old Marie crying hunger – just as he used to do more than a score of years ago up in the Riffel House!"

And before I knew it I was embraced and kissed on both cheeks by this tall, gaunt old woman – greatly, of course, to the joy of Sweetheart. But her turn was yet to come. Madame Marie continued scolding me even in the utmost expansion of her greeting. She held me at arm's length and scolded. She scolded because I had come without warning, and because I had not come sooner. Scolded because I had let the years slip past till her hair was white like the snow on the mountains, on which I had so often tarried till my dinner was burnt to a cinder! While mine – but there – who was this with me? Was I married? "Your daughter!" A daughter like that, and old Marie getting so blind that she had called me bad names – the names of the old time – in her hearing. But Mademoiselle would understand! She would pardon a poor old woman who had known her father, and been a mother to him, years and years before the young lady was born, or even thought of!

So, indeed, Mademoiselle understood very well. No forgiveness was necessary. She was all too happy. And while the dinner was preparing, she set down all these facts in her notebook, so that when Madame Marie came to the door to say that the omelette was ready to be put before us on the table, she called to Sweetheart that she was indeed her father's own daughter. For that in the old days at the Riffel House he had always been like that, sitting down on the very glacier to scribble in his notebook all about nothing, and so letting good food spoil because of his foolishness!

And so it happened that on our way back from Madame Marie's, Sweetheart let me see the first pages of her Diary. I found them so interesting that we arranged on the spot how they were to be published. And so here they are, ready (if you be simple) to please you as well as they pleased me.

II

When the Roads Were Sweet, Safe and Silent.

So, preliminaries being settled, the elder of the *Sweetheart Travelers* was entrusted with the editing of this book, on the express condition that he must *not* edit it! Strange but true! It is just sixteen years since, with the assistance of Mr. Gordon Browne's pencil, he began the preparation of the first series of *Sweetheart*. Ever since which, for him, fortunate day, he has been under promise to supply a second volume having for title *Sweethearts at Home*. From all over the world children keep writing to ask him for more adventures with his little companion on the front basket-seat of his tricycle. Gladly would he respond to this wish of unseen baby lips, generally expressed on ruled paper in straggly lines of doubtful spelling. But, alas! Sweetheart is nineteen and tall. She would be the death of her poor father (and of the machine) at the very first hill. Now she rides a "free-wheel" of her own, and saddest of all to relate, prefers Hugh John or other younger company to her ancientest of comrades. That is, on cycling trips. But she makes up to him in other ways, and hardly anything gives her greater pleasure than to "revisit the roads and ridges" where, sixteen years ago, her baby fingers, vigilant on the cycle bell, called the preceding wayfarer to attention.

Then we had the world to ourselves, save for a red farm cart or so. Then there were no motor-cars, no motor-buses, no clattering insolent monocycles! It was in some wise the rider's age of gold. The country still lay waste and sweet and silent about him. The ignoble "toot-toot" and rhinoceros snort of the pursuing monster was unknown – unknown, too, the odors which leave the wayfarer fretful and angry behind them.

"*Get out of the way, all you mean little people!*" was not yet the commonest of highway sounds. The green hedgerows were not hidden under a gray dust veil. The Trossachs, the Highlands, the English lakes, and our own fair Galloway roads were not splashed with the iridescent fragrance of petrol. Ah, we took Time by the forelock, Sweetheart, you and I, in those old days when the hawthorn was untainted and the wayside honeysuckles still gave forth a good smell. True, Sweetheart (as above stated) sounded a bell. But even she did it with relish, and the trill carried tenderly on the ear, like the mass-bell rung in some great cathedral as the service culminates, each time more thrilling and insistent. And it was good to see the smile of the folk as they stood aside, and the nod which red-cloaked Sweetheart gave them as we glided noiselessly past!

Ah, a good time! Neither of us are in the least likely to see a better! For during these fifteen years there has come upon our land a strange thing, a kind of plague of heartlessness; the return, perhaps, of mechanically civilized man to the brute, or (if that be too strong) at least to the ruling-out of all gracious consideration for the rights of wayfarers.

I am sure that the "motoring-habit" is more poisonous and more injurious to the nations in this Year of Grace, 1911, than all the poisons that ever were "listed." It is the Indian hemp of the soul, which makes even good men mad. The earth may still belong to the Lord, though, standing afar off, I have sometimes my doubts. But of a certainty the roads between city and city, the creeper-hung village street where, generation after generation, children played, the quiet lanes where the old folk walked arm in arm, are now given over to the Minotaur whose name is "My Lord Teuf-Teuf."

Every day in all lands (called civilized) the journals are filled with a lengthening tale of victims – of the little child going to school, bag on back; the bairn playing with his soldiers in the dust; the deaf old lady walking along the lanes, so safe and quiet a few years ago. I can see her pattering about, looking for a few roses to grace her room – roses to dream over, roses to call back the good days now past for ever.

"HRRUMPH! HRRUMPH!" It is the trump of doom – behind her, unseen, to her unheard. And in the next number of the local paper there will be the briefest of paragraphs: "No blame attaches to the proprietor or to his excellent and competent chauffeur."

Sometimes, if one has the honor to be run over by the Highest of the High Born, they do inquire for you at the hospital, or even send a wreath for the coffin. For this one should even be content to die. And the paragraphs in the papers recording the gift quite make up to the mourners for their loss.

But even so, this is on the heights of motoring generosity. For at least *noblesse* does sometimes oblige. But the more recently and the more ignobly the Over-Slaughterman has been enriched, the more ignorant of all knowledge he is, the less he has seen of other lands, the fewer incursions he has made into the world of books and art, the less he possesses of that kindly natural consideration which the King-Gentleman shares with the Working-Gentleman – the more cruel and selfish he is when he gets himself upon the road, rushing along, disguised to the eyes, fakir-mad in a kind of devilish Juggernaut joy, to the holocaust of innumerable innocent victims.

"The police failed to obtain the number of the car which caused the accident."

Naturally! Excellent Under-Slaughterman, vulgarly called Chauffeur! Knows his business! He will ask for a rise next week and he will get it. That paragraph about the little girl trailed along for fifty yards under the rear wheels, with – Hold your tongue, you understand, Higgins – the details would not look well posted up in my club! Brave Under-Slaughterman! He winks an eye, as he has a right to do when he puts his latest-earned gratuity in his pocket.

But, halt there! I will do no man an injustice if I can help it. There are motorists and drivers of motor-cars who are nowadays "motor-fiends," who conduct a car as safely and carefully as in other times they would a pair of horses. I have friends among such. God keep them in life and the practice of "Unto others as I would that others should do unto me!"

But I grow old, at least in experience, and I fear for these my friends. Motoring as practiced in Great Britain to-day (and the northern continent is little better) is the direct and intentional abrogation of the Golden Rule. More, it is the only way in which a man, light-heartedly, taking no thought for the morrow, may kill his neighbor with impunity. In old times it was the pursuit of cent. – per-cent. which damned a man, and delivered him bound body and soul to Satan. We have changed all that. Now it is the pursuit of the mile-a-minute which sucks men's hearts empty of a generous feeling, which is the great open-air school for making iron-bound materialists out of human men – or rather animals fitted with deadly mechanical appliances worse than those of Mr. Wells's Martians.

