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"My dear child, what is wrong?"

Hunter's Marjory

A STORY FOR GIRLS

BY

MARGARET BRUCE CLARKE

Author of "The Little Heiress," etc., etc.

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Inconsistency in spelling and punctuation is as in the original.

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HUNTER'S MARJORY.

CHAPTER I.

TEARS.

"A maid whom there were none to praise,
And very few to love."—WORDSWORTH.

Marjory was lying under a tree in the wood beyond her uncle's garden; her head was hidden in the long, soft coat of a black retriever, and she was crying—sobbing bitterly as if her heart would break, and as if nothing could ever comfort her again.

"O Silky," she moaned, "if you only knew, you would be so sorry for me."

The faithful dog knew that something very serious was the matter with his young mistress, but he could only lick her hands and wag his tail as well as he was able with her weight upon his body.

A fresh burst of grief shook the girl; and Silky, puzzled by this unusual behaviour on Marjory's part, began to make little low whines himself. Suddenly the whines were changed to growls, the dog shook himself free from the girl's clasping arms and stood erect, staring into the wood beyond.

Marjory was too much overcome by her grief to notice Silky's doings, and it was not until she heard a voice quite close to her saying, "You poor little thing, what is the matter?" that she realized that she was not alone.

She looked up, startled, wondering who this stranger could be making free of her uncle's woods. She saw a lady, tall and fair, looking kindly at her, and a girl who might have stepped out of a picture, so sweet and fresh and pretty she looked in her white frock and shady hat.

For one minute Marjory gazed at her in admiration, and then, conscious of her tear-stained face and tumbled dress, let her head droop again and sobbed afresh.

The lady spoke again: "My dear child, what is wrong?"

"Nothing," sobbed Marjory—"nothing that I can tell you."

She felt ashamed of being seen in such a plight, and had an instinctive dislike of showing her feelings to a stranger, for Marjory was an extremely shy girl.

"But, my dear," remonstrated the lady, "I cannot leave you like this; besides," with a smile most winning, if only Marjory could have seen it, "I believe you are trespassing upon our newly-acquired property."

Marjory raised her head at this, and said quickly, and perhaps just a little proudly,—

"Oh no, I'm not; this is my uncle's ground."

"Oh dear; then Blanche and I are the trespassers, though quite innocent ones. And you must be Marjory Davidson, I think—Dr. Hunter's niece; and if so, I know a great deal about you, and we are going to be friends, and you must let me begin by helping you now."

So saying, the lady seated herself on the ground beside Marjory, her daughter looking on, at the same time stroking and patting Silky, who seemed much more disposed to be friendly than his mistress.

"Can't you tell me what the trouble is, Marjory? I am Mrs. Forester, and this is my daughter Blanche. We have just come to live at Braeside. Your uncle called on us to-day, and told us about you. Blanche and I have been looking forward to seeing you and making friends.—Haven't we, Blanche?"

"Yes, I've thought of nothing else since I heard about you," said the girl, rather shyly, the colour coming into her face as she spoke.

Marjory stole another glance at her, and she thought she had never seen or imagined any one so sweet and pretty as this girl.

"Blanche," she thought—"that means white; I know it from the names of roses and hyacinths. I've seen it on the labels. And she is just like her name—like a beautiful white rose with the tiniest bit of pink in it."

"Come now, Marjory dear," coaxed Mrs. Forester; "won't you take us for friends, and tell me a little about this trouble of yours? Won't you let me try to help you out of it?"

"No, you can't help me; nobody can. It's very kind of you," stammered Marjory, "but it's no use."

"Suppose you tell me, and let me judge whether I can help you or not." And Mrs. Forester took hold of one of Marjory's little brown hands and stroked it gently.

The soft touch and the gentle voice won Marjory's heart at last, and she said brokenly, between her sobs,—

"It's about—learning things—and going to school—and uncle—won't let me, and—and he won't tell me about my father, and I don't belong to anybody."

"Poor child, poor little one, don't cry so. Try to tell me all about it. I don't quite understand, but I am sure I shall be able to help you."

Bit by bit the story came out. The poor little heart unburdened itself to sympathetic ears, and the girl could hardly believe that it was she—Marjory Davidson—who was talking like this to a stranger. She felt for the first time in her life the relief of confiding in some one who really understands, and she experienced the comfort that sympathy can give. She felt as though she were dreaming, and that this gentle woman, whose touch was so loving and whose voice was so tender, might be the mother whom, alas! she had never seen but in her dreams.

Marjory's mother had died when her baby was only a few days old, and all that the child had ever been told about her father was that he was away in foreign parts at the time of her mother's death, and that he had never been seen or heard of since. Many and many a time did she think of this unknown father. Was he still alive? Did he never give a thought to his little girl? Would he ever come home to see her?

The true story was this: Dr. Hunter had been devotedly fond of his sister Marjory—the only one amongst several brothers and sisters who had lived to grow up. Many years younger than himself, she had been more like a daughter to him than a sister. On the death of their parents he had been left her sole guardian, and she had lived with him and been the light and joy of his home. The doctor might seem hard and cold to outsiders, wrapped up in his scientific studies and pursuits, giving little thought or care to any other affairs, but he had an intense capacity for loving, and he lavished his affection upon his young sister, leaving nothing undone that might increase her happiness or her comfort.

All went well until she married Hugh Davidson, handsome, careless, and of a roving disposition, as the doctor pronounced him to be. They loved each other, and the doctor had to take the second place.

Mr. and Mrs. Davidson made their home in England for a few months after their marriage; then he received an imperative summons from the other side of the world requiring his presence. He was needed to look after some mining property in the far away North-West in the interests of a company to which he belonged. He bade a hurried farewell to his wife, promising to be back in six months. She went home to her brother at Hunters' Brae, and lived with him until her death. She never recovered from the shock of the parting. Her husband's letters were of necessity few and far between. She had no idea of the difficulties and hardships of his life, and although she defended his long silences when the doctor made comment upon them, still she felt it was very hard that he should write so seldom, and when he did write that the letters should be so short. Could she have seen him struggling through an ice-bound country, enduring hardships and even privations such as are unknown to the traveller of to-day; could she have seen all this, she could never have blamed him, she could only have praised him for his faithful service to those who had sent him, and the cheerful tone of his letters to her, with no word of personal complaint.

But Mrs. Davidson slowly lost her strength. She faded away as a beautiful fragile lily might, and Hunters' Brae was once more left desolate—yet not quite desolate, for there was the baby girl; and, thinking of her, the doctor resolved that she should take her mother's place with him. He would devote himself to her, he would try to avoid all the mistakes he had made with his sister, and, above all, her father should not even know of her existence. He would keep her all to himself, she should know no other care but his, and thus her whole affection should be his alone.

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It must be owned that jealousy had blinded Dr. Hunter to his brother-in-law's good qualities. He had never troubled to inquire into the circumstances of his going abroad. Enough for him that the man had left his wife alone only a few months after their marriage, and he obstinately refused to hear one word in his defence, and would believe no good of him. He was quite honest in his desire to do the best that was possible for the child, and in the feeling that it would be better to keep all knowledge of her father from her. He looked upon Hugh Davidson as a black sheep. A black sheep could do no good to any one; therefore, he argued, he should not come near this precious child.

Acting upon this determination, he wrote a very curt note to Mr. Davidson, acquainting him with the fact of his wife's death, and telling him that it was entirely his fault—that he had practically killed her by leaving her alone—but making no mention of the child.

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Poor Mr. Davidson received this letter just at a time when he dared to hope that his work was nearly done and he could allow himself to think of going home, and his grief was pitiable. He had no near relatives, having been the only child of his parents, who had been dead many years. His wandering life had cut him adrift from the acquaintances and surroundings of his youth. He and his wife had lived in a world of their own during those few short months, and she had been his only correspondent in the old country when he left it. Thus it came about that there was no one to give him the information which Dr. Hunter withheld; and the poor man, thinking himself alone in the world, with no ties, no friends, never had the heart to return home to the scenes of his former happiness; and thus it was that he never knew, never thought of his little girl growing up in that remote Scottish home, lonely like himself, longing for and dreaming of things that seemed beyond her reach.

In the first weeks after his sister's death Dr. Hunter derived much consolation from the thought of the child. He had named her Marjory after her mother, and took it for granted that she would be just such another Marjory—fair-haired and blue-eyed—and he pictured her growing up gentle and quiet, as her mother had been. Certainly the infant's eyes were blue at first, and there was no hair to be seen on her head to trouble the doctor's visions by its unexpected colour; but slowly and surely it showed itself dark—black as night—crisp, and curly like her father's. The eyes deepened and deepened till they too were dark, liquid, and shining, with a look of appeal in them, even in those early days.

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To say that Dr. Hunter was disappointed would be a most inadequate description of his feelings. He was dismayed at first when he realized the total reversal of his expectations, and finally enraged to think that this living image of the man he disliked, and whom his conscience at times would insist he had wronged, would be constantly before him to remind him of things he would prefer to forget.

But these feelings passed, and the child soon found her way into her uncle's heart—the heart that was really so big and so loving, though the way to it might be hard and rough. The little toddling child knew no fear of her stern old uncle; it was only as she grew up that shyness, restraint, and awkwardness in his presence took possession of Marjory.

Dr. Hunter had looked after her education himself. She had been a delicate little child, and he had not troubled about any lessons in the ordinary sense of the word for some years. He wished her body to grow strong first, so she had spent her days in the garden, on the hills, or on the lake with him; she had learned the ways of birds and flowers and animals, and meanwhile had grown sturdy and healthy. Her uncle had not allowed her to make friends with any of the children in the neighbourhood; he himself was intimate with none of his neighbours except the minister, Mr. Mackenzie, and the doctor, Dr. Morison. The minister had no children, and the doctor's two boys were at school, so that Marjory only saw them occasionally in the holidays. She had no playmates of her own age, and the children of the village looked upon her as an alien amongst them, regarding her almost with dislike, although it was not her fault that she was obliged to hold aloof from them.

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Dr. Hunter had a theory that his sister had been too dreamy and romantic; that he had petted her and given in to her too much, instead of insisting upon her learning to be more practical. He blamed the fairy tales of her childhood, the influence of her school companions, the poetry and novels of later years as the chief causes of what he called her dreamy ways and romantic nonsense, and he determined that Marjory should be very differently brought up. She must learn to cook and to sew and to be useful in the house. She should not be allowed to read fairy tales or poetry, nor should she be sent to school; he himself would teach her what it was necessary for her to learn; he would be very careful before allowing her to make any friendships; and with all these precautionary measures he felt that she must grow into a good, strong, sensible, capable girl.

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So Lisbeth the housekeeper was ordered to teach the child to dust and to sew and other useful things; and Peter, her husband, must teach her to hoe and to rake, to sow seeds in her little garden and keep it tidy. The doctor's own part in the programme was to teach her to read and

write and cast up figures. That would be enough, he considered, for the present. Music, languages, and poetry were to be left out as being likely to lead to romantic ideas and dreams and unrealities. "Time enough for them when she is older," he decided. "When the foundation of common-sense has been laid, there will be no danger. Till then I shall keep her to facts and nothing else."

The doctor did his best to carry out these plans, which he honestly believed to be for the child's good in every possible way. Lisbeth and Peter, grown old in service at Hunters' Brae, were warned on no account to talk to Marjory about her father or old times, or to encourage her in doing so; and they tried hard to do as their master bade them, though it was difficult sometimes to resist those pleading eyes when the child would say, "Won't you tell me about my father, Lisbeth dear?" or "Peter darling," as the case might be. Peter was a gardener and man-of-all-work, and his hands were sometimes very dirty, but he was a darling all the same to Marjory, and indeed he was a good old man. If he and his wife had known the truth, that Mr. Davidson had never been told about his child, it is likely that Peter's strict sense of justice would have prompted him to right that wrong. But, like every one else, he took it for granted that the news had gone to Mr. Davidson, and in his kind old heart was often tempted to blame the seemingly careless father.

"Could he but see the bonnie lamb," he would say sometimes to his wife, "the vera picter o' himsel', he wouldna hae the heart to leave her. I've wondered whiles if the doctor wouldna send him a bit photograph, just to show him what like she is."

Lisbeth would reply, "Peter, it's just nae manner o' use thinkin' o' ony sic a thing. The doctor he's that set against Mr. Davidson that ye nicht as weel try to move Ben Lomond itsel' as to move him."

These conversations usually ended in an admonition from Lisbeth to Peter to eat his meat and no blether. The suggestion was never made to the doctor, no word ever reached Mr. Davidson, and things went on much in the same way year after year; and although at times the doctor would question the efficacy of his plans for Marjory's education, on the whole he was fairly satisfied with them.

The day on which this story opens had seen the doctor take a most unusual step. Hearing from an old acquaintance in London—a scientific man and student like himself whose opinion he considered worth something—that some friends of his had bought Braeside, the property adjoining Hunters' Brae, he determined to do his duty as a neighbour, and go to welcome the newcomers as soon as they arrived. His friend had written, "Mrs. Forester is a most charming woman, Forester himself a thoroughly good fellow, and their little girl Blanche one of the sweetest children I have ever seen. She will make a good companion for your niece, poor little thing."

This letter had set the doctor thinking. First, he was nettled by his friend's use of the words "poor little thing." Why should Marjory be pitied as a poor little thing? Had he not done everything he possibly could for her? Then came one of those painful stabs of conscience which insisted now and then on being felt. What about her father? Have you done right in that matter?

He salved his conscience for the time being by making up his mind to go and see the Foresters, and if they were indeed all that his friend had said, there could be no reason why he should not encourage a friendship between the two girls. Marjory certainly had been very quiet and inclined to mope of late, and it would be a good thing for her to be roused by this new interest. The child was seldom out of his thoughts for long together; he loved her as his own; and yet Marjory was not happy—she was lonely, she did not understand her uncle and misjudged him, and he found her cold and unresponsive. There was something wanting between them; both were conscious of this want, yet neither knew how to supply it and so mend matters.

CHAPTER II.

A FRIEND IN NEED.

"Have hope, though clouds environ now,
And gladness hides her face in scorn;
Put thou the shadow from thy brow—
No night but has its morn."—SCHILLER.

Things had come to a climax that afternoon. Marjory had driven by herself to the village to get some things that Lisbeth wanted, and also to buy some stamps for her uncle. Peter usually accompanied her on these expeditions, but to-day he was busy in the vine-house, and excused himself from attending upon his little mistress. She was quite accustomed to driving, however, and Brownie, the pony, was a very steady, well-behaved little animal, and a great pet of

Marjory's; so she started off in good spirits, Silky running beside the cart as usual. She did her errands in the village, finishing up at the post office, which was also the bakery and the most important building in the place. Mrs. Smylie, the baker's wife and postmistress, served her with the stamps, and Marjory was about to say good-afternoon and leave the shop, when Mrs. Smylie opened a door and called out,—

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"Mary Ann, here's Hunter's Marjory; maybe ye'd like to see her." And turning to Marjory, she explained, "Mary Ann's just hame frae the schule for a wee bit."

The Smylies were the most important people in the village of Heathermuir. Their mills supplied the countryside with flour, and their bakery was the only one of any size in the district. They had built their own house; it had a garden attached to it and a greenhouse; and, to crown all, their only child Mary Ann was to be brought up as a lady. With this object in view, the ambitious parents had sent the girl to a "Seminary for Young Ladies" at Morristown, some twenty miles away, and were greatly pleased with the result, feeling that Mary Ann was really quite a lady. That young person was delighted to come home and be worshipped by her admiring parents; and their idea that a real lady should never soil her fingers by household work, or indeed by work of any kind, suited her very well.

Mrs. Smylie, bursting with pride as her daughter appeared, watched the meeting between the two girls. Mary Ann's dress was very much overtrimmed, her hair was frizzed into a spiky bush across her forehead, and her somewhat freckled face was composed into an expression of serene self-complacency. She was the only girl in the village who was at a boarding-school; not even Hunter's Marjory, with all her airs, could boast this advantage, she thought; and Mary Ann felt her superiority, and gloried in it.

25

Mrs. Smylie noted with great pride that the hand her daughter held out to Marjory was white and delicate—in great contrast to Marjory's brown one. "But then," she reflected, "the puir bairn hasna got her mither to watch her like oor Mary Ann has. Bless me! how the lassie glowers! Mary Ann has the biggest share o' manners onyways."

It must be confessed that Marjory was "glowering." She regarded the overdressed girl with aversion, answered her mincingly-spoken "How do you do, Marjory?" very curtly, and continued to "glower," as Mrs. Smylie described it, without saying another word.

"Won't you come into the house?" asked Mary Ann, and Marjory went.

She did not care about these people; she had never liked Mary Ann, and could hardly bear to look at her now, or listen to her affected way of talking. Still, she did not wish to be rude, so she followed Mary Ann through the shop into the house, and was ushered into the sitting-room, or parlour as it was called. The room was like Mary Ann's dress—full of all sorts of bright colours and gaudy ornaments of poor quality.

There was one thing about Mary Ann which interested Marjory profoundly, and that was her school experience. She felt that she would like to question the girl about it, and yet was too proud to betray her curiosity by bringing up the subject. Mary Ann, however, saved her the trouble, for as soon as they were seated she began at once,—

26

"Why don't your uncle send you to school? Any one would think a great girl like you ought to be sent to school. Why don't he send you?"

"Uncle doesn't wish me to go to school."

"Maybe he don't want to pay the fees," said Mary Ann.

Marjory said nothing.

"I learn French and German and music. I'm getting on fine with the piano, and papa's going to buy me one of my own soon. You haven't got a piano at Hunters' Brae, have you?"

"No," said Marjory shortly.

As a matter of fact there was a piano at Hunters' Brae, but it was kept in the room that had been her mother's—a room that Marjory was not allowed to enter. For reasons of his own the doctor had forbidden Marjory to go into it. She should do so on her fifteenth birthday, but not before. Lisbeth went in once a week with pail, broom, and duster, but she always carefully locked the door behind her, and Marjory knew nothing of the room or its contents. "Some bonnie day," was all that the old woman would say when she questioned her.