I love my friends who are tied to these chariot wheels. But I fear for them. Temptation is great. Easy is the descent of Avernus, aided by a smart chauffeur, who wants to give you "the value of your money" in speed and the survival of the fittest: *id est*, of himself and you!

Better, far better, to take pack on back, pilgrim staff in hand, and then – to the woods and the hills with Sweetheart and me, where never "teuf-teuf" can be heard, nor petrol perfume the land.

But at least in Sweetheart's new book you will only find the old sweet things, the pleasures that do but gladden, the record of things at once simple and gracious and tender – such as, if you have been fortunate, must have happened to yourself. She does not once mention any car except that pulled along by honest "gees," or that still more favorite sort of all engineering achievements – the fortifications that the next tide will sweep away.

Sweetheart, little Sweetheart, and that "dear diary" of yours – for this relief, much thanks! God keep you ever of the humble, of the wayside-goers, of those who think – first, second and always – of the comfort of their fellow-men, especially of the weak, the friendless, and the poor who foot it along life's way. In brief, may you stay what you have always been, Sweet of heart – and *my Heart!*

Ainsi soit-il!

S. R. Crockett.

SWEETHEART'S DIARY

I

SWEETHEART OBJECTS

In June – Some Day, 3 o'clock. Cool under the Trees.

Some while ago a book was written about me, called *Sweetheart Travelers*. It was father who wrote it, and I think he did his best, saying a lot of nice things. But, of course, how could he really understand little girls?

At first I thought I would write a book contradicting the mistakes. But Mr. Dignus, who is a friend of mine and knows about such things, said that would not be very kind to father, and might do him harm in his business. But that if I would write about everything just as it seemed to me as I grew up, he would see to it that it was printed and published.

So when father sees it, won't he just get a surprise? Perhaps he will go into a shop and buy *Sweetheart's Diary*, thinking that somebody is poaching on his preserves. I can see him tugging at his big mustache, and walking very solid and determined, same as he does when he says to the boys, "You, sir, come into the study along o' me!" Which makes all the rest of us go sort of cold and trembly all over, like a rabbit smelling fresh lettuce.

But it is for what we are NOT going to get that *we* are sincerely thankful.

Only, after a dreadful lecture the boys are generally let off – "for this time only, mind you!" – whereas the rabbit always ends up by eating the lettuce. [Moral somewhere about, but I can't just make it out.]

And that reminds me. I will tell you the dreadful history of the Blue Delhi Vase. It is one of the first things I can remember and the one that frightened me the most. It used to sit on our brown, carved-oak table in the little drawing-room. It was pale blue like the color of the beady stones you can't see into – oh, yes – thank you very much —*turquoise*. And somehow I thought that it had come from a fearfully rich uncle in India, who was Prime Minister to a Begum, and would come home one day with an elephant in a huge cattle truck, like what I had seen on the railway. He would then have a scarlet carpet laid to keep his embroidered slippers clean – there is always mud before our station – and he would ride up to our front door on the Begum's state elephant. And the first question he would ask was always, "Is my Blue Delhi Vase in good repair?"

And if it wasn't, then he would demand the name of the miscreant who had done it, and bid the elephant, whose name was quite distinctly Ram Punch, t-r-r-rample him to pieces.

I suppose when I was very young I must have dreamed this, or heard folk talking, without understanding. At any rate I got things pretty mixed in my mind. You see I was *very* little then, so little that I don't remember there being any boys. Though I suppose Hugh John was a little trundler in a "pram," looking up at the sky with wide solemn eyes and never saying a word. I suppose so, but I don't remember.

All I know is that I wore little red caps, one for Sunday and one for week-days. The Sunday one was put away during the week, and so mostly I had only one.

Now, on this great day I happened to be in the garden, and Somebody sent me in for my cap. Because my hair flew all about and got just fearfully "tuggy" – enough to make any one cry, even Hugh John, who never cries at all. But, then, *he* has hair short like a door-mat and rough as if made of teased string. He has also a head so hard that he will bounce it right through the panel of a door for a penny – that was, of course, afterwards, not when he used to lie in his "prim-pram." But he got whipped, for the doors had to be mended. So he stopped.

I was in a great hurry. Indeed I flew. I never remember walking in those days. So in I banged as hard as I could, and coming out of the hot sun, the rooms felt all very still and cool. The parlor smelt of old rose leaves, which I sometimes stirred with my finger. They were in a big bowl, all powdery, and smelt nice – especially on hot days. Then I used to think that the poor old dead things were stirring in their sleep, and trying to "blossom in the dust." I don't know where I got those words – in a hymn, most likely. But I used to say them over and over to myself – yes, till I cried. Because I was sorry for the old roses that tried to live and couldn't. Silly, wasn't it? Well, it seems so now. But then, of course, it was different.

Now, when I had got over the queer little catch in my throat that finding myself alone always gave me, I started looking round under all the sofas and chairs to see that there were no lurking Day Ghosts about. They are the worst kind, and I began to wonder where my cap was.

I had come for it specially, you see. So I could not go out without it. Also there were awfully nice things going on in the garden; the picking of white raspberries, mainly; each shaped like a thimble; the cap coming easily off, and leaving a small dead white spear-point, and with a taste – oh, to make your mouth water for quite a week!

Anyway, mine does now.

For a while I could not see my red cap. Then, all in a minute, I caught sight of it on the top of the Delhi Blue Vase. It was dreadfully high, and as for me, I was dreadfully little. More than that, the table was slippery.

But I *had* to get the cap, because all the time I was missing the white raspberries out in the garden. I could hear them pattering into the tin pails with a rustle of waving stems and a *whish* of nice green leaves when you let them go.

So I got up on tiptoe. I was still ever so much too short. Then I took a buffet – the one on which I listened to stories being told. And I mounted on that. I had very nearly got the cap off when the buffet slipped sideways, and – oh, it was dreadful – there on the carpet lay the Delhi Blue Vase all in shreds – no, "shards" is the proper word.

I couldn't think. I couldn't cry. I could not even pray. I forgot how. I grew ice-cold. For I had heard it said that of all the valuable things in the house that was the rarest. I knew it could never be put together again, and it was I who had done it.

For a moment I thought of running away altogether. It was not fear of being punished. No, if it had only been that, I should not have minded. At least not much. Punishments don't last long up at our house. But now I should never see the uncle from India, nor the elephant being unpacked end-foremost out of the cattle truck, nor the crimson carpet, nor the howdah, nor any of these fine things. Or even if I did I might be stamped to death by the elephant, after all. Oh, I *was* unhappy. I looked in the glass and, I declare, I hardly knew the white, frightened, peeky face I saw there for my own.

You see, I usually see my own face when my hair is being done, or when the soap is just washed off. Then it is shiny and red; but now, in the dusk of the room, it looked very small and pale, and my eyes very big and black, with rims round them.

Now our cat was there, and the thought came of itself that everything might be blamed on her. She was our only *not-nice* pussy, and if I said it was Mir-row who did it, nobody would be the worse. She was always knocking things down anyway. She would only get chased out, and she was always being chased out. So one extra time would not matter to Mir-row.

Well, I suppose that is what the ministers and grown-up people call temptation – when you think you can do a thing so as not to be found out. When you do a thing and don't care whether you are found out or not – that is different. That's like Sir Toady (he's my brother, as you shall hear) when he goes bird-nesting and has to watch out for the keeper. But he doesn't really care if he *is* caught.

But the Delhi Vase! Oh, it seemed as if I never could be happy again in this world!

I knew – I mean at the time – that I should have prayed. I had been often and often told that I ought. Still, you can't just always pray when you ought to. However, I did manage to kneel down and grab hold of Mir-row.

I knew that Mir-row was a bad cat, and did all sorts of things she ought not to do. So I took her to the place where the Delhi Vase had been broken, and asked her if she minded. And she said as plain as possible that she did not care a bit. I should get whipped, that was all, and she would be glad.

She was a hard-hearted Thing. For I was in dreadful trouble. But for all that Mir-row would not take a bit of the blame. And she might just as easily, seeing the number of tit-bits I had brought out for her. But cats have no gratitude – at least Mir-row had none. However, I think she must have been a foreign cat, because she could not even pronounce "*Mee-ow*" properly. And that is the reason why her name was "Mir-row." She said so herself.

So I said to her, "You, Mir-row, will you come up-stairs and 'fess'?"

And Mir-row said just "*Fsssst-Mir-row!*" to show that she was cross.

Then I said, "Mir-row, you are a horrid nasty cat, and you don't deserve that you should get off breaking that Delhi Vase. But I will take the blame on myself – yes, I will – just to show you what it is to be noble. *I* will go up-stairs and 'fess.'"

So I said, "Get thee behind me, Mir-row!" as I ought to have done at first. Because Mir-row had always been so naughty that she tempted me to blame her for breaking it. If she had been a good cat, then such a thing would never have entered my head. But her character was against her.

You see, I knew that I had only to say, "Mir-row did it," to get believed. Because she was always doing wicked things like that.

Then I went up-stairs, running as hard as I could to get away from the wicked Mir-row, who was tempting me to tell a story. I ran to find Somebody to 'fess' to. And I found Somebody. And Somebody listened, and then rose up looking quite grave, but very kind. Oh, I was shaking ever so, till Somebody took me in such nice strong arms, and said that as I had come at once, and had not even thought of trying to escape the blame or to put it on anybody else, I should not be punished – though it certainly *was* a great, great pity.

But I never told about Mir-row, or how nearly it had happened otherwise.

And as for Mir-row, she said nothing either. She just curled herself up on the carpet among the broken pieces of the vase, and when we went down was peacefully dreaming of catching mice. I knew she was by the way she had of thrusting out her claws and pulling them in again.

No, Mir-row did not deserve all that I had done for her.

But, after all, honesty is a better policy than blaming things on Mir-row.

This is the story of my first temptation, and how I was saved from the wickedness of Mir-row.

II

PURPLE "THINKS"

June again. Aged ten. Afternoon of the Day when the first Strawberry was Half-ripe.

It will never be whole-ripe, owing to an accident which happened to it. However, none of the Grown-ups knew except Sandy the gardener, and he only tells us not to. But we don't really mind.

Which makes me wonder sometimes if Grown-ups have a world of their own, same as us Children. I don't think so. If they had, they wouldn't always be writing and reading, or paying calls and sitting on chairs, and looking Nim-Pim-Pimmany! They can't really have good times all by themselves, same as us. What do you think? I suppose it is account-books, and postmen, and having to understand the sermon that makes them look like that.

But at any rate they have not an idea that children really are thinking – nor how much they know. Perhaps that is just as well. For, as they say about the monkeys, if they only knew how we talk among ourselves, they might set us to work. At least they would not be so ready to believe in us when next they saw us with our "behaving faces" on.

Now I will tell you about our house. It is a nice one, and I have a bedroom with greeny paper, and out of the window you can see the Pentland hills and the flagstaff in front of them. The flagstaff is on the drying green, but the hills are a good deal farther away. Maid Margaret and I live there – that is, at nights, and I tell her stories if she will lie on her right side and not kick.

Sometimes we have fights, but not such ones as the boys have up above. Often we can hear them stamping and thumping, and then coming down with a huge "bang" that you would think would shake down the house. That is when they clutch and wrestle. Outside there is just the Low Garden and the High Garden, a road between big old yew-trees, and then you are at the library, which is made of wood. And mostly there is a ticking sound inside, which is the typewriter —*tick-a-tack – tick-a-tack!* Then a pause, a few growls, and then the noise of a book being pulled out, rustling leaves, more stamps, more growls, and again —*tick-a-tack!*

It goes on like that most of the time, except when the Animal inside must be fed, or on fine afternoons, when he comes out to play.

Then we have quite lovely times in the woods and hunting for things, or picnicking. And it is nice to see the white tablecloth, which Somebody has arranged on the green grass or under the shade, all covered with nice things for you to eat.

Then all about there are woods – oh! miles and miles of them. There is the Low Park, where there are lots of apples – rather crabby, but not much the worse for that when you are really hungry.

The Low Park is pretty big, and has a stream running through it, quite slowly and steadily. Then down below is the river-bed, all rocks and pools. Because the water is drawn off for the mills below. We can play there in the summer-time, and keep fish as safe as in an aquarium.

Of course there are nice places higher up – where Esk goes along lipping over the pebbles, tugging at the overhanging branches of trees, or opening out to make a mirror for the purple heather on the slopes above. But of all these you shall hear before I have done. Oh, yes, I mean that you shall.

And in the evening all is lovely dark purple except the hills, which are light purple and green in patches, the shape of cloud-shadows.

I wonder if ever you got to love words, colors, and things till they grew to be part of yourself? What do I mean? Well, I will try and explain.

When I was little, the word "purple" somehow nearly made me cry. Oh, no – I did not like dresses that color, nor even ribbons – much. Only just the word. Sometimes funnily, as in the line —

"A pleasant purple Porpoise,
From the Waters of Chili."

Sometimes seriously, as in two lines which have always brought the tears to my eyes – I do not know why. I think I must have put them together myself when I was thinking in sermon-time (which is a very good time to think in). Because the first is the line of a Scottish psalm, and the rest is – I know not what – some jingle that ran in my head, I suppose. But they made me cry – they do still, I confess, and it is the color-word that does it! – that, and the feeling that it is years and years ago since first I began to say them over to myself. It seems as if there would never again be such hues on the mountains, never such richness on the heather, never sunsets so arrogant (yes, I got the word that time) as those when I was little.

But what, you ask, are the lines? Well, you won't think anything of them. I *know* you will laugh.

They are just – but oh! I am ashamed to put them down to be printed. For they are just altogether mine – all little girls who have been lonely little girls will know what I mean. Boys are pigs and will laugh – except Hugh John.

However, I can't put off any longer, can I? Oh, yes, I could, but – it is better to be over and done with it.

MY POEM

Made up when I was (about) Four.

"I to the hills will lift mine eyes —
The purple hills of Paradise."

That's all! Now laugh! And if you do, I shan't ever love you again. Father smiles and says that very likely I did put them together, but that the last line is in a book of poems by a man named Trowbridge.