Mary Ann continued,—

27

"It seems a shame you can't be made a lady of too."

"I can be a lady without going to school," said Marjory sulkily.

The other looked at her in surprise.

"Oh no, you can't. Who is there to teach you? You have to learn manners and deportment and accomplishments and all that sort of thing first. I don't see that you've got any chance here, you poor little thing," patronizingly.

"I don't care," said Marjory, knowing in her heart that she did care beyond everything, and that

her greatest desire was to learn all sorts of things. "I don't care a pin," she repeated.

"Yes, you do, or you wouldn't get so red," said Mary Ann provokingly. Then she continued, "Your uncle's queer, isn't he?"

"What do you mean by 'queer'?"

"Well—queer—in his head, you know. People say he is, and, anyhow, he does queer things—keeping that room shut up, and all that. I should say he *must* be a little bit mad."

"He *isn't*," indignantly. "He's a very clever, celebrated man."

Mary Ann went off into peals of laughter.

"Oh dear! who told you that?" she cried at last.

"Lisbeth," defiantly.

Another peal of laughter greeted this statement.

"It really is too funny; you little simpleton, to believe such a thing. Why, if he was celebrated, he would be rich enough to send you to school, and he wouldn't let you sew and dust the way you do, just like any village girl. I *never* dust; mamma doesn't wish me to." And Mary Ann looked at her white hands admiringly, and shot a glance, which Marjory felt rather than saw, at the brown ones nervously clasping and unclasping themselves.

28

"I wonder," continued her tormentor, "that you don't insist on being sent to school, so that you could learn to earn your own living. I've heard mamma say your uncle gets no money for your keep; no letters ever come from foreign parts from your father. It must be strange to have a father you've never seen. It must be horrid to be like you, because, really, when you come to think of it, you are no better off than a charity child, are you?"

But Mary Ann had gone too far. A tempest was raging in Marjory's heart, and as soon as she could find her voice, which seemed suddenly to have deserted her, she cried,—

"You are a beast, Mary Ann Smylie, and I hate you; and although I haven't been to school, I don't say 'if he was,' and 'don't' instead of doesn't." And with this parting shot Marjory rushed through the shop and jumped into the cart; and Brownie, infected by his mistress's excitement, galloped nearly all the way home, his unusual haste and Silky's sympathetic barking causing quite a commotion in the sleepy, quiet village.

29

Arrived home, Marjory ran to her uncle's study, knocked loudly at the door, and hardly waiting for permission, went in, leaving Silky, breathless and panting, outside.

The doctor was sitting in his armchair in his favourite attitude—his legs crossed, the tips of his fingers meeting, his eyes fixed upon them, but his thoughts far away. As a matter of fact he was thinking of Marjory at this very moment, of his visit to the Foresters, and the plans they had been making for the two girls.

"Well, Marjory, what is it?" he asked kindly, as the excited girl stood before him. She was trembling with agitation, her cheeks were scarlet, and her dark eyes flashed upon her uncle as she replied,—

"I want you to send me to school. I don't want to live on your charity any longer. I never knew I was till to-day," with a sob; then, piteously, "Won't you send me to school, Uncle George?"

"My dear child!" exclaimed the doctor, "what is all this? Who has been talking to you and putting such nonsense into your head?" looking at his niece in astonishment.

The quiet, usually almost sullen girl was transformed into a passionate little fury for the time being, and her uncle hardly recognized her. She burst out again,—

"Mary Ann Smylie looks down on me because I don't go to school. She says I can't ever be a lady; and she says that you get no money for my keep, and that I am no better than a charity child. I want to learn what other girls learn. I want you to send me to school, and I want you to tell me about my father, and to let me go into my mother's room!"

30

The child almost screamed these last words, and stamped upon the floor to emphasize them.

The doctor, now thoroughly aroused, rose from his chair, saying very sternly,—

"Marjory, I cannot alter my decision upon these matters. I do not wish you to go to school. I refuse to tell you any more than you have already been told about your father. I have promised that you shall go into your mother's room and take possession of it on your fifteenth birthday. That is enough. I am grieved that you should have listened to vulgar gossip about our affairs; but I may tell you that your mother left money to provide for you ten times over, if need be."

"Then you are unkind and cruel not to use it to send me to school and let me have what other girls have," cried Marjory passionately.

"Marjory," said her uncle quietly, "I cannot listen to you while you are in this mood. You had better go, and come back again when you can talk more reasonably."

"Yes, I will go, and I wish I need never come back. I hate everything, and I wish I were dead."

31

With these words she flung out of the room, rushed blindly through the house into the garden and on into the wood, where she threw herself down under a tree, and sobbed out her grief to the faithful Silky until Mrs. Forester found her.

Dr. Hunter was very much troubled and puzzled by his niece's behaviour. Never before had she given way to such an outburst. He had not believed her capable of such a storm of passion, and felt himself quite at a loss. He was grieved and shocked beyond measure by Marjory's words. "Unkind, cruel," he muttered to himself. "Surely not. I love the little thing as though she were my own." And while Marjory was weeping bitterly under the tree in the wood, her uncle, very sorrowful and thoughtful, was pacing up and down his study wondering what he could do for the best. It seemed all the more grievous as, only that afternoon, he had been making plans for Marjory with Mrs. Forester—that she should share Blanche's lessons and enjoy her companionship.

Mrs. Forester had heard much of the doctor and his niece from the mutual friend in London who had written to the doctor, and she knew exactly how to manage things, so that in the course of one short hour plans were made which were to alter Marjory's whole existence.

But she, poor child, knew nothing of this, and her grief was bitter—the more so as she slowly realized that she had been wrong to give way to her passion. First, she had called Mary Ann Smylie a beast. Well, she had been very much shocked once to hear a child in the street use that word to another, but she herself had used it quite easily, and still felt as if she would like to use it again; but, worst of all, she had called her uncle unkind and cruel. Thinking over the scene in the study, she remembered the look on his face as she said these words. "It was as if I had struck him," she thought; and then came more tears and sobs.

Mrs. Forester's motherly heart yearned over the girl as she made her confession. Brokenly and with many tears the story was told, and relief came to Marjory in the telling of it. Blanche, with instinctive tact, had walked away a little distance with Silky, so that Marjory should feel free to talk to her mother. When the recital was over, Mrs. Forester said cheerfully, "I told you I thought I should be able to help you. First of all, I have got some delightful news for you. Only to-day your uncle and I have been making plans for you to share in Blanche's lessons. You are to learn everything that she does, *including* French and music," with a smile at the recollection of her battle against the doctor's prejudices.

A breathless "oh" was all that Marjory could say.

Mrs. Forester continued,—

"Blanche has a very good, kind governess. Unfortunately, she has rather an ugly name, and it may make you smile. It is Waspe—W, a, s, p, e—not pretty, is it? But she is as sweet as she can be, and very accomplished, and Blanche gets on nicely with her. It will be much more interesting for Blanche to have some one to share her lessons with, and good for you too, won't it?"

"Oh, indeed it will!" replied Marjory, bewildered by this wonderful piece of news.

"And in return for this I want you to teach Blanche all you can."

"I?" asked Marjory in surprise.

"Yes, you," with a smile at the girl's puzzled expression. "Blanche is a little too much like her name at present; she isn't very strong. Living in London didn't suit her, and it is for her sake that we have come to live here. I want you to show her all your favourite nooks and corners, to teach her all you know about the birds and flowers, and to let her help you in your garden. Will you do this, and keep her out of doors as much as you can?"

"I shall love it!" cried Marjory emphatically. "It's like a dream, and seems too good to be true."

"Now, my child," continued Mrs. Forester seriously, "listen to me. I think you have been doing your uncle a great injustice. You say you called him unkind and cruel; he is neither the one nor the other."

"I know," replied Marjory in a low voice.

"He is very fond of you," said Mrs. Forester.

Marjory looked up quickly.

"He never says so," she objected.

"Ah!" said Mrs. Forester, "now we have got to the root of the whole matter. So, then, just because her uncle doesn't say, 'Marjory, I am very fond of you,' therefore Marjory thinks that he doesn't care for her very much."

Marjory nodded.

"My dear child, you never made a greater mistake. It is not in your uncle's nature to say much; he is content with doing things for you. This afternoon he talked of nothing but his plans for you, his ideas for your education—how his first care has been that you should grow strong and healthy amongst those outdoor things that you love. For your sake he has been content to stay in this obscure place, when he would receive the recognition he is entitled to if he went more into the world. His very meals he takes at times which he considers best for you. Look at your frock.

Perhaps you don't think much of it, but let me tell you it is made of the very best tweed that Scotland can produce. Your boots are strong and sensible-looking, but they are of the finest quality of leather; your stockings are the best that money can buy. Let me see your handkerchief. Ah! I thought so," as Marjory obediently produced from her pocket the little hard, wet ball her tears had made. "This is a plain handkerchief, but so fine that it is fit for a princess to use. I don't suppose you ever thought about these things; but it must mean a great deal of trouble and care to your uncle to get them for you. He told me he looks after your wardrobe himself. Now, haven't I proved that he thinks about you a great deal?"

35

Marjory nodded.

"Don't you believe that, even if your mother had not left you provided for, your uncle would have been glad to keep you—that he would never have felt you a burden?"

"I don't know," said Marjory slowly. She was beginning to see her uncle in a new light, but she could not see him as he really was just yet.

"Well, you will know some day. There are many things which you are too young to understand, and you must try to trust in your uncle's knowing what is best for you in the matter of your father, who will return to you some day, I hope."

"Oh! do you really think that is possible?" cried Marjory. "Could it ever happen?"

"Certainly it might. I don't see any reason at all why you shouldn't hope for his coming. And if you will promise to be very patient, and to hope for the best, I will tell you something very nice that I heard said about your father a little while ago."

Marjory's eyes grew big with wonder. "Oh, *do* tell me. Indeed I will try to be patient."

"Well, an old friend of mine in London, who knows your uncle, and met your father long ago, said to me, 'A fine fellow was Hugh Davidson. I always feel that he may turn up again some day.'"

36

Mrs. Forester did not repeat other words said at the same time—namely, that "Hunter was always jealous, and would see no good in him;" but she felt justified in telling Marjory what she did, for she well knew how the girl would treasure the words, and how they might often comfort and encourage her.

"Oh! that *is* good," said Marjory. "I do thank you for telling me." And she squeezed her friend's hand.

"Now you must try to be very patient and hopeful. If God sees fit, be sure that He will give your father to you for your very own some day. In the meantime you must do all you can to be the sort of girl that a father would be proud of; and, Marjory, I have been thinking that your uncle might say the same of you as you do of him. You are fond of him, really, aren't you?"

"Yes, of course," assented Marjory.

"Well, do you ever tell him so?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"Oh, I shouldn't dare to."

"Nonsense! I suppose you would quite like it if he were to put his arms round you and call you his dear little Marjory?"

"Yes." Marjory was quite sure that she would like it very much, but she could hardly imagine such a thing happening.

37

"Well, do you ever go near enough to him to let him do it if he wanted to, or do you simply give him your cheek to kiss, morning and evening, and nothing more?"

"Yes, that's just what I do," confessed Marjory, laughing.

"Then perhaps your poor uncle thinks that you consider yourself too big to be kissed and hugged, and so he doesn't do it. You can't blame him, you know; if you just give him a little peck, and run away, you don't give him a chance. You take my advice: try to be a little more loving in your manner towards him, and it will soon make a difference. Perhaps you don't like a stranger to speak so plainly to you, but I have heard so much about you that I don't feel like a stranger at all. But I must be going now. Dr. Hunter has invited Blanche to come to tea with you to-morrow, and I hope this will be the beginning of a brighter life for you, my child. Good-bye, dear," kissing her. —"Come, Blanche; we must be going now."

The girls bade each other good-bye somewhat shyly, while Silky looked on approvingly, wagging his tail, as if he knew that in some way these strangers had been good to his mistress; and when they were gone he turned to Marjory and rubbed his soft, wet nose against her hand as if to say, "It's all right now, isn't it?" Marjory returned the dog's caress, and walked slowly and thoughtfully towards the house.

CHAPTER III.

UNCLE AND NIECE.

"If thou art worn and hard beset
With troubles that thou wouldst forget,
Go to the woods and hills! No tears
Dim the sweet look that nature wears."

LONGFELLOW

One thing showed itself very clearly to Marjory's mind—she must tell her uncle at once that she was sorry for what she had said, though how she was to bring herself to do so she did not know. She had never had to do such a thing before, and now that she was calm again it seemed impossible that she could have spoken those wild words. She realized how these feelings against her uncle had been gathering force for a long time. Very slowly, very gradually they had grown, to arrive at their full strength as she listened to Mary Ann Smylie's tormenting suggestions. She had grown to hate even the name by which she was known in and about Heathermuir. Why did people call her "Hunter's Marjory"? Why couldn't they give her her own name—her father's name? Some of these feelings still rankled in her heart; but she was truly sorry for her outburst, and made up her mind to tell her uncle so. She determined to go at once to his study; and, once inside it and in his presence, perhaps she would know what to say and do. So accordingly she went and knocked at the study door. There was no answer. She knocked again louder, and still there was no answer. Then she opened the door cautiously and looked in, thinking her uncle might be asleep; but no—the room was empty. Disappointed, she turned away, and going towards the kitchen, called,—

39

"Lisbeth, where's Uncle George?"

The reply came in shouts from the distant kitchen,—

"He's awa to the doctor's. He winna be in to supper the nicht, and ye're to gang awa early to yer bed."

The shouts came nearer as Lisbeth, wiping her floury hands on the large apron she always wore when cooking, came bustling along the passage.

"Gude save us!" she cried, when she saw Marjory's face; "what's wrang wi' the bairn—eyes red and face peekit like a wet hen? Come yer ways in, lambie, an' Lisbeth'll gie ye some nice supper, for nae tea ye've had. But I've got scones just newly bakit, an' I'll mak ye a cup o' fine coffee. Come awa."

"Dear old Lisbeth," cried Marjory, "I would kiss you if you weren't so floury. But I'm really quite happy, except that I wanted to see Uncle George to tell him something."

40

"Weel, if yon's the way ye look when ye're quite happy, I wunner how ye'll look when ye're quite meeserable. Havers," said the old woman contemptuously, "*somebuddy's* been tormentin' ye. Come awa."

The good cheer which Lisbeth provided was much appreciated by Marjory, who did ample justice to the scones and cookies. She had been without food for several hours, and was really quite hungry now that she had got over the worst of her trouble. She listened to Lisbeth's cheerful chatter as she bustled about the room, encouraging her "bairn" to try a piece of this, a "wee bit scrappie" of that, till Marjory told her that she simply couldn't eat any more.

"I'm going out to say good-night to Peter, and to give Silky his supper, and then I'm going to bed," she announced.

"Peter, indeed!" said the old woman wrathfully. "It's little I've seen o' him the day. Mony's the wee bit job I've wanted him to dae; but na, na, no the day, he must be lookin' after the vine, he says." And Lisbeth tossed her head.

"Well, you know, Peter isn't as young as he once was, and when he has to climb up the steps to reach the top bits of the vine, it takes him a long time," said Marjory, with a view to calming the old woman's wrath.

41

Lisbeth flounced round. "Don't you go for to say my Peter's slow at his work. It's little ye ken how hard he's at it, nicht an' day, slavin' for you an' the doctor, miss; and he's nane sae auld neither, an' ye needna be ca'in' him an auld rheumaticky body that canna climb a lether."

"O Lisbeth, I *didn't*," reproachfully.

"You did so."

"I did nothing of the kind; I tried to make excuses for him because you were so cross with him."

"*Me* cross! *Me* cross wi' Peter!" ejaculated Lisbeth. "*Me* that's never been cross wi' my man in a

lifetime o' years! What next?"

"Just that you're a dear, funny old thing, and I'm going to bed."

"Ye're a peart-mouthed lassie, that's what ye are. Ye'd best get awa to yer bed."

It was always thus with Lisbeth and Peter. Did any one cast the slightest shadow of blame on either, the other was up in arms at once; and though each might blame the other for some omission or commission, as soon as any third person agreed in laying blame, that person found himself in very hot water indeed.

Marjory went out to give Silky his supper. He always had his food in the stable, but his bed was on a mat outside Marjory's bedroom door. Then she went down the garden to find Peter. 42

She found him just putting away his tools for the night.

"Good-night, Peter," she said. "I just came to tell you I've got a friend, and also that Lisbeth's cross."

"*She* cross! Na, na; that canna be, Miss Marjory. Weary maybe wi' her cookin' an' siclike for you an' the doctor, but no cross; na, na."

"Well, but, Peter, didn't you hear me say I've found a friend? Aren't you glad?"

"Glad indeed I am. That's a bonnie bit news. An' what like is she?"

"She's the sweetest, prettiest girl you ever saw," said Marjory enthusiastically.

"Ay, maybe she's that," replied the old man doubtfully, looking significantly at Marjory.

"But I tell you she *is*, Peter, and her mother is so kind and gentle. Their name is Forester, and they've just come to live at Braeside."

"Oh, *they*," said the old man.

The Foresters, being newcomers, did not hold a very high place in Peter's estimation as yet.

"That's quick wark, Miss Marjory," he continued; and then, as if to atone for his want of enthusiasm, "I'm glad to hear it, for whiles it must be a bit lonesome here for a lassie the likes o' you."

"And, Peter darling, you'll be good to her, like you are to me, won't you? And you'll show her the birds' eggs, and where to look for nests; and you'll tell us stories on wet days, won't you?" 43

Peter looked guilty. He knew his master disapproved of fairy stories; and his tales, although he would declare they were true ones and was always careful to point them with an excellent moral, dealt largely with the old Scottish fairy folk, and with the many superstitions handed down from generation to generation amongst the peasantry.