Well, what if it is? Can't *I* think it and Mr. Trowbridge too? I never saw his old book. Why, I could not read then, and *he* couldn't know what a little girl was thinking, sitting down by Esk-waterside and watching the purple hills – till I was told to come in and haste-me-fast, because the dew was falling.

But of course I don't tell this to everybody. They would call it sentiment. But I pity the little lonely girl who doesn't have "thinks" like that all to herself, which she would die sooner than tell to anybody except to her Dear Diary.

After the boys got bigger and could romp, I didn't have nearly so many thinks – not time enough, I suppose. Boys need a heap of watching. At first they have no soul – only a mouth to be silly with, teeth to eat with, and a Little Imp inside each to make them pesterful and like boys.

Well, little by little, I made a collection of things that were of my color – all in my head, of course.

"League upon rolling league of imperial purple!"

I think it was father who wrote that, and I believe his heart was pretty big and proud within him, seeing his own heathery country spread out before him when he did it. I wonder if something went *cluck-cluck* (like a hen) at the bottom of his throat? It does in mine sometimes.

Then there is "the Purple Wine of the Balkans," and "the wine-hearted sea" – but that last I only heard of at school.

And I liked a story about an Irish patriot who, when they brought him an address of honor with a green cover, told them to take it away and bind it in purple, the color of the heather.

Also I loved to read about heroines with "eyes like the purple twilight," though just at present these are scarce in our part of the country. One of our forbears (funny word – for *we* are the Four

Bears, the little ones! Somebody I know is the Big Big Growly – only don't tell him!) well, one of our ancestors – immediate ancestors, I mean – left us blue eyes, but as we grew older they all turned gray, which I think unfair.

Later on, I loved to be told about the "purple Codex" – that is, the Gospels written out on purple vellum in letters all gold. That must be lovely. I tried to stain a sheet with Amethystine ink, and print on it in gold paint. But it only looked blotchy and stupid – you never saw such a mess. So I thought it was better just to dream about the Codex.

I wasn't born in the purple myself, but I resolved early never to marry anybody that wasn't. And I should have a purple nursery, and purple bibs, and a purple "prim-pram," and a nurse with purple strings to her caps, and baby should live exclusively on preserved violets (candied) and beautiful purple jelly.

Then wouldn't she be a happy child? Not commonplace like me, and compelled to wear a clean white pinafore. They don't half know how to bring up children now-a-days.

Oh, how I do wish that I had been "born in the purple!"

But I wasn't, and white soils so easily. You see, if the purple were only dark enough, you wouldn't get scolded half so much, and they wouldn't all the time be telling you that milk food is "so wholesome"! Oh, how tired I am of being told that!

Still, after all, chocolate isn't bad, and you can easily make believe that it is purple instead of brown.

At least *I* can. And it tastes just the same.

Good-by, Dear, my Diary. There's Nurse calling.

III PRESENTS

Still the Same Age. But no Date.

I wish we could choose our own presents, don't you?

People give you surprises, or think they do. For mostly you can tell pretty well by keeping an eye on the parcels and things as they come in. Or one of the servants tells you, or you hear the Grown-ups whispering when they think you are not attending. Attending! Why, you are always attending. How could you learn else? *They* did just the same themselves, only they forget.

Of all presents, I hate most "useful" ones – "to teach you how to keep your things tidy," and what "you will be sure to need by and by, you know, dear!"

For when the time comes you've had it so long that you don't care a button about it. I suppose there are some Miss Polly Prinks who like things to put on. But I haven't got to *that* yet. Nor yet money that you are told you mustn't spend. There ought to be a "Misfit Presents' Emporium," where you could take all the presents you don't care about and get them exchanged for what you do.

"Please, sir, can I have a nice lot of the newest books with the prettiest pictures for four Jack-in-the-boxes, eight dolls (three dressed), a windmill and a Noah's Ark, that only wants Noah and one of his son's wives' legs?"

"Let me see them, miss, please!"

"Can I look at the books on that shelf?"

"Oh, these are the adventure books for Grown-ups," says the man; "children don't read such thing now-a-days – something in the picture-book way, Miss —*Little Sambo and the Seven Pious Pigs*, or *How many Blue Beans make Five?*"

But *I* would know ever so much better, and would have down half-a-dozen Grown-up books that just make your eyes stand out of your head like currants in a ginger-bread bunny. That's what *I* like. No children's books for me. And I'd have them all chosen as soon as the Presents' Exchange man had made sure that none of the paws were knocked off the green kangaroo, and that the elephant still owned a trunk.

It is a good idea, isn't it? What do you think? About the Exchange, I mean.

Once my Uncle Tom got a birthday present from Aunt Margaret. It was a set of fire-irons for the drawing-room grate! And when her birthday came round Uncle Tom chose for her present —*a pipe-rack for the smoking-room!*

I think that was fine – and so does Hugh John.

Now I am not complaining. August the tenth is *my* birthday, and it is a good time for birthdays – being sufficiently long before Christmas. I pity the poor people who were born in early January. Also presents are good at our house, and there are enough of us to change round among ourselves if any mistakes do occur. But what I really want to tell you about is what happened to Little Sarah Brown, who lives just outside our gate.

Sarah's people are very poor and her father makes them poorer by going and drinking – as he says, "To drown Dull Care." My father says if he let Dull Care alone and drowned himself it would be better for every one all round. And that's a good deal for father to say, mind you, because he believes dreadfully in letting people alone.

Well, Little Sarah Brown's mother was ill most of the time. She had a cough and couldn't do washing, so Little Sarah came to our house to run messages and go to the post with big letters when father said so. It was pretty nice for Sarah too, because every second Saturday she got half-a-sovereign from father. He grabbed deep in his pocket until he found a piece of about the size, looked if it was gold, and handed it over to Little Sarah.

Just fancy carrying about real-for-true gold like that! Some people are dreadfully careless. Well, one time Little Sarah went up to the library to get her Saturday's money. Father was mooning about among his books, and shoved something at her, telling her gruffly to be off. He hadn't time to be thanked then, but would see about it on Monday!

And do you know – it was a whole big sovereign he had given her! Now of course *he* never knew. He wouldn't have found out in twenty centuries, and Little Sarah knew it. She did not notice till she was nearly home, and then she stopped under a lamp-post that was early lighted to look at what was in her hand.

Yes, it was a sovereign. Nothing less!

And, do you know, a bad, *bad* boy named Pete Bolton came behind Little Sarah and gave her hand a good knock up.

She would have lost it in about two ticks, because Pete Bolton was a perfectly horrid boy, and would have stolen it like nothing at all. Only Little Sarah was upon him with a bound like a tiger, and bit his hand (yes, it *was* nasty, being very dirty). Only she bit Pete's hand from a sense of duty, and made him let go. She had her face rubbed in the mud, her hair tugged, and all, but she never let go the sovereign – half of which wasn't hers.

There was a girl for you, and yet boys will say that only they are brave! Well, don't you think it was pretty hard for Sarah – harder, I think, after fighting for it than before? You see, she thought of all the nice things she could get for her mother with the extra ten shillings, besides new boots for herself that didn't let in the water, and – oh! a lot of things like that.