"Na, na, Miss Marjory; ye're gettin' ower auld for Peter's stories; they are but bairnie's tales."

"Now, Peter, you mustn't be obstinate. You must try to remember some nice new ones."

"Aweel, gin I must, I must," said the old man, with a twinkle in his eye, for if there was one thing he enjoyed above another, it was to see Marjory sitting wide-eyed and open-mouthed drinking in some tale of olden times.

"That's a good Peter. Now, remember, the first wet day that comes you're engaged to us in the wood-shed. Good-night."

It was a beautiful still evening. July was not yet ended, and roses, lilies, and mignonette breathed their fragrance upon the air. Overhead one clear star was shining; like the star of promise that shone of old, it seemed to Marjory an omen of a new life for her. Peace entered into her soul as she gazed upwards. Away to the west the last lingering tints of a late sunset were still to be seen; the whole world seemed at rest. She, too, would lie down and sleep, calm after the storm, and tomorrow she would begin a new day. She would tell her uncle she was sorry, and would try to follow Mrs. Forester's advice. Loving words that she would say to the doctor came into her mind, and she fell asleep thinking of him with tenderness and gratitude. 44

When the morrow came, Marjory awoke with a confused sense that something unusual was to happen that day. She gradually remembered her resolution of the night before; but the loving words she had planned to say seemed frozen inside her, and she felt as if she did not dare to speak to her uncle.

She went down to breakfast dreading the meeting with him; but Dr. Hunter said good-morning as usual, just as if nothing had happened. Marjory noticed, with a pang of self-reproach, that he looked tired, and that his eyes had a weary expression that was not usually there. He ate his breakfast in silence, but that was nothing out of the common, for they often sat through a meal with little or no conversation. Marjory hated this state of things, and yet she had never had the courage to try to alter it. She would sit and rack her brains for something to say, and then decide that it was impossible that anything she could say would interest a grown-up man, and a man so stern and silent as Uncle George. Lately she had actually come to dreading meal-times, and would be thankful when they were over and she could escape. All this was very foolish on her 45

part, no doubt, but it arose entirely from her misunderstanding of her uncle.

Contrary to her usual custom, she hovered about the dining-room after breakfast was over that morning, trying to make up her mind to speak. She watched her uncle wind the clock on the mantelpiece, saying to herself that she would speak when he left off turning the key, but she let the opportunity slip by. Then the doctor gathered up his letters and papers and went to his study without a word or a look in her direction. In fact, he was quite unconscious of her presence for the time being; he was thinking deeply over a scientific problem which absorbed his whole attention.

Marjory despised herself for being so weak and timid, and at last scolded herself into a determination to go and knock boldly at the study door. She would be obliged to go in then; there could be no turning back or putting off.

Her heart beating very quickly, she went and knocked at the door; and in response to her uncle's "Come in," she opened it and walked across to the table at which the doctor was sitting.

Interested as he was in his work, when he saw who was the cause of this unusual disturbance, he smiled at her, asking,—

"Well, Marjory, what is it?"

The girl turned white to the lips and said, her voice low and trembling,—

"I am very sorry about yesterday; will you forgive me?"

"Of course I will, and gladly," said the doctor heartily. "My dear child, you didn't understand; you don't know that I only wish to do what is for your good. I may have made mistakes. I was told yesterday that I have made some big ones," sadly, "but I intend to try to rectify them now. Things are going to be different, little one. You are to have a companion, and you are to learn some of the things you are so anxious about. Will that please you?"

"Oh yes," eagerly.

"And you take back those words, 'unkind and cruel'? I never thought to hear my dear sister's child use such words to me."

Marjory's answer was a storm of tears.

"There, there, my child; don't cry. You won't think so hardly of me again. Come, let us forget all our troubles." And the doctor took out his handkerchief, and began to dry Marjory's tears, clumsily, it must be owned, but with the kindest intention.

"See, Marjory, the sun is shining, and everything out of doors looks bright and happy; you must be happy too. Follow the example of the flowers. They droop under a storm of rain, but when the rain leaves off and the sun begins to shine, they hold up their heads as straight as ever."

"Yes; but they aren't wicked like people are; they haven't got things to be sorry for."

"Tut, tut, child; now you want to argue. That opens up a very large field for discussion, and little girls have no business arguing. Run away into the garden and play with Peter or Silky, or both, for both dearly love an excuse for a game."

Marjory obeyed, saying to herself as she went, "Why will he always treat me as such a child? I'm nearly thirteen, and I want to know about things. I should like to know why people were made so that they can so easily be naughty, and so suddenly too, without really wanting to." And she thought of yesterday. "I suppose Uncle George knows everything; but grown-up people always say that you wouldn't understand, and they won't tell you anything. I wonder if trees and flowers are really as good as they look. I know birds and insects, and even little tiny ants, are naughty, because I've seen them quarrelling. I do wonder about the flowers, because they are just as much alive as people or animals."

Turning over this problem in her mind, she went slowly down the garden to Peter, who was at work again in his beloved vinery.

"Peter," she said, "do you think that flowers and trees and vegetables are ever naughty?"

The old man paused in his work and scratched his head thoughtfully.

"Aweel, Miss Marjory," he said, "I'm thinkin' not. Seems to me that the bonnie flowers hae been gien us for a gude example. They aye bloom as best they can. Sunshine an' shade, rain an' wind, they tak them a' as God Almichty sends them, an' are aye sweet, an' aye content just to dae their best. I dinna ken for certain, Miss Marjory, but that's what I'm thinkin'."

"I think so too, Peter. They certainly don't look as if they were ever naughty. My new friend is just like a lovely white rose, and she doesn't look as if she could ever be naughty either."

"H'm," remarked Peter, "she's no mortal, lassie, then."

"Peter, you're not a bit nice about the Foresters. I tell you they are just as sweet as they can be, both Blanche and her mother."

"It's just this," replied Peter, thus admonished. "I'm no a man that can gae heid ower ears a' in a

meenit; I must prove folks first. These Foresters, they're English for ae thing, an' maybe they'll bring new fangles to Braeside, which, bein' a Scotsman, I canna gie my approbation to. I'm no sayin' they *wull*, but they *micht*. Na, na, Miss Marjory; I maun prove them first."

"You're an obstinate old thing; but you can begin proving, as you call it, this very afternoon, for Blanche is coming to tea; and I say, Peter, will you spare time to take us down to the Low Farm after tea? Blanche comes from London, and I'm sure she would love to see over it."

"*London*," muttered Peter in a voice that meant volumes of disapproval.

"Now, *do* be nice, and promise," coaxed Marjory. "I'm going to ask Lisbeth a favour too, and I'm sure *she'll* say yes."

Not to be outdone in good nature by his wife, the old man at last gave his promise.

"Gin the doctor can spare me," he said.

Marjory smiled, for she well knew that Peter had had his own way at Hunters' Brae for many a long year, and the doctor had very little to do with the disposal of his time; but Peter was faithful to the smallest detail, his duty was his life, and the doctor could trust him.

Marjory then betook herself to the kitchen to try her powers of persuasion upon Lisbeth.

The kitchen at Hunters' Brae was a picture to see. A large room, bright and airy, plates in orderly rows upon the dresser, copper pans that shone like mirrors, spotless table and spotless floor, a big open fire throwing out a cheerful glow—such was Lisbeth's domain. To complete the picture, there was Lisbeth herself, a most wholesome hearty-looking old lady, with rosy cheeks and kindly eyes. Her dress was made of lilac-coloured print, and her apron was an immense size. She wore a round cap with a goffered frill and strings which tied under her chin. She was firmly convinced that no finer family than the Hunters of Hunters' Brae ever existed, and that the world did not contain such another man as her Peter—two beliefs which went a long way towards maintaining that domestic peace which was the rule at Hunters' Brae.

"Weel, Marjory, what is't?" she asked, as Marjory entered the kitchen. Lisbeth had never adopted the formal "Miss" in her mode of addressing Marjory, the baby she had seen grow up. She had determined that when the "bairn" should reach the age of fifteen, then would be time enough to begin it.

"I want to ask you a favour," said Marjory.

"Ask awa," replied Lisbeth, her arms akimbo.

"Will you do it?"

"No till I hear what it is."

"Well, I want you to make some shortbread for tea."

"Shortbread the day?" asked the old woman in surprise; "the morn's no the Sawbath."

"I know; but Blanche Forester, my new friend, is coming to tea, and I want her to taste it. You know very well that you make the best shortbread and wear the biggest aprons in Heathermuir. You will make us some, won't you? Peter has promised to do what I asked him," added naughty Marjory.

"I suppose I micht just as weel, though there's scones and cookies enough for a regiment only bakit yesterday."

"That's a good Lisbeth," said Marjory, delighted with the result of her mission, and feeling that the success of the afternoon's entertainment was assured.

CHAPTER IV.

TEA AT HUNTERS' BRAE.

"They looked upon me from the pictured wall;
They—the great dead—
Stood still upon the canvas while I told
The glorious memories to their ashes wed."

E. B. BROWNING.

The day passed very slowly for Marjory until four o'clock, which was the time appointed for the arrival of her visitor. She wondered whether Uncle George would have tea with them, and, it must be confessed, she secretly hoped that he would not, telling herself that it would be much nicer without him, because Blanche and she would then feel free to talk to each other. It must not

be supposed that a better understanding of her uncle could be reached by leaps and bounds. The change from the confidence of the baby child to the constraint and awkwardness of the older girl had been gradual, and the return to that fearless confidence must be gradual too; but Marjory had taken a step in the right direction that morning, and she really meant to try hard.

53

The girl had never had a friend of her own age to tea in her life, and she felt how delightful it would be if they could be alone together.

There were occasional tea-parties at Hunters' Brae, but they were dreaded rather than looked forward to by Marjory. The company usually consisted of the minister and his wife and the doctor and his wife, and it seemed to Marjory that these parties had been exactly the same in every detail for years. The guests made the same flattering remarks about Lisbeth's scones, cookies, and shortbread; they told the same tales, and they put Marjory through the same catechism. How old was she now? How was she getting on with her lessons? Could she sew her seam nicely? Could she turn the heel of a sock? When these questions were asked and answered, there would be long silences, broken only by the crunching of shortbread and the swallowing of tea. To Marjory these silences caused the most acute pain. She felt helpless and inclined to run away, or scream, or do something to create a diversion. She would watch the hands of the clock, hoping that each minute might bring a remark from somebody. But the other people did not seem to mind the lack of conversation; and once she counted ten whole minutes during which no one said anything except what was necessary in passing and handing eatables! How different her tea-party might be, she thought, if only—But then she stopped, thinking of her new resolves. Still, it was a great relief when the doctor said,—

54

"I'm going to Morristown this afternoon, Marjory, so you must entertain your visitor yourself. Do you think you can manage it?"

There was a twinkle of mischief in the doctor's eyes as he asked the question, but Marjory did not see it. She was looking at the ground, blushing rather guiltily as she realized how pleased she was to hear of this plan.

"Oh yes," she replied, "I shall manage quite well, Uncle George."

"Then just go and tell Peter I want him at once to drive me to the station."

"Oh, mayn't I drive you?" asked Marjory eagerly.

"Of course you may," replied the doctor, looking at his niece in some surprise. This was the first time she had ever suggested such a thing, and he was more pleased than he cared to own even to himself. As for Marjory, the words had slipped out almost before she knew what she was saying; and when she had spoken them she felt half afraid of their effect, and wholly surprised at herself.

The doctor, who did nothing by halves, had planned this trip to Morristown for himself, so as to leave the coast quite clear for the two girls to enjoy themselves in their own way. It was a most considerate action on his part, for he disliked railway travelling, and at that time was much engrossed in the study of the scientific problem before mentioned. He told himself that if he were to stay anywhere in the neighbourhood of Heathermuir he would not be able to keep away from his study for long, so he decided to banish himself to Morristown.

55

Marjory drove her uncle to the station, and was back in plenty of time to prepare for the reception of her guest. She could see the house at Braeside very well from her bedroom, and, perched on the window-sill, she watched for Blanche's coming. At last she saw two figures—a small one and a tall one—coming out of the house. The tall one was a man, and must be Mr. Forester she decided; and in that case she would not go to meet them—she felt too shy. She watched them coming across the park which surrounded their house; then they were lost to sight in the wood which was at the end of the Hunters' Brae garden. The doctor must have told them to come this way, as it was much nearer than coming by the road.

Marjory was rather relieved to see that when at last the garden gate opened Blanche was alone. She rushed downstairs and through the garden, eager to welcome her visitor; but when she reached Blanche she felt almost tongue-tied, and all she could say was, "How do you do?" which sounded very stiff and formal, compared with what she felt.

But Blanche was equal to the occasion.

"How nice of you to come and meet me!" she said. "Dr. Hunter told us we might come this way, as it is so much nearer. But how did you know just when to come?"

56

"I was watching from my bedroom window."

"Then I believe we can see each other's bedroom windows, because mine looks to the front of the house. How lovely! We shall be able to signal to each other. Won't that be fun?"

"Yes, indeed it will. We shall be able to say 'good-night' and 'good-morning' to each other, and all sorts of things." And Marjory's busy brain at once began to devise methods of signalling.

"What a lovely garden!" exclaimed Blanche as they walked towards the house. "Ours is all weeds and rubbish, it has been left alone so long. Nobody seems to have bothered about the garden while the house was empty."

"It will soon begin to look nice, now you've come," said Marjory consolingly; and, indeed, it

seemed to her as if the very flowers in the garden must grow to greet the coming of her friend.

"What a lot there is to see here!" said Blanche enthusiastically. "Where shall we begin?"

"Well, let's have tea first," suggested Marjory. "Then we can go over the house, then the garden; and then Peter has promised to take us to the Low Farm—that is, if you would like it," she added, looking shyly at her companion.

"I shall simply love it all," Blanche replied emphatically; and then, in a burst of confidence, "I say, I'm awfully glad you haven't got on your best frock—at least," quickly, "it's the same one you had on yesterday. Mother said she didn't think I need put mine on; that we might be in the garden, perhaps, and I should enjoy it better if I didn't have to think about my frock."

57

"I never put my best one on unless I'm obliged to," said Marjory. "I always feel so boxed up in it, and it always reminds me of sermons and tea-parties."

Blanche laughed merrily. "Oh!" she cried, "are the sermons very long here?"

"Well," laughing too, "they are not very short; but that's not why I dislike them. It's because uncle likes me to write them down afterwards."

"Oh, how *dreadful*! And do you manage to do it?"

"I try to. Sometimes it's easier than others; but sometimes there are so many firstlies and secondlies divided into other firstlies and secondlies that I get into a regular muddle. Uncle always says that it's a very good exercise for the memory, as well as teaching me about Church things. Sometimes Mr. Mackenzie preaches a sermon for children in the afternoon, and then it's quite different; I could remember every word. But the funny thing is that uncle never wants me to write them!"

"Too easy, I suppose!"

58

Blanche laughed again, such a joyous laugh that Marjory was infected by it and laughed too. Blanche was a child of most unusual beauty, though she herself seemed quite unconscious of it. Her face in repose wore an expression of innocent loveliness which went straight to the heart. Her skin was fair and soft, her eyes large and dark and of an indescribable colour, neither brown nor gray, and her hair was like burnished copper, with pretty waves in it, and the dearest little fine tendrils curling about her neck and ears. Her childhood had been very happy. Surrounded and protected by the loving care of devoted parents, she had grown to look out upon the world with happy eyes, and her sunshiny disposition made pleasure for herself and for others. Marjory had fallen in love with her at first sight, and felt that she could never tire of looking at her friend's sweet face.

They found tea laid for them in the dining-room. It was a pleasant room, long and low-ceilinged, with oak beams and high panelled doors. At one end of it stood an old-fashioned dresser, its shelves decorated with precious china and silver. On the walls were pictures of bygone Hunters in various costumes, Marjory's favourite being a dashing young cavalier, with hat and feather, collar and frills of costly lace, and all the other appointments of the period. Marjory used to amuse herself trying to imagine her Uncle George dressed in such a style. There was the admiral in cocked hat and gold lace; the minister in black gown and orthodox white bands; there was the brave young soldier who had died for Prince Charlie; and there were many others, most of them celebrated in some way, for the Hunters had been a race of strong men.

59

Lisbeth, resplendent in a black silk dress, with muslin apron and cap in honour of the occasion, stood at the door to meet the girls. On such a day as this, Jean, the young maid, gave place to her superior.

"This is Blanche Forester," said Marjory by way of introduction; and turning to Blanche, "This is dear old Lisbeth."

"I'm pleased to see ye," said the old lady graciously, nodding with satisfaction, her eyes fixed upon Blanche's flower-like face. "Ye're a bit ower white like for health," she remarked.

Shyness was not a failing that afflicted either Lisbeth or Peter: they were both apt to say exactly what they thought, regardless of time, place, or person.

Marjory was delighted by Lisbeth's evident approval of her friend, and felt very grateful to the old woman for putting on her "silk," which only came out on great occasions; and when she saw the table daintily spread with all sorts of good things, her satisfaction was complete.

"If ye want onything, just ring the bell and I'll come," said Lisbeth, and she rustled slowly out of the room. That was what Marjory called Lisbeth's "silk walk." Dressed in her ordinary gown she bustled and clattered about, but in the silk she was as stately and dignified as a duchess.

60

"I *am* glad it isn't a ladies' tea," said Blanche as they took their seats, Marjory at the head of the table to "pour out."

Marjory looked at her questioningly.

"I mean where there's nothing to sit up to—no place to put your cup and plate except your own knee; and if you want to blow your nose or cough, you're sure to spill your tea; and the bread and butter is always so thin that it drops to pieces before you can fold it up. But this is *lovely*; and it is

so nice to have it all to ourselves!" And she settled herself comfortably in her chair.

Marjory felt quite at her ease by this time, and the two girls chattered gaily while they disposed of Lisbeth's good things.

Tea over, they started on a tour of inspection round the house. It had been built by a Hunter long ago, and Hunters had lived in it ever since, and had added to it in many ways; but there was still part of the original building left—an old wing which was now unused. There were various stories told in the village about this old part of the house. Footsteps were heard sometimes, it was said, and lights had been seen in the night by belated passers-by. Lisbeth and Peter knew of the tales and wild rumours that were current in the neighbourhood, but they were careful to say nothing to Marjory or the doctor, and also very careful to lock themselves in at night, as they were by no means free from foolish fears and superstitions.

61

First of all, the girls examined the portraits in the dining-room. Blanche inquired why there were no ladies amongst them.

"Don't they count as ancestors?" she asked.

"Oh yes," replied Marjory, laughing, "but they are all in the drawing-room. I've often thought it would be much nicer to hang them up in pairs, but Uncle George won't hear of it. He says they always have been kept separate, and he doesn't like to have anything altered. Come and see the ladies."

To the drawing-room accordingly they went. It was a large room, and contained many treasures in the way of beautiful and valuable old furniture and china. As a rule it was kept shrouded in dust-sheets, but to-day Lisbeth had uncovered everything in preparation for the visitor. There was a faint, delicious scent of potpourri about the room, the recipe of which had been handed down from one generation of Hunter ladies to the next, and was a speciality of the house. On the walls hung the portraits of these same ladies, smiling serenely down upon the room they had known so well. On the rare occasions when Marjory spent any time in this room, she used to study the faces of these dames, and try to trace some likeness to herself amongst them; but not one of them had the curly hair and dark eyes that were her portion, and the child sometimes felt sad to think that she was so unlike all the rest of her family.

62

Blanche was delighted, and studied all the portraits to the last one—that of Marjory's grandmother.

"But isn't there one of your mother?" she asked.

Marjory blushed. "Yes, there is one," she replied, "but it's in another room."

Somehow she felt ashamed of that shut-up, silent room with its hidden treasures that she had never seen.

"But," she continued, "I've got a picture of her when she was a girl, inside this locket." And she unfastened a small, old-fashioned trinket which she wore on a fine gold chain round her neck.

"Oh, how pretty!" cried Blanche; "but not a bit like you, is she?" And then, somewhat confused lest Marjory should misunderstand her, she continued, "I don't mean that you're not pretty, because you are; only it's so funny that you are so dark and your mother was so fair."

"I often and often wish I were fair," said Marjory wistfully. "I should love to be."

"Oh, but your hair is so curly and nice, it's just as good as fair hair. Mother always says that all young girls are pretty so long as they keep themselves tidy and fresh and try to be good. I used to be very cross with my hair, especially when boys in London would call 'carrots' after me, until at last mother made me understand that it is really quite wrong not to be pleased with whatever hair or eyes God has given us, and now I'm more content with it."

63

"It is lovely hair, and I would kick any boy that called it carrots," cried Marjory stoutly; and she took hold of a strand of it and kissed it impulsively. "Oh, I do think you're such a darling!" she said. "I'm going to be so happy now I've got you!"

This from quiet, self-contained Marjory! Here indeed was a revelation.

Marjory was just putting her locket back inside the neck of her dress, where she always kept it hidden, when Blanche's attention was attracted by something else which hung on the chain.

"What's this silver thing?" she asked; and Marjory explained that it was the half of a sixpence with a hole in it. "Lisbeth says my mother wore it for luck, so I always wear it too."

"How interesting! I wonder where the other half is."

"Lisbeth doesn't know; she says she never saw or heard of the other half."

"If you were in a fairy tale, you'd make all the knights that wanted to marry you go all over the world to find the other half; and then most likely the person that had it would turn out to be a king's son, and he would marry you, and you would be a queen, and be happy ever after."

64

Marjory laughed. "You shall make a story of it and tell it to me some day; but come now and see my bedroom."

On the way to Marjory's bedroom they had to pass the locked chamber, and of course Blanche had to inquire what it was, and Marjory had to explain, which she did in an apologetic, shamefaced way.

"But how romantic—much better than a fairy tale! How you must long to be fifteen and go in and see it!"

"Yes, I do. I wish it every day. But it takes such a lot of days to make a year, and there are still two more years to come." And Marjory sighed.

"Oh, they'll soon go," said Blanche cheerfully, "now that you've got to have lessons and be so busy."

When they reached the bedroom the girls went straight to the window, and were delighted to find that Blanche's room could be seen from it, so that the proposed signalling could easily be managed. They arranged that it should be done by waving white handkerchiefs. Four waves were to mean "Can you come out?" One wave in reply was to mean "No," and a lot of little waves "Yes." If either had to go out elsewhere, or should be prevented in any way from waiting till the other appeared at her window, the handkerchief was to be hung on a nail outside. They agreed that they would always go to signal directly after breakfast every morning.

65

All this took some time to plan, and Marjory said that if they were to see the garden and the farm they must leave the old part of the house till another day. Blanche agreed, and they went out into the garden.

CHAPTER V.

A VISIT TO THE LOW FARM.

66

"The blossom's scent
Floated across the fresh grass, and the bees
With low, vexed song from rose to lily went;
A gentle wind was in the heavy trees."

W. MORRIS.

The garden at Hunters' Brae was a charming place. Like the house, it had been the care and pleasure of generations of the Hunters. Its lawns were soft and velvety. The impertinent daisy and the pushing dandelion had never been allowed their way amongst the tender grass, and it was smooth and springy to walk on. It was Peter's pride that no such lawns could be shown anywhere in or around Heathermuir. There was nothing stiff or formal in this garden, no chessboard patterns or stripes of colour round the borders, but there were lovely masses of luxuriant blooms, radiant colourings, delicious scents, and all in such harmony that the result was a charm which no more regular arrangement could have produced.

One of Marjory's favourite walks was a narrow grass path bordered on each side by stately hollyhocks. When she was a little girl she used to wonder how long it would be before she grew as tall as they were. This walk led to the rose garden, which had always had a great attraction for the lonely child. A real rose garden it was, with low stone walls, gold and green with the mossy growth of many years. There was a sundial in the centre of it, which had seen many a sunny day since it had been set up to mark the passing of time for the visitors to the rose garden. Here were roses of many sorts and colours, some rare, some common, but all sweet, as only roses can be. Peter knew their secrets—knew just how to treat these lovely queens among flowers—knew, too, that, above all, they like to have undisputed possession of the ground, for they are exclusive these royal ladies, and do not care to share with all and sundry; and they rewarded the old man's care and consideration by blooming early and late and in the most wonderful profusion.

67

It would take many pages to tell of all the delights of the Hunters' Brae garden, with its unexpected turns and nooks and corners, its rustic seats in shady places for hot days, in sunny places for cold ones, and even in many pages it would be impossible to convey the old-world charm pervading it, its stately dignity and the aspect of long-established well-being over all. Peter seemed to know every inch of it, every plant in it was as a child to him, and not the tiniest seedling was overlooked, for—

68

"The gardener, in his old brown hands,
Turns over the brown earth
As if he loves and understands
The flowers before their birth;
The fragile, childish little strands
He buries in the earth."

Dr. Hunter was often quite astonished at the amount of work the old man would get through.

Certainly he had two or three assistants, but they were young and raw and had to be watched and told what to do; but Peter always said he preferred them young, because "They didna hae quite sic a gude conceit o' theirsels," and any young man who could get his training under Peter thought himself very fortunate. Everything with him was done in due season and for love of his work; there was no rushing or hurrying—it was indeed a garden of peace.

Marjory loved the garden. It was here that the happiest hours of her life had been spent; here that she had watched the ways of birds and flowers and insects; here that she had listened to Peter's tales of olden times; and here that she had dreamed dreams of her father, and built many a castle in the air. She was glad when she saw that this beloved garden was casting its charm upon her friend. It was looking very lovely in the afternoon sunshine. Butterflies were flitting amongst the flowers, and the hum of bees and many insects made the air musical with sound of happy life. A gorgeous dragon-fly sailed past them, wheeling round as if to show its wonderful glittering colours to the best advantage in the sunshine. Blanche had never seen such a thing in her life, and after it had gone she lingered many minutes hoping that it might pass back again. But it did not come, and the time was slipping away. Marjory spied the bent back of Peter in the distance, and the two girls went towards him, Marjory calling to him to come and take them to the farm.

69

Peter was not to be hurried; he was tying up a carnation plant, and he continued his job with only a nod at the girls. He finished the last knot just as they reached him, and straightening himself and raising his hat, he said, "I'm ready noo."

Marjory said to Blanche, "This is Peter;" and then turning to Peter, "This is Miss Forester. Aren't you pleased to see her?"

"I am that," replied the old man, looking at Blanche for the first time; and then, as if satisfied with what he saw, he repeated much more enthusiastically, "'Deed an' I am that," with a nod and a smile at Blanche.

Marjory felt great satisfaction in the assurance that her friend had found favour in the eyes of the two very important personages in the Brae household—Lisbeth and Peter.

70

The girls chatted gaily to the old man as they went down the hill on the other side of the wood to Low Farm.

Marjory never liked to go to the farm without Peter or Lisbeth or her uncle, for she was a little afraid of the woman who managed it. Mrs. Shaw was very tall and strongly built, with black hair turning gray about the temples, and dark, deep-set, piercing eyes, and eyebrows which Marjory always thought looked long enough to comb. This gave Mrs. Shaw, as she was called, a somewhat forbidding look, and, added to her quick, decided, almost rough way of speaking, made her more feared than loved. No one knew anything of her life before she came to Heathermuir; but the story went that her husband had gone away to foreign parts and never come back again, and that her temper was soured in consequence. Be that as it might, she was an excellent manager; everything at the Low Farm was in spick-and-span order, and fit for inspection at any time of the day. Maids and men alike knew that they must do their work, or Alison Shaw would demand the reason of any neglect or unpunctuality; and with those black eyes fixed upon them it was impossible to prevaricate or offer excuses.

The young ladies' visit must have been expected, for when they were ushered by Mrs. Shaw into the little parlour, there was a tray on the table with glasses on it, and a bottle of gooseberry wine and a cake of shortbread.

71

Mrs. Shaw poured out some wine for each of the girls, eyeing them critically as she did so. When at last she spoke it was not with the broad accent usual amongst the people of Heathermuir—a fact which in itself proclaimed her as not one of them, and added not a little to their respect for her, and to the mystery which surrounded her.

"So you've come to see the farm, Miss Forester," she said in her deep but musical voice. "What do you wish to see first?"

Blanche, conscious of the earnest scrutiny of those dark eyes, blushed rosy red, and, bewildered by this sudden question, looked appealingly at Marjory, who, unfortunately, had a mouthful of shortbread at that moment; then, feeling that she must say something, Blanche stammered, "Oh, I don't know—er—have you any pigs?" She did not in the least wish to see pigs more than any other animal, but they were the only living things she could think of at the moment as appropriate to a farm.

Marjory laughed, but Mrs. Shaw did not move a muscle.

"Yes," she said, "we have pigs; you shall see them first if you please."

"Thank you," said Blanche; and then, thinking that she ought to try to be polite and friendly, "What very nice wine this is!"

72

"Yes, it is," responded Mrs. Shaw. "I made it myself."

Blanche was somewhat abashed by the reply, and could think of no further remark. She did not yet know that there was not a shadow of pretence about Mrs. Shaw. Her reply had no savour of conceit; it was honest, that was all. She knew the wine was good, because she had made it

herself and could vouch for it; therefore, why should she deny or disclaim it?

Blanche would have liked to linger in the little parlour to examine some of the curiosities which had caught her eye. Pieces of dried seaweed, scraps of coral, strings of queer-looking beads, and even dried and stuffed fish, were arranged on the mantelpiece and on every available bracket and shelf. She was eager to know where all these treasures had come from, and how they had found their way to the Low Farm, but she did not dare to question Mrs. Shaw. All Marjory knew about them was, as she told Blanche afterwards, that it was said they came from "foreign parts," which was the general term applied by the people of Heathermuir to any country outside of the British Isles. It was said that a mysterious parcel came regularly every Christmas to Mrs. Shaw, that she never spoke of its contents to any one, but that the collection of curiosities grew larger every year.

Mrs. Shaw was ready for the business of the moment, and as soon as the girls had finished their refreshment, she led the way out of the house into the little garden which surrounded it, where Peter and Silky were patiently waiting for them. Silky was quite to be trusted in the farmyard; he had paid many visits to it, and always behaved as a pattern of propriety. 73

The first things to attract Blanche's attention were three pretty straw beehives. Mrs. Shaw was proud of her honey and fond of her bees, and seemed to understand them in some curious, sympathetic way. It was her boast that she had never been stung; and as she was a very honest person, there is no reason to doubt her word.

The hives stood at some distance from the house, at the end of the farm garden, and there were beds of lemon, thyme, sage, mignonette, and other sweet flowers near the hives for the bees to feed on; and a border of tall sunflowers along the garden path seemed to be very much appreciated by them too.

Mrs. Shaw was very much pleased by Blanche's interest in her bees, and she actually gave an invitation to the two girls to come again when it was time to take the honey, and she would tell them all about it. This was a most unusual action on her part, for, although she was always ready to receive visitors, she was seldom known to invite them. Peter's face wore a curious smile as he heard the invitation given and accepted. 74

But they must pass the bees and go on to something else. Mrs. Shaw led the way, remarking to Peter,—

"Miss Forester wishes to see the pigs; we'll go to them first."

Peter's smile broadened into a grin, and he stole a glance at Blanche which caused her to laugh outright. Marjory joined in, and, wonderful to relate, even Mrs. Shaw smiled. Blanche tried to explain.

"Mrs. Shaw asked me what I would like to see, and I could only think of pigs just then," she said, blushing and laughing.

"'Deed, then, an' Mrs. Shaw's pigs are a bonnie lot, I can tell ye, an' worth seein', Miss Blanche," said Peter.

They soon arrived at the sties, and although they were all that they should be—and no doubt the pigs were well-bred and well-conducted animals—Blanche did not take to them with much enthusiasm, except in the case of one perky little black-and-white fellow, who seemed to be the life and soul of the family party.

They next went to the poultry-yard, where there were many varieties of fowls, and one or two families of charming little yellow balls of chickens promenading the yard with their proud mothers.

It was getting near milking time, and the sleek, well-fed cows were sauntering one by one into the yard. They scarcely needed any driving: a man stood at the yard gate, whistling a long, peculiar note, and the animals knew what to do, though they never hurried themselves in the doing of it. 75

Blanche had never been quite so near to cows before, and it must be admitted that she felt a little frightened of them; their horns looked so very large and pointed, now that they were so close! Marjory, of course, was quite accustomed to them, and had no idea that they were a real terror to her town-bred friend.

One great beast, bearing the innocent name of Daisy, but with an immense pair of horns, and eyes that seemed to Blanche to be rolling with fury directed towards herself, came through the gate, and she instinctively went closer to Mrs. Shaw for protection. Quick as thought, the woman caught her hand and gently led her farther away.

"They won't hurt you," she whispered. "Daisy's as gentle as she can be. You must come again and make friends with her."

Blanche gave Mrs. Shaw a grateful look, and squeezed the hand that held hers. The pressure was returned, and any one who had happened to look at Mrs. Shaw at that moment would have seen a suspicious moisture in the black eyes and a little quiver on the set lips; for Mrs. Shaw had a heart, and Blanche had somehow found her way into it.

A dairymaid came to ask if the young ladies would be waiting for a drink of the new milk. Marjory said, "Yes, please," at once. She liked the new milk, frothy and warm. But Blanche said quickly,—

"Oh no, thank you; I would really rather not. You're very kind, but I'm sure I shouldn't like it."

"It would be good for ye, Miss Blanche," remarked Peter, "and maybe help to put some colour into yon white cheeks o' yours."

The cheeks were rosy red for a minute as Blanche repeated her refusal. She did not want to be rude, but, oh dear! could she ever bring herself to drink milk like that? She did not think she possibly could.

"Never mind; she shan't be bothered," said Mrs. Shaw, to Blanche's relief. "She shall come to the dairy and have some curds and cream—I've some nicely set—or a drink of the other milk, if she likes that better." And, still holding Blanche's hand, she led the way to the dairy, across the yard and along a shady path.

What a refreshingly cool place the dairy was, with its rows of shining white pans, and its tiled walls and floor! Everything looked so fresh and spotless, it was a pleasure to see it.

Blanche was glad to have a glass of the milk here. It was very different, ladled out of one of those beautiful white pans with a nice white ladle!

Mrs. Shaw showed them the churn and the pats of yellow butter. There were cheeses too, and pots of cream—one and all of the best and freshest.

The dairy was the last sight; and the girls, very much pleased with all they had seen, said good-bye to Mrs. Shaw, receiving a hearty invitation to come again soon—in fact, to come any time they liked.

Marjory walked with Blanche from the farm to a small gate which led into the Braeside park, Peter watching them, waiting for Marjory's return, and then walking home with her.

"She's a bonnie lassie yon," said Peter, as he walked stiffly up the hill beside Marjory. "I'm weel pleased wi' her."

"Yes, isn't she a darling, Peter? I do feel so happy now I've got a friend, and such a friend. Did you notice how Mrs. Shaw kept looking at her?"

"Ay," replied Peter, "I did that."

Dr. Hunter was at home when they arrived. They found him sitting on one of the garden seats smoking.

"I'm taking a holiday too, you see," he called to Marjory. "Come and tell me about yours."

Marjory obeyed, and was surprised that she felt able to tell her uncle quite freely about what she and Blanche had been doing; and he, on his part, was glad to see the light in Marjory's eyes, and to hear the ring of pleasure in her voice, both of which had been rare of late.

As for Marjory, she went to bed full of contentment, and with a sense of general well-being. Often she had got up in the morning with a feeling of dullness, as if there were nothing to look forward to. She was sure that such a feeling would never come to her again, now that she had some one to share her days, to share her pleasures and her troubles—for even girls have troubles of their own, and very real ones sometimes.