Worst of all, she knew that if she did take it back to father he would only shove it in his pocket without noticing. But she said over and over: "Honesty is the best! Honesty is the best!" You see, she could not remember the word "policy," which does not improve the sentiment anyway – to my mind, at least.

So back she went. Father was still mooning about among his books, and just as she expected he took the golden sovereign and shoved it back into his pocket right among pennies and pocket-knives and so on. But he quite forgot to give Sarah her own real half-sovereign. I believe he thought she had picked the coin up off the floor. For he just said, "Thank you," and went on with his work.

And Little Sarah stood there fit to cry.

By and by he noticed the girl and asked what she was waiting for – not unkindly, you know. But, as usual, he was busy and wanted to be left alone.

"Please, sir," said Little Sarah Brown, "my half-sovereign!"

"But I paid you your wages, did I not?"

"Oh, yes, sir; but –"

"Oh, you would like an advance on next week – very well, then." And he pulled out of his pocket the very identical piece of gold that had been Little Sarah's temptation – like mine about the Blue Vase and Mir-row, you remember.

"There!" he said; "now go away! I'm busy!"

"But, *please*, sir –!"

"WHAT?"

Then Little Sarah burst into tears, and father stared. But after a while he got at the truth – how he had given a whole sovereign in place of a half —

"Very likely – very likely!" said he.

And how Sarah had brought it back – all of her own accord.

"Very unlikely!" he muttered.

And how he had shoved it back into his pocket without noticing —

"*Very likely!*" he said – to himself this time.

So what did he do, when he had heard all about it, but promise to whack Pete Bolton with his stick the first time he got him. And Sarah began to cry all over again, saying that Pete had no mother and couldn't be expected to know any better.

"Well," said he, "that's as may be! But anyway, I'll be a father to Pete the next time I catch him. I'll teach him to let little girls alone. I've dealt with heaps of Pete Boltons before! Oh, often! Don't you trouble, little girl!"

And he actually got his hat and walked home with Little Sarah, growling all the time. I don't know what he gave her. But, anyway, what he said to her mother made the poor woman so happy that she nearly forgot to be ill. And on Monday I noticed that Little Sarah had new whole shoes and so had her brother Billy. So something must have happened, and though nothing was said, I can pretty well guess what.

So can Hugh John – and you too, my dear Diary. Only we won't tell. But the "Compulsory Man," who makes boys attend school, descended on wicked Pete Bolton, and then the schoolmaster fell on him, so that Pete became a reformed character – this is, so long as he was sore. Then, of course, he forgot, and began playing truant again.

Only after that he let Little Sarah alone. Because, you see, he never knew when, in a narrow lane, he might meet a big man, pulling at a big mustache, and carrying a very big stick. Because the sermons that big man preached with his stick were powerful, and Pete Bolton did not forget them easily.

The End – moral included free of charge, as Hugh John says.

IV MISS POLLY PRETEND

End of June.

Of course there ought to be a story in all this – the story of my life. I have a Relative who can spin you the story of anybody's life if you only tell him what number of shoe he wears. Only I am just a little girl, and have neither been murdered nor married – as yet. So in my life there are no – what is the word? – ingredients for the pudding. Yes, that is it.

So it must just come anyhow, like things tumbling out of your pocket when you hang head down from a tree or haystack which you are climbing.

All the same I will try always to put one story or one subject into a chapter, though these won't be called "Printed in Gore," or "The House of Crime," or anything like that.

For, you see, the stories the boys read are just stuffed with such things. So it will be rather a change to write about "The Dirty Piece of Embroidery" and "The Colored-Silk Work-basket."

And that reminds me. Often Grown-ups "give it" to their children for the very identical things they used to do themselves when young. There is a friend of father's down at Dumfries whom he calls Mr. Massa. And once we bribed Mr. Massa to tell us all about when father was young – he was his earliest and dearest friend – though, by his telling, father pounded him shamefully and unmercifully for nothing at all, even after they had vowed eternal friendship. And do you know, the things that father did when he was a boy – well, he would thrash Hugh John and Sir Toady for *now*!

But I expect that all fathers and most mothers were like that. When *I* am a mother, I shan't be. Because, having kept a Diary, I shall only have to take it out and see how I felt. Don't you think that is a first-rate idea?

Besides, if it is printed, as Mr. Dignus says that it will be, it is bound to be true, and I shall have to believe it. Oh, just won't my children have a good time! Also Hugh John's. But Sir Toady Lion says he isn't going to have any – being married is ever such a swot, and children are all little pigs.

Well, *he* ought to know.

Oh, about this Mr. Massa? He told us some splendid things about father – how he stood on the top of Thieve Castle with a stone in one hand and his watch in the other to measure the altitude, having just learned how. Only he forgot, and let go the wrong hand.

Smack– went the watch on the grass about seventy feet below! And there was he left standing with the stone in his hand. But the watch was ticking cheerfully away when they picked it up, and it is that very same old nursery watch that is hung up there now, and tells us when it is time *not* to get up.

I don't think I ever knew what it was to have a true friend with a good memory till that moment. And as for the boys and me, we never thought we should like any of father's friends so much. But Mr. Massa told us more things that we can cast up to him in time of need than we would ever have wormed out of father himself in a century. Funny how close people get about some things when they get older. Oh, I wish I had been born my own little girl. Then I *should* have been properly brought up!

However, that is not my fault.

Hugh John says that being naughty is just according as you look at it. Big Folks' job is to make us behave, so that we are as little of a nuisance to them as possible. *Our* business to get as much fun as we can out of life without getting in the way of the Grown-ups. All their "Don't do this's" and "You mustn't do that's" are just warnings not to give them trouble. Moral (according to Hugh John), "Give as little trouble as possible to Grown-ups. And they will let you do pretty much as you want to."

He says that acts first-rate at school. Toe the line with the masters, and then if you *do* "whale" your fellow-pupil, no questions are asked. The only way to be a bad little boy in peace and quiet is to be a good little boy so far as work is concerned!

And as Hugh John does it, this is not hypocritical. He couldn't be that if he tried. He has just thought it out, and now makes it work with the greatest coolness in the world. It is his system. And he says every boy is a fool who gives the masters trouble. He means Grown-ups generally. You do certain things *as* they say, work out your sums, and keep your drawers tidy. Then you can live in your own world and they in theirs. They won't bother about you.

But, of course, Hugh John is pretty safe anyway. He has a reason for everything, and is always ready to give it if asked. If not, he keeps it to himself, wraps it about him like an inky cloak – and is triply armed because he has his quarrel just – and knows it.

But, you see, we are really pretty well off at our house, though we do grumble sometimes. When I was a little girl I rode many hundreds of miles with father on his cycle, and now Hugh John and he spend days over glasses of all descriptions, telescopes and binoculars, while Sir Toady talks about birds' eggs for hours, and has succeeded to father's collection.

In the library there are the loveliest books on flowers – both editions of *Curtis*, the *Botanical Magazine*, two *Sowerby's English Botanies*, and lots more in foreign languages. Maid Margaret thinks she will go in for botany so as to get these. But I like best just reading books – or browsing among them, rather. For of course you can't really *read* forty thousand volumes, even if you knew all the languages they are written in.