"Everything will be different now," was her thought as she lay down to sleep. "I shall be glad when to-morrow comes."

CHAPTER VI.

CONFIDENCES.

"'Tis the Land of Little People, where the happy children play,
 And the things they know and see there are so wonderful and grand—
 Things that wiser, older folks cannot know or understand.
 In the woods they meet the fairies, find the giants in their caves,
 See the palaces of cloudland, and the mermen in the waves,
 Know what all the birdies sing of, hear the secrets of the flowers—
 For the Land of Little People is another world than ours."

ANON.

So this is the little gypsy Blanche has been telling me about!"

Such was Mr. Forester's greeting to Marjory when she went to Braeside on a return visit.

Marjory was not sure that she liked being called a gypsy. That dark hair of hers was always a sore point, but she was quite certain that she did not like the kiss which Mr. Forester bestowed upon her in all kindness of heart. To begin with, she did not like being kissed by strangers; and secondly, if the said strangers happened to possess moustaches, it made their offence the greater. Mr. Forester was a stranger, and, moreover, was the proud owner of a long and silky moustache, so Marjory felt that she had some excuse for her resentment.

"Don't like being called a gypsy, and don't like being kissed' written large all over her face—eh, Blanche?" said Mr. Forester mischievously.

"Papa, you are a horrid tease. Go away and leave us in peace. I don't wonder Marjory doesn't like your nasty, tickly kisses."

"Oh dear, please don't send me away," he said in mock dismay. "Mayn't I stay if I promise to be very, very good?"

"You must ask Marjory."

Marjory's reply was to burst out laughing.

"Ah, that's better," said Mr. Forester. "Now we're all quite happy. Sit down, both of you, and listen to me."

The girls obeyed, and Mr. Forester continued,—

"Guess what I brought from Morrystown to-day?"

"Sweets!" cried Blanche.

"No. Guess again."

"Anything to eat?"

"I should be very sorry to eat it, but some people might like to."

"Lesson books," hazarded Marjory.

"No; nothing so useful, I'm afraid."

"Does mother know?"

"No. Nobody knows but me."

"Oh, do tell us, papa."

"Well, you are a pair of duffers. I thought you would have been sure to guess, but I'll go and fetch it."

Mr. Forester returned carrying a small hamper. There was straw poking out of it in places, and it was labelled, "This side up, with care."

"Oh, it's a new tea-set for the schoolroom," cried Blanche. "Mother said we needed one."

"No, it's not a new tea-set for the schoolroom, Miss Clever. There's a new pupil, and that's quite enough for any schoolroom. You're no good as a guesser, and yet you've been worrying my life out for weeks about this very thing."

Mr. Forester meanwhile was untying the string which fastened down the lid of the hamper. He slowly raised it, and there, curled up in the straw, lay a little black retriever puppy, its baby face puckered up partly in fear and partly in interest over this new experience.

"What a perfect little darling!" cried Blanche. "Oh, isn't he sweet? But how could you say some people might like to eat him, papa?"

"Well, I've heard of the Chinese eating puppy-dog stew; it comes after birds'-nest soup, you know."

"Papa!" indignantly.

Mr. Forester lifted the little fellow out of the basket and set him on the floor. He began running along with such a queer little waddle that they all laughed. Then he stopped and contemplated them questioningly, as much as to say, "What are you laughing at?"

"There, Miss Blanche," said her father, "you've got your work cut out for you to train that small person in the way he should go. Don't make a fool of him, dear; love him as much as you like, but make him obey orders. He's a game little beggar, isn't he?"

Blanche was delighted. "O papa, thank you a thousand times. Is he really for my very own, like Marjory has Silky? Oh, I am so glad to have him! You darling!" she cried, catching up the dog and hugging him close.

"I thought *I* was the darling," said Mr. Forester comically. "In fact, I'm sure I am, for thinking of it all myself."

"So you are—the dearest, darlingest papa in all the world." And the girl sprang into her father's arms.

This scene made Marjory a little bit sad.

"If only I had my father too, how happy I should be!" she thought. "But I don't even know if I've got one." And she sighed.

Blanche noticed the cloud on her friend's face, and instinctively felt what had caused it. Tears of sympathy rushed to her eyes, and she picked up the puppy and put him into Marjory's arms.

"Now," she said, with a look which Marjory understood, it was so full of sympathy, "you must christen him." 83

Marjory looked attentively at the little fat ball of a dog, and then said thoughtfully,—

"What would you think of 'Curly'? He is one of the curly kind, different from Silky."

"Yes, that will do beautifully. We'll call him Curly. Do you agree, papa?"

"Right you are," replied Mr. Forester. "But it doesn't matter so much what you call him as whether he comes when he's called; that's the chief thing." And so saying he left the girls to enjoy the new treasure by themselves.

Marjory was quite as enthusiastic as Blanche. She was passionately fond of animals, and the young ones always charmed her. She was able to give Blanche instructions as to how Curly should be fed; and they made a set of very strict rules for his training, which was to begin at once.

Their consultation was interrupted by the entrance of Mrs. Forester. She had been out driving, and was very beautifully dressed. Marjory thought she had never seen such a lovely lady before. She kissed the girl tenderly, and, putting her arms round her, said,—

"I am very glad to welcome you here, little Marjory, and I hope this will soon feel like a second home to you. Now," brightly, "I've got a great piece of news for you. Miss Waspe writes that she would be very glad to have an extra week's holidays till the eighteenth of September. What do you say?" 84

Blanche clapped her hands. "Oh, how jolly! a whole week more to do as we like! Do let her have it, mother."

Mrs. Forester laughed. "Yes, I think we must let her have it. She will be just as pleased as you, no doubt. Well, then, you will begin lessons on the eighteenth of September.—Will that suit you, Marjory?"

"Oh yes, it's my birthday."

"In that case, wouldn't you rather wait until the next day, dear? It won't make any difference to us."

"Oh no, thank you. I think it would be splendid to begin on my birthday. I've wanted to learn things for such a long time, it will be a kind of present," said Marjory.

"How funny you are!" cried Blanche. "I should hate to have lessons on my birthday. I always have a holiday. Mine is in June, and Waspy and I always have a treat of some kind."

"Miss Waspe also says, Marjory, that she is very glad indeed that you are going to be her pupil, and is looking forward to the term's work with two of you to teach."

Marjory blushed with pleasure. "She is very kind. I am looking forward too."

Mrs. Forester turned to go, saying that she hoped the girls would enjoy their tea and have a nice time. Marjory followed her as she left the room, and when they were outside the door asked,— 85

"Do you think I ought to say I'm sorry for calling Mary Ann Smylie a beast?"

Mrs. Forester smiled in spite of herself at Marjory's solemn face.

"Do you feel sorry?" she asked.

Marjory looked down. Her conscience had pricked her several times about it, but she could not honestly say that she felt really sorry. In fact, she felt quite sure that if Mary Ann were to say the same thing again, she would feel inclined to call her names again.

"I see," said Mrs. Forester, "you don't feel very sorry. Well, do you think it was a nice, lady-like way to speak?"

"Oh no," replied Marjory quickly.

"Then you are sorry that you used an unbecoming word, but you still think Mary Ann richly deserved some punishment for her unkind words?"

"Yes, that's just it," said Marjory, wondering how it was that Mrs. Forester understood her so well.

"But you still feel uncomfortable when you think about Mary Ann?"

"Yes."

"Well, if I were you, I should go to Mary Ann and say, 'I am sorry I used an ugly word to you, but I still think you were very unkind in what you said.' Then, if she is a nice girl, she will say she wishes she hadn't said what she did; and if not—well, you must just leave it, dear. I will go with you if you like. We can all drive to the village to-morrow afternoon."

"Oh, how good of you! Thank you so much." And Marjory, much relieved, went back to Blanche.

As a matter of fact Mrs. Forester had her own reasons for going herself with Marjory, for that very afternoon Mrs. Smylie, by way of ingratiating herself with the newcomer, had been making unkind remarks about Marjory and her bringing-up, and warning Mrs. Forester that she would not be a suitable companion for her daughter. Mrs. Forester had known very well how to reply to these statements, but she thought it would be a very good thing to show the Smylies that their spiteful, unkind words had no weight with her.

Mrs. Smylie's ambition knew no bounds as far as her daughter was concerned. She was conscious of the fact that she herself was a plain, ordinary, country woman, and would never be anything else; but with her daughter it was different. With her looks and education she ought to be able to associate with the best of people. Such was this foolish mother's dream, and she had thought to curry favour with the lady of Braeside by her remarks on what she considered should be the behaviour of a well-brought-up young lady, and what she had always aimed at in the education of her daughter. Mary Ann would have laughed could she have read her mother's mind and seen to what heights her ambition rose.

Marjory forgot about her for the time being. Blanche had so many treasures to show her and so much to say to her that the afternoon passed all too quickly.

They had tea by themselves in the room Mrs. Forester had chosen as a schoolroom—comfortable and cheerful, with windows looking over the garden. A new set of shelves had been put up, and all Blanche's books were arranged on them—her story books on the top and her lesson books on the lower shelves.

Marjory feasted her eyes upon the collection. Here were Blanche's old favourites, amongst them Grimm's "Fairy Tales," and Hans Andersen's, "Alice in Wonderland," "Black Beauty," and many others. One after another she took them down to show to Marjory.

"You must read every one of them," she said, "and then your mind inside will be just like mine."

"I should love to read them all, but I wouldn't be allowed to read the fairy tales," with a sigh.

"Why not?"

"Uncle doesn't approve of them."

"What a pity!" cried Blanche. "I wonder why. Do you think he would let you if I were to ask him? I could take him my 'Grimm' and show him what splendid tales they are."

"Would you dare to?" asked Marjory, awestruck by her friend's bold plan.

"Dare to? Of course I should. I can't think why you are so frightened of Dr. Hunter, he looks such a dear old thing. If he were a cow or a bull it would be different," laughing; "but you don't seem a bit afraid of them, with their great horns and bulging, glaring eyes."

"That's just where we're different," said Marjory, laughing too. "You're afraid of animals and not of people, and I'm afraid of people and not of animals."

"Well, anyway, I'm not afraid to ask about the fairy tales. I shall tell him that of course we don't really believe in them in our everyday heads, but they are nice to think about, and to think perhaps some day a fairy thing might happen."

Marjory laughed. "Isn't that believing in them?"

"No, not really. I can't quite explain what I mean."

"I've made fairies for myself," said Marjory. "There are plenty of them in the garden, and I understand what they say. They know me quite well, and I only have to sit very quietly and hardly breathe, and I can hear them. They live in the flowers, and you can hear them ringing their tiny little bells and talking to one another, so low that it is only just a whisper."

"Do go on," urged Blanche.

"I don't know if you would be able to hear them. Peter says he can't; but then he's old and deaf, and he says he never thought of listening when he was young."

"What made you think of it?"

"Nothing; it just came. I seem to have known about the flower fairies all my life. I miss them so in the winter, when they all go away under the ground to their winter palace, and I am always so happy when I see the first snowdrop come. I always go and kiss her, and tell her how glad I am to see her, and how brave I think she is to be the first to come; and I promise her that if a hard frost comes I will put some nice leaves round her to keep her warm."

"Why, this *is* a fairy tale. What does your uncle say?"

"I have never told him; it wouldn't be any good. He would only tell me to sew my seam, or knit my stocking, or do something useful."

"But couldn't you make him understand?"

Marjory shook her head. "I don't think so."

"Do tell me some more," said Blanche.

"Well, there are all sorts of fairies that belong to the different kinds of flowers. The head one of all, who is great queen, arranges everything for them, and tells each one exactly how long she may stay; and they come up out of the winter palace through the ground inside the buds, and they live in the flowers until they begin to fade, and then they go back again and wait for the next flower time. The fairies bring the sweet scents with them. They have to see that their flower houses are shut up in good time at night, and in the daytime they have to be kind in receiving the bees and insects that fly into them, and give them what they can. They have to try to keep away bad insects and worms and caterpillars that do harm, and before they go they have to see that everything is ready for the seeds to form, because they mean homes for the fairies when the next year comes. So they are really quite busy all the time. I'm always so glad to think that the fairies are all girls, and yet how important they are! Not like us human beings: boys are always most wanted and most important with us. I heard Dr. Morison say to Uncle George one day, 'It's a pity she wasn't a boy; she might have been such a help to you.' Of course that meant that I wasn't a help at all. The doctor has two boys. I don't like them much; they seem to think such a lot of themselves, and they never believe that I can do anything, because I'm a girl; but I can do most things that boys do."

"I'm very glad you're not a boy," said Blanche. "You're just as good as one in being strong and knowing how to do things, but you're much nicer than a boy." And she gave her friend a loving hug; then continuing, "I don't suppose the fairies would talk to a boy like they do to you."

"No, they say that they only talk to people who believe in them," laughing, and looking at Blanche.

"I say, Marj," said Blanche suddenly, "do you believe in ghosts?"

"No. Why?"

"Because," lowering her voice and speaking in a low, mysterious tone, "Crossley—that's our maid—told me that the people in the village say your house is haunted, that a light comes there in the middle of the night, and moves about in the old part. Have you ever seen it?"

"No; the old part is always shut up. I never heard about any light."

"Wouldn't it be fun if we could find out about it?" said Blanche excitedly.

"Yes. But how could you be there in the middle of the night? I might go and look some night."

"Not by yourself; you *couldn't*. Besides, it would be much jollier to be together. It would be so exciting finding out what it is, and so romantic. Mother says that all such stories can generally be explained by some quite ordinary thing; but still it's fun finding out, isn't it?"

Marjory agreed, but her busy little brain was trying to discover some possible explanation of the mysterious lights. She had no fears of the darkness. Her simple faith taught her that she was as safe in the dark as in the daylight, but she had many fancies—fancies that had come to her as she lay alone in her little bed watching the moonbeams playing across her windows, and listening to the whispering of the leaves outside. The darkness was full of mystery and charm to the lonely child, but fear had no place in her thoughts concerning it. What could these lights be—lights that moved about when every one else was asleep? Could they be the will-o'-the-wisp that Peter had told her about? Could they perhaps be angels with beautiful white wings and stars on their foreheads—guardian angels watching over the house while its inmates slept peacefully?

"Oh, I *should* like to see what it is!" she cried. "We *must* try some night, if only you could come and stay with me!"

"If mother and dad ever have to go to London for anything, then I might—that is, if Waspy isn't here."

"Oh, I do wish they would go! Wouldn't it be lovely if they did, and you came to stay?" And Marjory drew a long breath of delight at the thought of such a pleasure.

The girls had been talking so eagerly that they had not noticed the passing of the time, and it was quite a shock to them when a maid came to say that Dr. Hunter had come for Miss Marjory, and would she please to go at once.

Marjory gave Curly an affectionate good-night hug, and rushed downstairs with Blanche, afraid that her uncle might be angry with her for staying so long, it seemed such an unusual thing for him to come to fetch her. To her relief, however, he was all smiles when she appeared, and seemed quite interested in her account of the afternoon's doings as they went home.

CHAPTER VII.

Marjory's apology.

"Fix in your minds—or rather ask God to fix in your minds—this one idea of an absolutely good God."—KINGSLEY.

Marjory did not sleep very much that night, her thoughts were so busy. The events of the day kept crowding in upon her, the story of the lights in the old wing, and running through all was the disquieting thought that to-morrow she must go to the baker's daughter and say that she was sorry. It seemed to Marjory that it would be very hard, and yet she felt sure that it was the right thing to do. Had not Mrs. Forester said so? and had not her own conscience told her so? Still, she dreaded the doing of it, for Marjory was proud as well as very shy, and Mary Ann's unkind words still rankled in her memory. She had yet to learn that the punishment of offences against us, great or small, lies in other hands than ours, and that absolute justice is watching over the affairs of men—that each action, good or evil, bears its own fruit. Thinking over Mrs. Forester's words, a dim realization came to her of that great truth, which, once grasped, brings calm trust and faith—the truth which promises that obedience to the voice of conscience keeps the soul in harmony with its Creator, so that outward circumstances cannot really harm or hurt. Marjory was but a young girl, with no experience, yet she knew this voice—she knew that obedience to it or disobedience meant either happiness or unhappiness inside herself, as she expressed it; but to-night, for the first time, she felt something of that trust in perfect justice which gives peace within, and she gradually began to lose the feeling of resentment against Mary Ann, and to feel that what she had to think of, and was responsible for, was her own behaviour—she must answer for her own thoughts and words.

95

She set out bravely the next day with Mrs. Forester and Blanche. Her heart beat very quickly as the carriage stopped at the post office.

"Why, Mary Ann, if this is no Hunter's Marjory in the carriage with thae new folks frae Braeside," exclaimed Mrs. Smylie to her daughter as she saw the party arrive. "After a' I telt the leddy yesterday too."

Marjory came into the post office alone.

"Good-afternoon, Mrs. Smylie," she said shyly. "Can I see Mary Ann?"

Mrs. Smylie did not return her greeting, and without looking up from the stamp desk called to Mary Ann.

96

"What is it?" cried Mary Ann from the parlour behind the shop.

"Come an' see," was her mother's reply. "*I canna tell ye.*"

Mary Ann came sauntering into the shop. When she saw Marjory she stopped and stared.

"Hallo!" she said mockingly. "Want some more of what you had last time?"

Marjory flushed, and then with an effort, and speaking very quickly, she said,—

"I've come to say I'm sorry I called you an ugly name, but I think you were unkind in what you said."

"Do you suppose I care whether you call me names or not?" And the girl gave a hard laugh.

"No; but I care. I am ashamed of myself."

Mrs. Smylie looked on and listened, curious to see how the affair would end.

"You are a queer little kid," said Mary Ann. "Any one can see you haven't been to school. No girl in our school would come and eat humble pie like this. Well, I believe I did say a lot of stuff just to rub you up, and if you're sorry I'm sorry too, so we'll shake hands—eh?"

The girls shook hands, and Marjory, again saying good-afternoon to Mrs. Smylie, left the shop.

Mrs. Smylie replied by a nod. She was a little disappointed at the turn things had taken. She rather enjoyed having a grievance, and Hunter's Marjory and her "tantrums" had been a fertile subject for gossip during the last few days.

97

"Ye needna hae gien in sae sune," she remarked to her daughter when the carriage had driven off.

"That was my business," replied Mary Ann, with a toss of her head.

"Hoots, lassie, ye needna haud yer head sae high wi' yer mither. I was but thinkin' ye might hae held it higher wi' yon chit."

"I'll never be like her, not if I live to be a hundred and go to fifty schools—so there." And Mary Ann banged out of the shop, leaving her mother silent with amazement.

Mary Ann had something to think about. She had been quite taken aback by Marjory's apology, and for a little while the real Mary Ann had shown herself. She was not a bad-hearted girl in reality, but she had been spoiled by those who should have known better; and although every now and then, at moments such as this, her better nature would assert itself, it was gradually becoming choked and crushed by selfishness, conceit, and carelessness. Marjory had been inclined to envy the baker's daughter her privileges, but in reality Mary Ann was to be pitied rather than envied, for she had no one to guide and help her. Her parents' chief care was that she should be better dressed and better educated than her neighbours. This they felt they could accomplish; and having done so, they were content, and satisfied that they had done their duty by their daughter.

98

The days were full of pleasure for Marjory and Blanche. When the garden had been thoroughly explored, there were many beautiful places for Marjory to show her friend. She must go to the woods, to the moors, and to the loch. Dr. Hunter had a pretty little sailing-boat, and Marjory was an expert sailor, and was allowed to go out on fine days by herself, though never without permission, in case she should be overtaken by a sudden storm. The doctor made a study of the weather day by day, and was able to foretell it to a certain extent. Sometimes, on a day which looked to Marjory to be quite fine, he would forbid her going on the loch, and she would find that he had been right.

The days were not long enough for all the delights the girls would have crowded into them. Marjory always remembered the first Sunday after her meeting with the Foresters. It came round in due course, and she did not greet it with much pleasure at first.

First of all came clean clothes, and amongst them a stiffly-starched petticoat. This was one of Marjory's pet aversions. It crackled as she walked and made her feel self-conscious. Then there was the best frock to be put on, which always seemed several degrees tighter than the everyday ones. Then came breakfast, an hour later on Sundays, to distinguish it from week days. Another distinguishing mark was the absence of the usual porridge and the presence of a plate of drop scones, a favourite dainty of Marjory's which Lisbeth always made for Sunday.

99

Dr. Hunter always devoted himself to his niece on Sunday mornings. He did not usually have much to say at breakfast during the week, but on Sundays he always made a point of inquiring about her doings, her garden, her pets, her sewing, and anything else he could think of. He always came down in his black clothes, and they had a slight odour of camphor, which the careful Lisbeth used to preserve them from moths. Marjory ever afterwards associated the smell of camphor with Sunday mornings at Hunters' Brae. The doctor, like Marjory, never wore his best clothes unless he felt absolutely obliged to, and sometimes for months together they only came out once a week. There was camphor in Marjory's wardrobe too, but she was careful to keep as many bags of lavender as she could amongst her clothes, to fight the camphor, as she told Lisbeth; and on the whole the lavender had the best of it.

Seated at the breakfast-table, Marjory always knew what was coming. As soon as they each had a cup of coffee and something to eat, the doctor would say, "Well, Marjory, how's things?"

100

It was always the same question, and it usually received the same answer. Marjory would feel very shy and awkward, and say, "All right, thank you," and nothing more. She never could think of anything that she felt would be interesting to her uncle. Week after week she would resolve to try to be less awkward, but when the time came it was usually only by a long list of questions that her uncle could get any information from her. On this particular Sunday morning she sat waiting for the inevitable question. It soon came. "Well, Marjory, how's things?"

Marjory made a valiant effort, and at last she gave her uncle a different reply. She looked up and said, "Better, thank you, uncle."

"Better, eh?" he said, with a twinkle in his eye. "That's good, if better *can* be good!"

"Everything's so different since Blanche came," Marjory went on, "and now that I'm going to have real lessons."

"It certainly has been an exciting week for you. First you quarrelled with that frizzle-pated Smylie girl, then with your old good-for-nothing of an uncle, then you met Blanche, then you made up your quarrels, Blanche came here, you went there, and so on." And the doctor smiled.

Marjory answered the smile, thinking how nice her uncle looked when he smiled, and wishing that he would do it oftener.

101

The smile was simply a response to her own effort in trying to understand her uncle better. She had been blaming him for his seeming indifference to her, when in reality she herself had been very much at fault. Of late the doctor had begun to feel that it was no use trying to win Marjory's confidence, she seemed to keep herself so aloof from him; but since she had faced him in the study, first like a little fury demanding to be sent to school, then pale and trembling, asking for his pardon, he had felt that he knew something more of the real Marjory, and he, too, had determined to try to preserve this better understanding.

Soon after breakfast they started off to church. It was a walk of about a mile, and Marjory and the doctor always went together. Silky always knew when Sunday came round. He would sit quite still by the gate and watch them with serious, longing eyes, but he never offered to accompany them. He made it a rule, however, to go to meet them on the way back. He always sat waiting by

a certain milestone, and as soon as they turned the bend of the road beyond it, he would go bounding towards them, frisking and wagging his tail, and barking excitedly.

The walks to church were not altogether pleasant ones for Marjory, as a rule. Her best clothes were always rather a worry to her, and she was obliged to wear gloves. Lisbeth was in the habit of seeing them start off. She took great pride in the doctor's appearance on the "Sawbath," and surveyed him critically from the crown of his shining silk hat to the sole of his well-polished boots. She never failed to set Marjory's hat straight, to give sundry little pats to her frock, and to what she called "sort" her hair. Marjory wore it in a plait all the week, but on Sunday it was allowed to hang at its will, and Lisbeth loved to see the wavy black mass which reached to the girl's waist, though she would not for worlds have told Marjory so, in case it might encourage her in the sin of vanity!

102

Another bugbear of Marjory's was the little bag which Lisbeth always insisted upon her carrying. Everybody had a bag for their books, she said, so Marjory must have one too; and Sunday after Sunday in they went, with a clean handkerchief and, it must be confessed, a sweetie. These sweeties were kept in a bottle in the study, of all places. It was never allowed to get empty, and Marjory often wondered if the doctor took them to church too. There was a certain moment, when the congregation was settling itself to listen to the sermon and there was a general rustling of clothes and clattering of feet, when the sweetie found its way to Marjory's mouth. She would begin by determining to make it last as long as the sermon, but, alas! it would become thinner and thinner, and finally disappear altogether before Mr. Mackenzie had got to "thirdly."

Besides the drawbacks of the best clothes and the bag there were usually many admonitions from her uncle, such as, "Marjory, turn out your toes. Hold up your head, child. Turn out your toes, I say," or, "O Marjory, do not swing that bag"—all very necessary, no doubt, but they had the effect of making the girl self-conscious. Thinking about her head, she would forget about her toes, and *vice versa*, and her uncle would be apt to think that it was obstinacy on her part and to tell her so, and then there would be sullen silence till the church door was reached. But to-day it was not so. Half-way to church they joined the Foresters, and Marjory and Blanche walked together behind their elders, so that their deportment could not be criticised.

103

Blanche gave Marjory the cheerful news that as there was to be a children's service in the afternoon, Mrs. Forester was going to beg for Marjory to be let off writing the morning sermon if she wrote the afternoon one instead.

"I don't suppose uncle will say yes, though," objected Marjory.

"Oh yes, he will; people always do to mother."

"How different it would be!" sighed Marjory. "I'm sure I could understand it better if I didn't have to keep thinking about writing it out."

"And mother's going to ask Dr. Hunter to come to tea, and you will come home from church with us. Won't it be nice?"

"Yes; but I don't believe he will let me." Blanche's face clouded. "Oh," she said, disappointment in her tone, "why not?"

104

"I've never been out anywhere on Sunday."

"But this is different—it isn't like going to a party; and we have such nice Sundays, and I do want you to come. I love Sundays, and I always look forward to them; don't you?"

"No," replied Marjory candidly, "not much."

Blanche looked sympathetically at her friend.

"Well, of course yours don't seem to be quite so nice as ours; but you'll see they'll be different now."

Blanche was right. Mrs. Forester won the day, and to Marjory's intense satisfaction, as they went in at the churchyard gate her uncle told her that she need not write the morning sermon if she would do the afternoon one, and that she was to be allowed to go to tea at Braeside after the service.

The Heathermuir church was an old one; its pews were of the straight, high-backed kind, and once inside them their occupants could see little of their surroundings except the minister, whose desk was raised above the level of the floor. With no temptations to look about her, and relieved of her weekly task, Marjory gave her whole attention to Mr. Mackenzie, trying to understand his meaning instead of mechanically taxing her memory, parrot-like, with his words. She watched the noble old face with its lines of kindness and patience, the eyes now liquid with pity for the sorrowful wrongdoer, now flashing with indignation as he spoke of the unrepentant and the careless, then softening again as he expressed the hope that their hearts might be touched, and the belief that they too would win forgiveness from a loving Father.

105

Parts of the sermon were not to be understood by a child such as Marjory—it was addressed to men and women—yet her eyes never left the preacher's face, the sweetie had been quite forgotten, and she carried away with her a mind-picture of a Being full of love, sorry when His children do wrong, just in His punishments, but all-forgiving when they are truly repentant and try to make amends.

In the afternoon Marjory sat in the Braeside pew with Mrs. Forester and Blanche. Again the preacher's theme was love—"the greatest thing in the world"—love to the Creator, and, through it, love to all His creatures great and small. The old man told how love can smooth rough places, can right wrong, can win battles; how love and kindness attract love and kindness in return, and how a loving thought, word, or action is never lost. The words she heard that day sank deeply into Marjory's mind. They were full of hope and encouragement for all, and she felt something of that spirit which prompted the poet to sing so joyously,—

"God's in His heaven; all's right with the world."

Service over, they walked back to Braeside. It was a pretty walk across a bit of moorland, through the heather and bracken, here and there a moss-grown rock, here and there across the path a tiny trickling stream with stepping-stones. 106

"Did you have to ask the doctor very hard to make him let Marjory come, mother?" asked Blanche as they walked along.

"Not very hard," replied her mother, smiling. "I explained to him that we always keep our Sundays quietly, enjoying the day of rest, but that at the same time we like it to be bright and happy; and when I told him that the pleasure of our friends' company would greatly add to the brightness and happiness, he said 'yes' for Marjory, and promised to come himself."

When they arrived at Braeside they found the doctor already there. Mr. Forester and he had established themselves under a shady tree on the lawn, both looking the picture of comfort, smoking their pipes, and talking together like old friends.

Marjory felt almost bewildered by the turn things had taken. Truly they were different, both for herself and for her uncle.

Tea was brought into the garden, and they all had it together, the girls waiting upon their elders. It was all so peaceful and happy that Marjory found it hard to tear herself away when the time came, but she consoled herself with the thought that there was to-morrow to look forward to now. Hitherto she had always disliked Monday. It was the day for the washing to be counted, for one thing, and Lisbeth was always rather flustered in consequence, although the counting of it was all she had to do, as a woman from the village came to do the actual washing. Then there was the sermon to write and her wardrobe and drawers to tidy. Lisbeth was very strict about the tidying. All these things gave Monday an atmosphere prosaic in the extreme in Marjory's opinion. Now it would be different; she could look forward to it because there would be Blanche to compare notes with. She would make haste and finish her duties, and then they could go off into the woods or on to the moor, as free as air, and with no one to interfere with them. She went to bed full of these plans, and feeling her heart overflowing with gratitude to the great and loving Father who had given her such happiness. 107

CHAPTER VIII.

THE SECRET CHAMBER.

"'Tis now the very witching hour of night."

SHAKESPEARE.

Next morning, directly after breakfast, Marjory went as usual to her room to signal to Blanche. Blanche was already at her window, waving wildly with a handkerchief in each hand, which meant might she come up at once. Marjory, all eagerness and excitement, waved back "yes," wondering what could be the reason for such an early visit. She was just going to run down the garden to meet Blanche when she heard Lisbeth's voice calling, "Hae ye coontit yer claes, Marjory? Jessie's waitin'." She hastily collected her things together, and wrote, not in her best writing, the list which Lisbeth always insisted upon, and which Marjory always argued was quite unnecessary, as the clothes were washed at home, and there was no other girl of her size at Hunters' Brae. Lisbeth remained firm, and every week the list was made. Marjory was just adding the last item when she heard Blanche's voice downstairs asking breathlessly where she was. "Coming!" she cried, and rushed downstairs, two steps at a time, to find Blanche capering up and down with excitement. 109

"Such news!" she cried. "Something so exciting to tell you. You'll never guess."

"What is it? Please don't make me guess. I can't wait." And Marjory caught hold of her friend's arm, trying to make her stand still and tell her news—a difficult task, for Blanche was almost beside herself with excitement, and was also bent upon tantalizing Marjory. But Marjory's arms were stronger than Blanche's, and she succeeded in making her stop dancing about.

"There now, tell me," she cried, when Blanche was fairly pinioned between her arms. "I shan't let you go till you do."

"Oh dear; then I must tell you, I suppose. Well, Marjory, what do you think?" very slowly and provokingly. "Mother—says—that—"

A shake from Marjory produced the end of the sentence more quickly.

"Oh!" and Blanche's laugh rang out; "don't, Marjory. Mother and father want to go to London for a few days, so can I come and stay here?"

A shriek of delight was Marjory's reply, and the two girls were executing a kind of war-dance round the hall, when suddenly the study door opened, and the doctor put his head out. He had a book in his hand, and was wearing his spectacles, which always made him look more formidable. Marjory wished that the floor might open and swallow her; but it was no use—they were fairly caught.

110

"Dear me," said the doctor when he saw them, "what is all this disturbance about?"

Blanche ran forward.

"Please don't scold Marjory," she said; "it is all my fault. I came to tell her something very exciting, and we were both so pleased that we quite forgot we oughtn't to make a noise. You see, there isn't anybody learned like you in our house, so I haven't got into the way of remembering not to disturb you. I am very sorry." And Blanche looked confidently at the doctor.

He smiled and pushed his spectacles up on his forehead.

"You haven't told me this exciting piece of news, though—the wonderful information that was the cause of this disturbance of the peace."

"Mother was coming to tell you—that is, to ask you about it. It depends on you, you see." And Blanche looked up into the doctor's face.

Marjory stood by, a silent listener. She quite expected a scolding, and was amazed at Blanche's boldness.

"Well, suppose *you* tell me, now you are here."

Blanche looked again at the doctor. She was afraid that this might not be a very good time to make her request. She could not quite tell by his face what he was thinking, but she took courage and said,—

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"Father wants mother to go to London with him for a few days, and she says she will if you will be so good as to let me come and stay with Marjory."

"What! A noisy little person like you!" The doctor was only in fun, but Blanche's face fell, and her eyes slowly filled with tears.

Marjory spoke up. "O uncle, she isn't really noisy. I made just as much noise as she did; and if only you will say yes, we will promise to be very quiet.—Won't we, Blanche?"

"Yes," faltered Blanche.

"Tut, tut," said the doctor; "I don't want you to be quiet; it isn't natural for young things. Yes, my child; come and stay as long as you like, and make as much noise as you like. I was only teasing you, but you didn't like my little joke," laughing.

"Oh, how good you are!" cried Blanche, and she put her arms round the doctor's neck and kissed him, her tears leaving little wet places on his cheeks.

Marjory looked on in wonder. How could Blanche dare to be so familiar with her uncle? she thought; and, stranger and still more unexpected than that, her uncle seemed to like it. She watched him take out his handkerchief and wipe the wet places, also his own eyes, and then take off his spectacles and polish them vigorously, asking Blanche meanwhile which day her parents would be leaving. It would be the next day, Tuesday, she replied; and the doctor told Marjory she had better see Lisbeth at once, and ask her to make the necessary preparations. Marjory gave her uncle a grateful look, which was meant to make up for the formal "Thank you, uncle," which was all that she could find to say.

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The girls went to the kitchen, where Lisbeth was working. Lisbeth having set the laundrymaid to work, was once more her usual smiling self, and was quite pleased to hear the news. She made no difficulties, and promised that Jean should put a second bed into Marjory's room, as that was what they said they would like best.

As they left the kitchen Lisbeth called to Marjory to be sure and not forget to tidy her wardrobe and drawers, and to see that there was room for Miss Blanche's things.

"Isn't she a dear old thing?" exclaimed Blanche, when they were out of hearing. "She seemed quite pleased for me to come. Some servants are so cross if there is anything extra, that it makes you feel quite uncomfortable."

"Lisbeth's not a bit like that. Besides, anybody would be glad to have you," said Marjory, looking at her friend with intense admiration, of which Blanche seemed quite unconscious.

"Yes," she said, "people are very kind. Mother says there are far more kind people in the world

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than unkind ones."

Marjory looked at the sweet face beside her, and thought that it would be a very unkind person indeed who could be unkind to Blanche. Then she said, rather sadly,—

"Uncle George seems quite a different person with you."

"O Marj, he's a dear old thing. I felt sure he was directly I saw him. I can't think why you are so afraid of him."

"I am," with a sigh.

"I'm sure you needn't be. Think of him just now. He was busy in his study, and we made all that noise, and he wasn't a bit cross. Most people would have been, even if they had only been writing a letter; and daddy says that Dr. Hunter's work is most important and valuable, and that he is a great man. You must be very proud of him, aren't you?"

"Yes; only I don't quite know what it is that he does."