There are sets of all the magazines that ever were: *Annual Registers*, *Scots Magazines*, *Gentleman's*, *Blackwood's*, *Chamber's*, *Leisure Hour*, *Cassell's*, *Magazine of Art*– oh, everything! And the library, being about eighty feet long altogether, is the loveliest place for wet Saturdays – so "mousey," and window-seaty, with big logs burning on a brass fireplace, and the storm pattering above and all about. It has a zinc roof, only nicely painted and covered with creepers. There is room enough for everybody to lie about, and read, and draw, all the time keeping out of Big Growly's way if he is working.

Even if he does see us, he only says, "Get out, Imps! I can't be bothered with you just now!"

Only if you are careful and have the kitchen key, you can tell by the growling and the "tick-tack" whereabouts the Ogre of Castle Bookworm is, and slip into another part. Best of all is the Old Observatory, where there is a bed in a little cabin, and windows all about, and a big brass telescope high overhead, with shelves and all sorts of fittings as in a ship.

It is first-rate, I tell you. Only you have to put the books you have been using back again exactly, or you will get Ursa Major after you, and he will fetch you out of your bed to do it, storming at you all the time. Then maybe he will forget, and show you the first edition of some book that there are only three or four of in all the world!

You don't really need to be afraid of Big Growly. It makes rather a noise while It lasts, but once It is finished, there is no more about it. It is like a thunderstorm which you hear sleepily among the hills in the night. All you have to do is just to pull the bed-clothes over your head and put your fingers in your ears. There is not the least danger, not really.

Altogether we are about as well off for Grown-ups as it is possible to be, and though lessons are seen to sharply enough – that is all in the day's work. While for the rest, we live less of the Double Life than other children have to do – that is, we don't have to "*pretend* good," and that makes all the difference.

And this brings me to the tale of Polly Pretend. That was what we called her. And by and by other people found her out, and did so too. And it is an awful thing to be going through the world with a name like that.

Yet Polly Pretend wasn't half a bad girl either. Indeed, if she had been left alone, she would have been quite nice. It wasn't her fault. Only this tale is a "terrible example" for parents and guardians. *They* put such things, like nasty medicine, in the books we have to read, and why shouldn't I hit back, when it is only my poor old Dear Diary that sees it? Till Mr. Dignus gets ready to print it, that is.

Polly Pretend had a father and mother, but worse than most. If ever they had been young, they had forgotten all about it. Polly mustn't run or romp, nor speak above her breath, nor climb a tree, nor do anything that makes life happy and really worth living.

And when we went to see her, it was ever so much worse than going to church four times a Sunday. *We* only go once, except on special occasions, because our folks believe in making Sunday an extra happy day. And, after all, church is church, and there is always the music, which is nice, and the organist's back hair, which isn't – and the sermon is never very long and sometimes interesting. Then for the boys there are the bees booming in the tall windows, and the flies that will persist in crawling stickily over the old gentlemen's bald heads – really quite pious flies they are. For the old gentlemen would be sure to go to sleep if it were not for the excitement of watching out and moving those flies on!

But at Polly Pretend's house it was ever so much worse. You couldn't believe it if you had not been there. And, do my best, I really can't give you an idea.

All the toys locked up, of course, all the drawing things, and every book except two – one of which was that everlasting *Josephus*, and the other the *Pilgrim's Progress*. As we knew these by heart, you may guess how cheerful it was. And you had to learn chapters till you hated the sight of an Oxford Bible, and hymns till you wanted to throw the book behind the fire.

Hugh John stuck to it and did pretty well, though he is not a quick study. But Sir Toady boldly asserted that he was a true Mahometan, and made a green turban out of an old green baize school-bag to prove that he was a "haji and a holy man"!

He had the cheek to brazen it out even when Polly's people threatened to inform his parents and have him sent home to-morrow!

Bless you, Toadums wished for nothing better. He missed his fox-terrier, Boss, worse than words can tell, and his eggs and his paint-box and everything.

But of course we soon saw how Polly Pretend managed. She pretended. She did not really read the books. She moved back the marker, and, if asked questions, knew all about the chapter. Even if they ticked it in pencil, there was india-rubber in Polly's pocket to rub it out. She played with beads in church – in her muff or under her cloak. And when one rolled on the floor, she said it was her collection money. She got another given her too, which was always a halfpenny saved.

At least so thought Polly Pretend. And Hugh John could not make her see it was not the square thing – to buy sweets and thus defraud the Church. He is awfully armor-plated on what is "the Square Thing," my brother Hugh John.

But Polly Pretend could not or would not see it. I think *could* not. For what could be expected of any girl who had such people for parents? Then I saw clearly how well *we* were off – whacked sometimes, of course, or Big Growly called upon to erupt (which he does very fierce for five minutes). But not expected to do anything except tell the truth and keep on telling it – not behave like reptiles – and if caught, own up prompt. Say your prayers when you feel like it. But don't do it just when you know parents and guardians will be coming into your bedroom, as Polly does – so that father or mother will say, "See how sweet and devotional our little girl is!"

And Polly's father and mother thought how good she was, and told all round the countryside what little heathens we were. Not that *we* cared for that.

But Sir Toady went up-stairs to the lumber-room and got an image of some Chinese dragon which had been stowed away there ever since Uncle Peter had been home the last time. And when Polly Pretend's father and mother came to complain of us, he was down on his knees worshipping this false image on the front lawn! Awful, wasn't it? But all the same it would have made you laugh till you cried if you had seen him doing kow-tow to this false god – it was only an old cardboard dragon anyway, like what you see on the Shanghai stamps – and smelling the whole neighborhood by burning brown paper joss-sticks before it, with a penny fire-cracker at every finger-length.

He was had up into the study for that, though, because father said he would have no "mockery" about such things. But I don't think he got it very bad, because we all knew by the noise he made that Big Growly wasn't really very mad.

When he is, he goes off and you see no more of him for a long time. He only stops in his den and doesn't growl. That is a good time to keep away and say nothing, till he has done chewing his paws. Only Maid Margaret dare go in then, and even she is wearing out of it – getting too old, I mean.

But about Polly Pretend. Of course she did not pretend to us. First of all, she could not – she knew that it was quite in vain. Children don't try on things with one another. They know they will be seen through. Generally they can see through Grown-ups too, though, bless you, *They* never know it.

Oh, poor Polly! I was sorry for Polly. Because she could never be natural, but all the time had got to – what is it the book says? – "assume a virtue when she had it not."

At school she knew wads of Scripture and all the Kings of Israel and Judah, but never did a French exercise without copying. Then, because her people were rich, and she so good, she got lots of money sent her – so much for telling what her place in class was. She told lies about that, and got money for being first when really most of the time she was first at the wrong end.

Now at our school every fortnight the class was turned upside down, the top girl being put at the bottom and the wooden spoon at the top, so that the clever ones could work their way up again. And so each alternate Monday Polly Pretend was really top girl for about five minutes. It was on that day she wrote to her parents, and often got a golden sovereign or a Post Office Order sent to her for her wonderful cleverness. So, after all, in a way it was true.

But there was trouble at the end of term – after the examinations, when Polly Pretend always came out the very last.

Because, you see, she had to save money to buy her own prizes, get one of the charwomen to steal the school tickets that they stick in prize-books, and print in her own name in capital letters as "first prize" to show her parents.

Then she had to watch for the School Report, which comes a day or two after, and get it safely from the postman. She burned it, after trying to alter the figures, but, of course, was anxious all the holidays. Also she warned me to say nothing about it when I came to see her.

As if I would! I knew Polly Pretend too well. So I never said a thing about school, for fear Polly had been telling some lie about it, and I should be giving her away. The visit was an unhappy time for all of us – except, that is, for Sir Toady, who invented new and horrible forms of idolatry every other day, and scared the immortal soul out of Polly Pretend by putting on his day-shirt (the spare one) over his clothes, and letting on to be an Evil Spirit which haunted the gooseberry-bushes.

And I will say he did growl most fearfully – especially when he found a good ripe bush. But we knew that was only to keep the rest of us off. So Hugh John chased the Evil Spirit by the sound, and growled too. Because the bush really was a good one – thin-skinned "silver-grays," and quite ripe. I had some.

But you should have seen poor Polly. She was frightened till she nearly told the truth. I can't say more than that. Almost – but not quite. I do believe that she would have gone and confessed the most innocent of her lies to her parents, if it had not been for that young Imp, Sir Toady, who laughed out loud, and jumped up and down in the shirt like a white Jack-in-the-Box.

But perhaps it was as well that she did not. For they were just the sort of people not to understand that Polly's lies had mostly been their own fault. But of course, as you may imagine, it was only putting off the day of reckoning.

It was in holiday-time – midsummer – when school-mistresses are just like other folk; only, if anything, a trifle nicer.

Now the head of our school, Miss Gray, came to Romano, which is the name of the town where Polly Pretend lived. And Miss Gray thought it would be a nice thing to call upon the mother of her

pupil. Perhaps she might be able to give Mrs. Pretend a hint or two which would keep Polly from entirely wasting her time next term at Olympia.

Oh, Miss Gray meant it just as kindly as she could, and that's saying a good deal. She is a nice chicky-biddy, fussy, motherly sort of thing, and wears the nicest satiny gowns at dinner-parties. It was the last thing in the world she would have thought of, to give Polly Pretend away – even to her parents.

But it happened that on this day the Pretends had gone for a motor-ride. And as it was hot, Miss Gray said that she would be glad to wait a few minutes in the drawing-room. Because, you see, Mrs. Pretend was expected in every minute. The maid knew her business, of course; there was no "pretend" about her. She brought a cup of tea, and left Miss Gray to do – what do you think? – look over the books on the table.

At first Miss Gray thought that something had suddenly gone wrong with her eyes. She opened a fine Macaulay, and saw "First Prize for History, Presented to Miss P. Pretend." Next came "Special Prize for Good Conduct – Miss P. Pretend."

There was a whole table covered with them, laid out in the center of the room, and more stuck in decorative oaken shelves, of fine old oak, made by the village handy-man.

Then Miss Gray understood, and her feelings were too much for her. But even then she did not give Polly away. You see, Miss Gray was a pretty good sort – that is, a good sort, and a pretty one too – which is the best sort of all, Hugh John says.

So she just rang the bell, and told the maid that she could not wait any longer to see Mrs. Pretend, but that she would write.

And she did. It was a little letter just saying that circumstances over which she had no control, etc., had caused such a pressure upon Olympia College that she was sorry there would not be a vacancy for Polly that year.

Well, you can fancy – Polly's mother and father were very angry. So much so that they determined to start off at once to call on the heads of the college and complain.

But Polly herself, as soon as she had heard from Ellen, the housemaid, what had happened, and how Miss Gray had been twenty minutes in the drawing-room, and gone away leaving her tea hardly "sipped," knew at once what was the matter.

So she dissuaded her father and mother from going to Olympia College.

She was not appreciated, she said. She had always known it. Even Miss Gray was jealous of her. And her mother said to her father, "I do not wonder at it, dear. It is all the effect of our too careful bringing up of Polly. Truly we may say with the Psalmist —

"Than all her teachers now she has
More understanding far!"

And in a way, do you know, she had. And it was the training that did it.

But later on, Dear Diary, I shall write more about Polly Pretend, when she got a governess. For then she pretended and the governess pretended, and instead of getting out of the habit, as Hugh John says, seven Pretending Devils worse than the first entered into her.

But of that another time.

V PRINCIPIA

June continued, but nearer the end, and hotter.

Polly Pretend's governess, after she could not be received at Olympia, was Miss Principia Crow. She had more than three miles of testimonials, if all had been written out in a line in text hand and measured.

The only curious thing was that the dates of all these were old, and Miss Principia was still fairly young. Also, she admitted having changed her name "for family reasons."

But she seemed just the sort of person for Polly Pretend. She did not know much arithmetic – just enough to cheat at tennis. She had certificates that reached as far as "trig" – the wonderful science which makes the boys stamp and throw their books about the room when they have to study it.

Now Pa and Ma Pretend had taken a great deal of trouble in providing a suitable companion for Polly, and in a way they had managed all right. Miss Crow pretended to teach, and Polly pretended to learn, and one knew as much about the matter as the other.

Miss Crow passed the time in telling Polly how many people had been in love with her, and the hopes she had of as many more. Polly begged the loan of a pier-glass from her mother, and thought, as she pretended before it, smiling at herself and sweeping imaginary trains, how soon her turn would come to have scores of lovers all willing and anxious to drown themselves for her sake, like Miss Principia Crow.

Fragments of conversation were sometimes caught by Mamma Pretend, and she thought to herself, "What strange authors they do set young people to study now-a-days! When I was a girl we had *Magnall's Questions* and *Little Arthur's History of England!*"

It was Miss Crow's voice, however. No mistake about that.

"Yes, and he said to me, 'I adore you with all the fervor of a free and untrammelled genius, with the noble indignation of a spirit on fire against wrong and oppression. It is true that in the meantime, though of an exalted race, I am poor, receiving only twelve shillings a week in one of the institutions of trust vulgarly called a pawn-broker's. But next year and every succeeding year I shall have my salary raised by the sum of two shillings – per fortnight. Oh, Principia, my Principia –'"

At this moment, overcome by her own pardonable curiosity, Mrs. Pretend entered hurriedly to see what they were doing.

She found them busily employed, with head bent over an exercise in dictation... "From Milton's Essay on Macaulay!" Miss Polly Pretend explained in answer to her mother's question.

"Dear me," said Mrs. Pretend, as she went out, "and I always thought that Milton wrote poetry. It's true I never could make out how they could say that blank verse was really poetry – not, I mean, like 'How doth the little busy' and 'Twinkle, twinkle'! But he wrote a long time ago, and perhaps then they had not learned to make the words at the end rhyme!"

But now I must tell how Polly Pretend corrupted the whole house. At first we had only called Polly's father and mother "the Pretends" because they belonged to Polly, and so that we might know who was meant.