"Neither do I; but, anyway, he is very clever. Daddy says so, and he says he considers himself very fortunate in being able to know Dr. Hunter."

This was quite a new aspect of affairs to Marjory. She had been used to the idea that she and her uncle were rather shunned than otherwise by other people, that her uncle was a stern old man with whom no one wanted to be friendly. But now that a man like Mr. Forester, from the great far-away world of London, should consider her uncle's acquaintance a privilege—this was indeed something new, and it gave Marjory food for thought and speculation. 114

Mr. and Mrs. Forester went to London, and Blanche to Hunters' Brae. Marjory and Peter fetched her in the pony-cart, and she brought Curly with her, as she could not bear to leave him for other people to look after. Silky was delighted with the puppy, and allowed the little fellow to take all sorts of liberties with him. It was a pretty picture—the big dog fondling the small one and playing with him.

Lisbeth had done as she had promised, and a second bed had been put up in Marjory's room. Such a pretty room it was—the best in the house, and looking out upon the garden. It was pretty by reason of its shape—long and low, with beams across the ceiling, and casement windows—and not from any extra decoration or those many knick-knacks which most girls contrive to collect around them. There were dainty white muslin curtains and covers, everything was spotless, but there were no ornaments or trifles lying about. On the bookshelf were Marjory's Bible and Psalm-book and a copy of the "Pilgrim's Progress"—no other books. These were all that the doctor considered it necessary for Marjory to have. There was a glass bowl on the chest of drawers, which was kept filled with flowers all the year round, and that was the only ornament in the room. Some might have thought it bare, but it had a simple charm of its own, with its spotless whiteness and its faint odour of lavender, stronger when the wardrobe or the drawers were open. 115

Marjory had been struck by the difference between Blanche's bedroom and hers when she had paid her first visit to Braeside. There the walls were covered with pictures of all sorts and sizes, the table was littered with silver toilet articles, photographs and trinkets, and the bookshelf was filled with books. Most of these things were presents from her father and mother, or from relations or acquaintances, and spoke for themselves of the difference in the lives of the two girls—the one solitary and simple in a remote country place, the other in the midst of friends and relations in the rush and hurry of a great city.

"How sweet your room is!" said Blanche as they went in.

"It isn't like yours, though," replied Marjory doubtfully. "You have such a lot of pretty things."

"Oh, but I love this!" cried Blanche enthusiastically, sniffing the lavender-scented air and walking to the window; "and what a lovely view! I could sit and look out all day."

They decided to wait till the next night to watch for the ghost, for they thought it would be better to pay a visit to the old wing in the daylight first, and to explore it thoroughly, so that they should both be well acquainted with the staircases and the various rooms. They spent some time in discussing their plans, and Blanche's cheeks flushed and her eyes grew bright as they talked them over. 116

"Isn't it exciting?" she cried. "I do hope the light will come, so that we shall be able to see it. I hope I shan't feel frightened when the time comes, but I don't think I shall with you, Marj. You don't seem to be afraid of anything."

"Except Uncle George," amended Marjory.

"Yes; and I can't think why. Fancy being less afraid of a thing that might be a ghost than you are of a real flesh-and-blood uncle, who is really quite a dear old man!"

"It does seem silly," admitted Marjory, "but it's no good pretending it isn't true, because it is."

They went to the old wing next morning. It consisted of a large square hall, from which led a wide staircase to a gallery above, and two or three other rooms on the ground floor. From the gallery led several narrow corridors, with many turns and corners, steps up and steps down, which were traps for the unwary visitor. It was seldom that any one came to the old wing; its tenants were

rats and spiders. Birds built their nests in the crumbling walls, and it smelt damp and musty, as if it had seen no sunlight for many a day.

The girls' footsteps and voices echoed through the empty rooms and passages. The old place had a fascination for Marjory, and yet she could never go through it without a shiver of something like awe. What had these mouldering walls seen? What tales could they tell if they could speak? Then her heart would swell with pride at the thought that she came of a long line of Hunters who had lived here and made the name famous. She, too, must do her part. Sometimes she would wish that she bore the old name; then she would rebuke herself for the thought, which was like treason to that unknown father of hers.

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They went carefully through each room. There was nothing unusual in any of them; old boxes, pieces of broken furniture, rusty bits of iron strewed the place. One thing took Blanche's fancy. It was in a tiny room opening out of one of the large ones, and was so big that it almost filled it. It was an immense chest, studded with nails, and ornamented with handsome brass hasps.

"It's like the chest in the 'Mistletoe Bough,'" cried Blanche. "Do let's try to open it."

But try as they would, they could make no impression upon it. It was locked, and to break it open would require greater strength than theirs.

"I do wish we could get it open," said Blanche, when at last they gave up trying. "Do you think Peter could do it?"

"He doesn't much like coming here," was the reply. "He always says the old walls might fall in at any time; but since you told me about the lights being seen, I've been thinking that perhaps he has heard about them too, and that's why he won't come here if he can help it. But we can ask him. What is the 'Mistletoe Bough'? Is it a story about a chest?"

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"Haven't you heard it?" asked Blanche, surprised. "I believe I can repeat it to you. Let's sit on the old box and pretend it is the one."

They scrambled up on to the chest, regardless of dust and cobwebs, and Blanche began,—

"The mistletoe hung in the castle hall,"—

and went on through the ballad.

Marjory sat entranced, listening to the story of Lord Lovel and his bride, and the fateful game of hide-and-see, which ended in the lovely lady being shut into the old oak chest, which none of the distracted seekers thought of opening, and which did not disclose its grim secret until many years afterwards, when at last it was opened.

"How *dreadful*!" exclaimed Marjory. "Fancy being shut up in a box like this! I wonder if this one has a spring lock. I wish we knew what is inside it."

They made up their minds to ask Dr. Hunter about it, and went on with their investigation of the rooms, until both felt that they knew every door and passage in the place.

Blanche was of the opinion that it would be of no use going to look for the ghost until after midnight. The time passed very slowly after they went to bed. They talked in whispers, Blanche telling all the ghost stories she had ever heard, which came chiefly from servants and from her young cousins in London.

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"But mother says," she repeated several times, as if to reassure both herself and Marjory, "that there is nothing more to do us harm at night than there is in the daytime; that everything belongs to God, and so we are just as safe in the dark as in the light. But I don't feel the same at night as I do in the daylight; do you?"

"Well, I'm not afraid of the dark," said Marjory, and this was quite true. She was fearless with regard to all natural things; storms, gales, all Nature's moods she could meet without flinching. Animals of all kinds had no terrors for her; neither had the dark—that land of blackness peopled with horrors for so many children. It was only in her dealings with her fellows that fear entered, and with her uncle especially.

They listened to the church clock at Heathermuir chiming the hours and half-hours. They watched the moon rising, glorious in its fullness, till it flooded their room with light. At last the clock boomed out its twelve echoing strokes. The time had come!

Each put on a dressing-gown and slippers, and then they started upon their enterprise. Marjory went in front, carrying a lighted candle. Very gently she opened the bedroom door and stood listening. There was not a sound to be heard. Silky looked questioningly at his mistress, as if wondering what her business could be at this time of night, and why she was thus disturbing his slumbers. Marjory beckoned to Blanche, and as she came out of the room, pushed the dog in, whispering, "Good dog, Silky. Be quiet and keep watch till we come back." Then she cautiously shut the door.

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They crept along the corridor on tiptoe, every creak of the boards as they went causing their hearts to beat quickly. They had to pass Dr. Hunter's bedroom, and Marjory fancied that she could hear some movement within. Full of apprehension, she hurried on, Blanche following close at her heels.

Once in the old part of the house, they could breathe more freely, feeling safe from discovery by any of the other inmates.

The deserted hall looked shadowy and mysterious as they passed through it, the pale moonlight casting weird shapes across its walls. Blanche caught Marjory's sleeve. "Look!" she whispered, pointing to a window where something like an arm and hand, with fingers outstretched, was waving up and down.

"It's only the branch of a tree," Marjory whispered back.

Everything looked so eerie and unfamiliar in the moonlit darkness that Blanche began to wish she had not come; but as the expedition had been her suggestion from the first, she felt in honour bound to proceed.

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Up the stairs they went, and round the gallery. Not a sign of anything unusual did they discover. There was no light, no sound of any kind. Something flitted across Blanche's face; she gave a little stifled scream.

"Oh! what can that be?" she panted.

Marjory turned and held up the candle. It came again, and she saw what it was.

"It's only a bat," she said reassuringly; "it won't hurt you."

"A bat!" echoed Blanche. "Oh, how horrible! They bite, don't they?"

"Oh no, they are quite harmless. Dear little soft things they are when you see them in the daylight, although they aren't pretty."

"O Marj, I don't like it; you won't let it come near me, will you?" And Blanche clung to her friend.

"No, you needn't be frightened; I'll keep it away."

Marjory could not exactly understand Blanche's fears, but she saw that they were real. She could see nothing to be afraid of in a tiny little bat, but the feeling that she was able to protect some one weaker than herself made her very tender towards her friend.

"We'll go back if you like," she whispered.

"No, no," replied Blanche breathlessly; "let's go on, now we've come so far."

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On they went. They passed the door of the room which contained the old chest. Nothing was to be seen; but, turning a sharp corner at the end of one passage leading to another which was apparently a blind alley, they stopped suddenly.

There before them, at the end of this passage, was a faint seam of light, hardly perceptible. There it was, looking as if it came from under a door, but they knew that no door was there. Where could it come from? They looked all round, but could find no clue to the mystery. Marjory shaded the candle with her hand, in case the light might in some way be reflected from it; but no—there was the straight narrow seam, shining as before.

They crept along the passage until they stood in front of the wall. They felt cautiously for a handle, but there was none—no sign of anything in the shape of a door or entrance of any kind.

A thought struck Blanche.

"Perhaps it's a secret sliding panel," she whispered. "I've read about them in books. They go by a spring in some way. You have to press in one place, and it slides back. Shall we try?" she said, breathing fast, her eyes large with mingled fear and excitement.

"Yes, if you're quite sure you're not frightened. It might do you harm to be frightened," said Marjory, whispering very softly. "I could take you back and come again by myself."

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"No, I'm not frightened—at least, not much—and we *must* try. What *can* it be?"

They began to press cautiously against the wall above the crack which showed the light. They tried for some time—it seemed hours to them—when suddenly, neither of them knowing who had touched the spring, there was a sharp *click*, the panel flew back, and a flood of light shone out upon them. Blanche's theory had been correct. It was a secret door, designed by some bygone Hunter in dangerous times.

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CHAPTER IX.

PETER'S STORY.

"We spur to a land of no name, outracing the storm wind;

We leap to the infinite dark, like the sparks from the anvil.
Thou ledest, O God: all's well with Thy troopers that follow."

LOUISE IMOGEN GUINEY.

Dazzled by the sudden blaze of light, the girls stood as if petrified. All they could see at first was a tall figure dressed in what seemed to be a long black gown, and wearing a cap on its head. It appeared to be surrounded by a cloud of vapour which gave off a sickly odour. As the mist cleared away, which it did in a few seconds, and as Marjory's eyes became accustomed to the light, she saw, to her surprise and terror, that the black figure was no other than her uncle, Dr. Hunter. Was he indeed mad, as Mary Ann had told her? What could he be doing here in the dead of night?

On a table in front of him lay piles of bones, some large, some small. There were skulls too, of different shapes and sizes, and in one corner of the room was a skeleton on a stand. What did it all mean?



Two queer little figures they looked

Instead of thinking about her own share in the escapade and its probable consequences, Marjory's mind was occupied by speculations as to her uncle. She felt Blanche's arms clinging round her, but was only roused to the remembrance of herself when her uncle said, "What is the meaning of this, Marjory?" His voice was cold and stern, and all her old fear of him rushed upon Marjory with tenfold force.

"We—that is—I," she stammered.

"Speak out, child," said the doctor.

"We wanted to find out what the light was," she said, with a great effort.

Blanche was sobbing by this time, and as she had not provided herself with a handkerchief, she was hiding her face in Marjory's dressing-gown. Two queer little figures they looked, their hair hanging about their faces, and their bare ankles showing beneath their dressing-gowns.

Something in their appearance must have tickled the doctor's fancy, for he actually laughed and said,—

"You're a pretty pair of monkeys, I must say, and you've just managed to spoil an experiment I have been working on for weeks."

"O *uncle!*" cried Marjory in dismay.

"I'm"—sob—"very"—sob—"sorry" came from poor Blanche. This was a most unexpected ending to their romantic expedition.

"Well, the only thing is for you two young people to come with me to my study, and then I shall consider what is to be done with you."

The words were sternly said, but Blanche looked up and caught just the suspicion of a twinkle in the doctor's eye, and, as he busied himself putting away some of his apparatus, she whispered to Marjory, "He's not cross."

Marjory, however, did not feel by any means reassured. How could he be anything but angry? Had he not just told them that they had spoiled his experiment? She dully wondered what their punishment would be—wondered whether Blanche, being a guest, would share in it. Could a visitor be punished?

"Now then, Mischief, in front," said the doctor, having put away his things; "give me that candle."

Marjory delivered up the candle with trembling hands, and the two delinquents passed out of the strange apartment, having no heart to look round at its curious contents. The doctor held the candle high to light the way, and they went in silence along the passages, down the wide staircase into the old hall, and from thence to the study, a strange little procession, the old man in dressing-gown and cap, and the two girls in their night-clothes.

"Now then, sit down and tell me all about it," commanded the doctor when they had reached the study. "Marjory, you're responsible; you must do the talking."

Hurriedly and in a low voice Marjory told how Mrs. Forester's maid had spread the story about the strange lights seen at Hunters' Brae; how Blanche and she had determined to try to find out their cause and see for themselves if there were indeed a ghost in the old wing; how they had laid their plans beforehand, and how at last they had come upon the lighted crack in the wall.

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"Well," said the doctor, rubbing his hands, "you've found the ghost, and he is a pretty substantial one, eh? Marjory, you deserve a whipping for being so thoughtless as to bring a delicate little thing like Blanche out of her bed at this time of night."

Marjory cowered in her chair. Would her uncle really resort to such stern measures? Surely girls were never whipped!

But Blanche stood up and faced the doctor with flushed face and shining eyes.

"You will be very unjust if you whip Marjory," she said. "It was all my fault from the beginning. I told her what Crossley said about lights being seen, and I suggested that we should try to see the ghost; and then mother went away and I came here, and it all fitted in so nicely, and—" Here Blanche broke down again. "Please, *please* don't whip her; I never thought you would be so cruel." And she put her arms round Marjory as if to protect her from her uncle's vengeance.

The doctor could keep a straight face no longer.

"You foolish children," he said, laughing, "do you suppose for one moment that I should be likely to whip either of you? Come here."

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They went obediently and stood in front of him, and then, wonder of wonders, he put an arm round each, and drew them down till he had one on each knee.

"Now listen. I think it would have been wiser and better if you had told me about the village tales. I could have explained them to you—at least partly," he added with a smile. "I shouldn't have told you *all* the secrets that you have found out for yourselves. Instead of telling me, however, you lie awake for hours, then you creep about, shivering and shaking, half frightened out of your wits, perhaps catching colds and coughs and all the rest of it, and you find that this wonderful ghost is nothing but a foolish old man who thinks that he can do what better men than he have failed in doing"—this with a sigh. "I will tell you why I have kept that room and its contents a secret from the rest of the household. One reason was that I didn't wish to frighten any one with my skulls and skeletons, my bones and bottles. Another reason was that I wished to be absolutely alone and uninterrupted when making my experiments; and yet another reason—I wished no housemaid, zealous with her duster, to enter my domain. When it is cleaned," with a smile, "I do it myself. What, then, could be better for my purpose than the secret chamber in the old wing? Hitherto I have been undiscovered; but now," in comical dismay, "two long tongues will be wagging over what they have seen, and my secret is mine no longer. You've spoilt my secret, and I've spoilt your ghost, so we're quits."

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"We won't tell," said both the girls eagerly—"at least," added Blanche, "I won't, if you'll let me tell mother. She keeps all my secrets, and she's a very safe person."

"Very well; you can make amends by keeping what you know to yourselves. Tell your mother, by all means, Blanche."

The doctor's arm tightened round Marjory. She, poor child, he thought, has no mother in whom to confide. Marjory felt the pressure, and drew a little closer to her uncle. It was very comfortable sitting on his knee. She was tired and had been really frightened at the result of the adventure, and she leaned contentedly against him. In a moment his lips were on her hair and the protecting arm had drawn her very close.

"Dear little girl," he murmured—"my little Marjory."

Then for the first time Marjory began to cry.

"Oh dear," said the doctor, "more tears! What an old ogre I must be. Don't cry, Marjory. Cheer up."

"I'm not crying," asserted Marjory, the tears streaming down her cheeks; "I only feel nice."

"I think you each need a handkerchief," said the doctor mischievously; and he went to a bureau

which stood in a corner of the room, and took out two handkerchiefs of a bright Oriental pattern. He presented one to each of the girls.

"Gaudy, but not neat," he misquoted. "Still, you must own that they are better than *nothing*," he said significantly. "Now, as you ladies have invited yourselves, I think we'd better have a little supper together—eh?"

So saying, the doctor went to a cupboard in the wall, and took out a small spirit-lamp, on which he proceeded to set a kettle to boil. He brought out cups and saucers of delicate china and an antique silver teapot.

Marjory watched these operations in amazement. Next came milk and sugar from the cupboard, and finally a tin box containing some of Lisbeth's famous shortbread.

"I always keep supplies here," he explained, "because playing ghost is hungry work. Now then, ladies, make yourselves at home. No, Marjory; this is *my* party. I prefer to make the tea myself, and to pour it out. Let's play we're all dressed in our best, and let's enjoy ourselves as we couldn't if we were."

The girls laughed, their recent tears were forgotten, and they did justice to the doctor's impromptu banquet.