But to begin with, Mrs. Pretend had to make up a lot of things to explain why, after all these prizes, Polly had not gone back to Olympia School. She had to think up something that people would believe. You see, Polly's inventions were really too daring – as that after a year abroad she and Miss Crow were going to set up a college of their own, a far better one than Olympia. And then she would show Miss Gray!

Now you will hardly believe me, but old Pretend, who was on the County Council and fussed about roads and drainage – "an innocent enough old duck," Sir Toady calls him – took to magnifying Miss Polly Pretend and her governess. I think he actually began to count up his dollars to see if he had

really enough money to start Polly Pretend in a school of her own. But one fine day he met old Lovell, of Castle Lovell, at some joint business meeting about a Combination Poorhouse, or something like that.

Now old Lovell is a fearful big-wig, and looked up to by everybody because he is too stupid ever to pretend the least little bit. He would get found out in a moment if he did. But solid as the Bank of England, and as conceited as Mir-row with a rosette tied to her tail last King's birthday!

And old Lovell said, "I hear you have a Miss Crow to be governess to your little child! I think I ought to know her!"

"Ye-es!" said Father Pretend slowly. He did not like to hear a young lady who was going to set up a school next year to rival Olympia itself called "your little child."

But he could not afford to fall out with old Lovell, who always seemed as wise as a bench of judges and as rich-looking as a jeweler's shop which can afford to keep its blinds down. So he only said, "My daughter is not *quite* a child!"

"Oh," said old Lovell, "then it can't be Lizzie you have for governess!"

"Certainly not!" said Mr. Pretend, much relieved; "her name is Principia!"

"I thought that was a Latin Grammar or something like that!" said old Lovell, scratching his head like a bald old parrot.

"Well, perhaps," said Papa Pretend, "it is very likely. Miss Crow has been educated in all the languages that are – from her youth up!"

Now all would have gone well if only it had not happened that at that moment Polly and her governess came out of Parkins the pastry-cook's, where they had been stuffing fruit-cakes.

"Why, Lizzie!" cried old Lovell, shaking Miss Principia heartily by the hand, "now I am pleased to see you have got on so well. This is my butler's daughter," he explained, turning to Mr. Pretend, whose mouth was the shape of a capital O; "it does Lizzie much credit. Because, you see, she never got any regular schooling, being kept at home to help her mother in the still-room and with the jams. Good-by, Lizzie! I shall not forget to inform your father and mother that I have seen you – also John the gardener, with whom, I understand, you are keeping company, as they call it. Ah, ha! young people will be young people! Good-by, Pretend! Good-by! Congratulate you on having the daughter of a respectable man in your house. She will teach your little girl to make jams, and her gooseberry-fool will be a marvel, if she is a bit like her mother. Sensible man, Pretend! Far better to teach your daughter to brew and bake than all the modern 'ologies' and fiddle-faddle in the world! Keeps their husbands in better temper. Ah, clever fellow, Pretend! But you couldn't take an old fellow in, eh, Pretend? I knew all that about learning Latin grammar was stuff and nonsense. Good-by, good-by! So long, Lizzie! Don't forget about that gooseberry-fool!"

So off he went, like the rough timber-sided old bargee he was, and left Mr. Pretend muttering angrily, "Gooseberry-fool! Gooseberry-fool!" As if he knew very well who the "Gooseberry Fool" was – knew, that is, but had promised not to tell.

But poor Principia went as white as a sheet and shook like a fly caught in a spider's web. I'm afraid in her heart she called old Lovell names.

How did it turn out? Oh, the best way in the world. You would hardly believe. At first, of course, old Pretend was all for packing off Principia for teaching his child deceit! But he calmed down when he thought of the lot of money he owed to old Lovell of Castle Lovell, and of the use that his influence would be to him. Besides, he had boasted so much about her. So had his wife.

So he not only let Principia stay on, but actually set her to teach Polly Pretend all she really knew. And she did know about cookery. That was the real college she had been at, and her mother was a better professor than all the ladies who gave lessons there. And Polly was obliged to learn, too, because her father ate all the things she cooked, and if he had indigestion, why, Polly heard about it, that's all. So she stopped pretending and really did learn.

And after a while they set up their college with old Pretend's money – old Lovell's too, and it was called

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Household Cookery, Preserving, and the
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And that sentence was the last little bit of "Pretend." For neither Polly nor Miss Crow has any family. Nor, between ourselves, are they likely to have.

VI TORRES VEDRAS

July the first in the year when I was eleven on August tenth.

Father has seen the real place, and, of course, knows all about it. He says that it is just a lot of rough mountains, with bits of wall built into the open places to connect them and make them strong.

But *we* know that there are not one, but two Torres Vedrases – all on one bend of a river. The first one is quite near the Low Park, between the Weir and Jackson's Pool. It is a pebbly bar with a kind of green tufty island. From one side of it there is a rippling ford crossing slantwise, by which you can lose yourself barefooted in the woods on the other side.

The water only takes you to about the knee, even if you are pretty little. It is always one of the nicest places in the world. The water makes a soft tinkling over the ford. The grasses and bluebells wave, and the wind goes *sough* through the big solid walls of pine on either side.

Yes, it is first-rate to play there with your oldest things on, especially on a warm day about this time of the year. The river is pretty dry, and there is a great deal of pebbly bar, also the little green island with rough grass on it has grown to about twice the size.

You can fortify this island, and it is fine to dig channels through the bar for the water, with all sorts of lovely harbors and pleasure-lakes. Once the boys and I made a channel right from one end of the bar to the other, and father helped – and got wet too!

Yes, he did. We always encouraged him to get wet, by saying, "Oh, here is a place we can't reach!" Because if *he* got wet, we knew very well there would be nothing said to us. Fathers are fearful nice and useful – sometimes. Ours particularly when he helps us to play, and forgets he isn't a boy. Oh, I can see quite well when he says to himself, "I ought to be working —*but*— oh, bother, how much nicer it is to dig in the sand with the other children!"

And then he took pictures of us – photographs, I mean – working at our engineering, and building and paddling – oh, whole albums full. They began when we were quite little tots. The best are of Maid Margaret and Sir Toady. For I was too old, I suppose, to look nice stuck among trees, and Hugh John hated so being photographed. When told to, he stood up stiff like a stork on one leg. But Sir Toady was usually as nice as pie, being made that way, and as for the Maid, she always looks natural whatever she is doing.

Father has a whole set called the History of a Biscuit. It is only the Maid eating one. But it is funny to see it getting smaller and smaller till it is all gone. They are flashed on quickly by our magic lantern, and we children go wild when it comes to the funny ones. The grand exhibitions are for winter nights. Then we are well wrapped up in gray Harris cloaks and come up, closely marshaled by Somebody to see that we don't snowball too much. They are quite lovely, these nights, with the snow crisping under our feet, and Somebody carrying a swig-swallowing lantern before us – everybody's shadow swaying tipsily about, and the sky so near and so thick with stars that it seems as if you had only to put up your hand to catch a whole cluster.

There are usually many pictures of this first Torres, because we were younger, and it is a prettier place. We wore little red coats with big white buttons then, and marched regularly like soldiers. Hugh John beat us on the legs if we did not. He had a switch for the purpose, and he said that was the way the father of Frederick the Great did to make his son turn out a good soldier.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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