"I shall have to 'wash up' two of the cups and saucers," remarked the doctor, with a smile, "or Lisbeth will hear of my party; but I'll do it to-morrow when the coast is clear. Meanwhile, I'll lock them up in the cupboard," which he thereupon proceeded to do.

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"I have greatly enjoyed your company, young ladies, but I cannot honestly say that I hope you will come again at one o'clock in the morning. Now I'm going to escort you back to bed. Go very quietly, so as not to wake anybody."

Thus ended the girls' search for the Hunters' Brae ghost. The adventure had been an exciting one, though not quite in the way which they had expected.

Her uncle's caress had been a revelation to Marjory, and she thought of it again and again. How true Mrs. Forester's words had been! Had she not said that the doctor would be sure to respond to any advance of Marjory's if only she would try, and had he not kissed her and called her his dear little girl, just as Mrs. Forester had suggested that he might? Her uncle seemed to Marjory to have changed into a different person, but in reality the change was in herself, for she was looking at him in another light—she was trying to see him through love's spectacles.

Mr. and Mrs. Forester were away for a few days only, and the time passed very quickly for the girls, there was so much to see and to do at Hunters' Brae. They summoned courage to ask the doctor about the key of the old chest. He replied that he did not think he had it, and did not suppose that there was anything inside the box, but he promised to look amongst his keys for one that might fit. They were afraid he would forget, but he was as good as his word, and gave them several old keys to try, none of which, however, would open the mysterious box. Dr. Hunter told them that it had been there ever since he could remember, but no one had ever paid any particular attention to it. To him it was merely an old box, valuable by reason of its age; but to the girls it stood for romance and mystery, an oracle that might speak volumes of past history could it only be opened.

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They paid many visits to the old wing, and tried all means of opening the chest, but to no purpose, and they were obliged to leave it for the time being. Blanche boldly suggested a locksmith, but the doctor, unable to see any necessity that the box should be opened, pooh-poohed the idea.

"Nonsense," he said, rather sharply. "I won't have any workmen tampering with it. Don't let me hear any more about it."

The doctor wanted to keep things as they had been, and did not approve of any alterations in the house, and he was probably afraid that the box might be injured by any attempts to open it forcibly. After this the girls stopped talking about it, but continued to think about it a good deal.

July slipped away and August came. Mr. Forester had invited some friends for the shooting, and the Twelfth saw quite a large party assembled at Braeside. Dr. Hunter forbade Marjory to go while the strangers were there. He gave no reason for so doing. He did not wish her to go, and that was enough. He expected Marjory's implicit obedience, without question on her part or explanation on his. The truth was that the doctor was afraid that some casual stranger, seeing Marjory, and perhaps hearing her story, might put two and two together, as the saying is, and convey to Mr. Davidson the information which had been so long and so carefully withheld.

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Marjory felt rebellion in her heart, and for a day or two returned to her old sullen mood with her uncle. Blanche came and begged that her friend might be allowed to go just once to a picnic luncheon on the moor, but the doctor was firm in his refusal. He himself was invited to dine at Braeside, but he declined the invitation, courteously but firmly. So there was nothing to be done but to submit. Blanche came to Hunters' Brae as often as she could, but Marjory was very glad when the visitors went away, and she was able to go in and out at Braeside as before.

These were the happiest weeks the girl had ever known. The two friends spent long sunshiny days together, but though it was very delightful to ramble about with Blanche, and to show the

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town-bred girl some of the sights and pleasures of the country, Marjory secretly longed for the eighteenth of September and the commencement of those lessons she so ardently wished for. It was quite certain that Blanche had no such longings, for she constantly expressed her satisfaction in the extra week of holidays, and wished it were longer. Blanche was a good and industrious scholar during lesson times, but she was honestly glad when they were over, and sorry when they began again. She had not that thirst for knowledge which was almost a pain to Marjory, and for her part she was inclined to wish that these lovely summer days might last, if not for ever, at least for a very, very long time. She would be quite content to do nothing but roam with Marjory about the park and gardens, to visit Mrs. Shaw at the Low Farm, and to wander about the house at Hunters' Brae, examining its many treasures. There was the loch, too, and its pleasures of boating and bathing. Every day she went with her mother and Marjory to bathe in the cool, clear water, and Marjory was teaching her to swim. Then, in the evenings, sometimes the doctor would take them for a sail, and she would sit wondering at the clever way in which Marjory carried out his orders, pulling this rope, slackening the other. It all seemed most bewildering to Blanche, and she admired her capable friend the more. These holidays were full of delight. Lesson hours would come again all too soon for Blanche.

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September set in wet. Leaden skies and steady rain enveloped Heathermuir in a mantle of gray. Marjory, accustomed to all weathers, went out and about as usual. The first wet morning when she signalled to Blanche, the reply was, "Can't come; you come here." So she went down to Braeside and tried to persuade Mrs. Forester to allow Blanche to come out, for they had looked forward to hearing Peter's story on the first wet day. But Mrs. Forester was just as firm as the doctor had been during the visiting time; she would not allow Blanche to go out in such rain in case she should catch cold. Marjory suggested goloshes and a waterproof, but Mrs. Forester remained unpersuaded. It was not until the rain had continued for several days, and Blanche had grown very weary of her imprisonment, that at last her mother allowed her to go to Hunters' Brae. It was decided that she must drive both ways, and if she went into the garden, it must only be to the wood-shed and back, and she must wear a cloak and goloshes. Blanche felt a little ashamed of all these precautions before Marjory's sturdy independence of the weather, and was rather afraid that her friend might laugh at her for a "mollycoddle." But that spirit of protection, with which Blanche's delicacy had inspired Marjory, prevented any such expression on her part, and made her only anxious that Mrs. Forester's instructions should be carefully carried out.

They gave Lisbeth a message for Peter, reminding him of his promise, and saying that they would meet him in the wood-shed after dinner. When they went there they found the old man sawing wood and apparently very busy.

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"You have dreadfully wet weather here, haven't you, Peter?" said Blanche, by way of opening the conversation.

The old man stopped his sawing and looked at her.

"I wouldna exactly say it's dreadfully wet," he replied. "It's maybe just a wee bittie saft, but no for to say *wet*."

"O *Peter!*" remonstrated Blanche. "Not wet, and it's been simply pouring cats and dogs for four whole days, and mother wouldn't let me come out. I hope it isn't often like this."

"Na, na, missie, only whiles."

"Well, I hope 'whiles' don't come very often, then," laughing.

"What are you going to tell us about to-day, Peter?" asked Marjory, anxious to begin the business of the afternoon.

"Me tell ye? What hae I to tell?" And the old man began his sawing again.

"Do be nice and begin, Peter darling," coaxed Marjory. "You promised, you know."

"Ay, to be sure, I begin to mind something about some story ye was wanting." Peter's eyes twinkled.

"Of course you remember. Now please begin, and don't let's waste any more time."

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"Gin I dae that I canna saw wood," objected Peter.

"Nobody wants you to saw wood; you can do that afterwards."

"Weel, weel, I suppose ye maun hae yer way."

The girls settled themselves on a wooden bench, Marjory with her arm round Blanche; and Peter, turning a basket upside down, sat upon it, laying the saw across his knees, and fingering its jagged edge as he told his tale. His Scots was a little difficult to follow, and Marjory whispered translations to Blanche every now and then.

Peter began: "This story is ca'd the 'Leddy's Grove,' an' it has twa morals to it." Peter was always very careful to point out the morals to his tales. "One is," he continued, "that revenge is no for us to meddle wi'. 'Vengeance is mine,' says God Almichty. And the other is, that though each day may be fu' o' unknown dangers, we maun go forward wi' faith an' courage, an' a' will be weel wi' us. Noo I'll begin.

"Lang, lang syne, before ever there was Hunters at the Brae, so ye may ken hoo lang it is, there

was war atween England and Scotland. Lord Ronald o' Glendown—which, as ye ken, Miss Marjory, lies no sae far frae here—he an' his eldest son, the young Ronald, went awa to fecht, leavin' his wife, the bonnie Leddy Flora, an' his youngest son at hame i' the castle wi' but a few servants.

"For mony a day the leddy waited patiently, wi' mony prayers for the safety o' her dear ones. At last a messenger brocht tidings o' a great battle. He didna richtly ken whether the victory lay wi' us or wi' the English; he only kenned o' mony fine men killed or sairly wounded.

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"Hearin' this, the Leddy Flora gaed to the watch-tower i' the castle keep, her son, the young Malcolm, beside her. Frae this tower they could see a' round for mony miles. They watched an' waitit, an' at last they spied a company o' men marchin' towards the castle. They were the men o' Glendown, for their colours could be seen. The Leddy Flora sent a prayer o' thanksgivin' to the skies, for weel she kenned that the men wouldna come withoot their lord. Fu' o' joy, she hurried awa to gie her orders for the reception o' the returnin' warriors. But, wae's me, what did she see as she went to the castle door to welcome them? The men hadna come back withoot their lord an' his son, but it was their deid bodies they were carryin' hame. Eh, but it was a sair sicht to see the leddy weepin' gin her heart wad break. E'en the great, rough men couldna hide their tears; an' nae shame to them ava, for a strong heart should hae its saft spot. Then, efter a while, the leddy raised her heid an' said, 'Men o' Glendown, they hae dee'd a glorious death, fechtin' for his Majesty the king an' for their country. 'Tis the death they wad hae chosen, fechtin' face to foe. Let us a' be thankful for God's mercy. They micht hae been cast into prison, an' put to a shameful death, but this is glory an' honour to them.' An' again she wept, coverin' her face wi' her hands. The young Malcolm, too, was weepin', no because his heart was afraid but because it was sair.

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"Then ane o' the men up an' spoke. 'Not so, my leddy. 'Twas a foul blow that killed my lord an' his son, an' it was gien them by a hidden enemy. We was marchin' hame victorious, Lord Ronald ridin' awa to the front, wi' young Ronald by his side, when a' in a moment an airmed man on a horse sprang frae a thicket an' thrust my lord i' the back wi' his sword. He fell withoot a groan. Young Ronald, he drew his sword like a flash o' licht, but it was too late; the murderer's knife plunged deep into his brave young heart. We rushed to the spot, my leddy, but the murderer had an unco swift horse, an' he rode awa like the deil towards the Abbey o' Glendown. We could see that he wore a bit sprig o' green oak i' his helmet, an' a scarlet ribbon round his airm.' The Leddy Flora's eyes flashed fire as she heard the story, an' when it was dune she cried, 'Which are o' ye a' will gang an' gie this coward his deserts?'

"Nae man spoke till he wha had telt the tale said in a low voice, 'My leddy, yon's a man possessed by the evil one, or he couldna ride sae swiftly, an' his horse is as black as the very deil himsel'; no mortal man could follow him.'

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"The leddy wrung her hands, despairin'. Then young Malcolm said stoutly, 'Let me gang, my leddy mither; I'm no feared for man or deil. I will be the avenger o' this cruel deed.'

"'Thou, my son?' questioned the leddy. 'Nay, thou art but a laddie. I canna let thee gang, my only child.' An' she cast her airms aboot him.

"But the lad gently freed himsel' frae her loving airms, sayin', 'It is my duty.' An' then he turned to the men an' commanded them to bring him his feyther's sword an' shield, an' he askit his mither to gie him her blessin'.

"Then the leddy cried, 'God bless thee, my son. Gae forth, Lord Malcolm o' Glendown, an' avenge the death o' thy feyther an' thy brither. The murderer's bluid be upo' his ain heid.'

"It was strange that sae gentle a woman should be sae set upo' bluid an' revenge, but this was lang syne, when folks didna ken o' the justice o' God, as we dae noo.

"Lord Malcolm set oot. He rode mony miles until he saw the black horse at last, an' a man ridin' on it wi' a sprig o' green i' his helmet an' a scarlet ribbon upo' his airm. The young lord spurred his horse, an' pursued his enemy, an' was comin' up wi' him, when suddenly horse an' rider sprang up i' the air, it seemed some distance, an' then doon to the earth again. When he cam to the place young Malcolm was sair dooncast to find before him a great, big, wide, yawnin' gulf, wi' a roarin' torrent at the bottom, an' sheer rocky sides that nae human bein' could scale.

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"'Wae's me,' said the lad, 'for I canna follow him. An' what can I tell my mither that she doesna ca' me a coward this day?'

"The young lad gazed across the chasm, an' as he looked he saw a shinin', misty light, an' in it the form o' a beautiful woman, an' he bared his heid an' bowed before this veesion.

"'Fear not,' cam a voice, clear and strong like the sound o' a trumpet—'fear not to leap across this gulf. Faith an' a brave heart will carry thee safely to this side. Come.' And she beckoned wi' her hand.

"The lad set his horse to the leap. One moment an' he was i' the air, anither an' he was safe upo' the ither side. Then the voice said, 'Whither awa sae swiftly?' An' the boy replied, 'I'm gaun to revenge the murder o' my feyther an' my brither. I'm seekin' a black horse an' its rider. Can ye tell me which way he went?'

"'He is gane where thy vengeance canna follow him,' replied the voice; an' then the figure raised its airm, pointin' to the heavens, an' the voice went on, 'I am Fate, a messenger o' Justice, to

whom vengeance belongs. I ca'd yon coward to the leap as I ca'd thee. He leaped to his death, an' thou hast leaped to safety, but no to revenge; that is for wiser hands than thine. Gang where his body lies, an' pluck the oak an' the scarlet ribbon frae him to show thy mither.' The lad did as he was bid, an' then the woman cam close to him an' laid her hand upo' his brow, sayin', 'Thou art a brave lad, an' I, Fate, do promise thee that thou shalt gang fearless a' thy days, an' they shall be mony.' I' a moment she was gane, an' there was naething to be seen o' her, nor o' the body o' the wicked man, nor the wide gulf; an' Lord Malcolm found himsel' upo' the road to the Abbey o' Glendown, but he still carried the sprig o' oak an' the scarlet ribbon. An' upo' the very spot whaur the gulf had been there grew a wonderfu' grove o' hawthorn trees, the finest i' the countryside. Folks ca' it the 'Leddy's Grove,' an' it is there till this day for a' to see, an' on the coat o' airms o' the Glendown family ye'll see the sprig o' oak an' the scarlet ribbon. Young Malcolm galloped hame an' telt his tale to his mither just as I hae telt it to you, young misses."

With appropriate looks and gestures the old man had told his story, his listeners sitting as if spellbound, motionless except for a whispered word of explanation here and there from Marjory. Both gave sighs of regret as his last words died away, and Marjory cried,—

"O Peter, that is one of the best you've ever told; it is simply splendid!"

"Do you think it's really true?" questioned Blanche eagerly. "Did such things as these really happen long ago?"

"I'm tellin' ye the story as my mither telt it to me. Her feyther telt it to her, an' wha's to ken whether it's true or whether it's no true." And, as if to dismiss the subject, Peter got up from his basket and resumed his sawing.

CHAPTER X.

MARJORY'S BIRTHDAY.

"I wish her beauty
That owes not all its duty
To gaudy tire, or glist'ring shoe-tie."

CRASHAW.

The eighteenth of September dawned at last. The sun shone in at Marjory's window, waking her to her birthday, as if impatient for her to begin this new year of her life.

She was soon up and dressed—dressed very carefully, in case the eyes of the governess should find anything amiss; but she would have been critical indeed could she have done so, for, when Marjory's toilet was completed, she looked the pink of neatness: Her abundant dark hair was plaited smoothly and tied with ribbon, new for the occasion, and she wore a new frock of soft, warm material, for the autumn days were chilly now and giving warning of the coming winter.

Marjory looked at herself in the glass very anxiously—a most unusual proceeding on her part. As a rule she spent little thought upon her personal appearance, but to-day things were different. She found herself wondering what impression Miss Waspe was likely to have of her at first sight. This was characteristic of Marjory, who was over-sensitive with regard to other people and their opinions of her. In this case it was not, "Shall I like Miss Waspe?" but, "Will Miss Waspe like me?"

Marjory always looked forward to her birthday. Her uncle never forgot to give her some gift in remembrance of the day; in fact, he made it a rule to give her two presents. She often wondered why he did so, but had never found courage to ask his reasons. The truth was that this was a curious way the doctor had of trying to satisfy that conscience which would continually prick him with regard to Mr. Davidson, and the second gift represented Marjory's father.

To-day was no exception to the rule. As Marjory went half eagerly, half shyly to the breakfast-table, there, by her place, were several parcels. The first she opened was a nice leather satchel for carrying her books to and from Braeside. This was from her uncle. Then came another with the words "To Marjory" written on it in the doctor's handwriting. It looked like a small square box, and as she took off the paper wrappings it proved to be a leather case containing a pretty little gold watch and chain. Her initials and the date were engraved on the back of it.

Dr. Hunter came in just as Marjory was examining this new treasure, and as she ran forward to thank him he said,—

"Like it, Marjory? That's right. But I think I am a foolish old man to give a watch to a young thing like you, for you'll only go and drop it down the first rabbit-hole you and Silky go scratching into; but I thought it might be useful in keeping you up to time with that governess of yours. No excuse for being late, eh? The date too—an important one, isn't it? Well, my child, I wish you many happy years."

Of the other parcels, one was raspberry toffee from Lisbeth, and the other, a curiously shaped one, was from Peter, and contained a trowel. Its somewhat prosaic appearance was relieved by the handle being decorated with Marjory's initial inside a heart of uncertain proportions, executed by poor old Peter's shaky hand with a red-hot skewer.

"Dear old Peter!" exclaimed Marjory. "He must have noticed that my old one is worn out. How good of him!"

"Come, child, eat your breakfast," was the doctor's only comment. Marjory's enthusiasm was quenched in a moment, and she sat down in silence. Dr. Hunter was anxious that Marjory should have a good breakfast before starting for Braeside. He spoke abruptly, giving no reason for his admonition, and Marjory thought he was cross—whether with her or with Peter and his present she did not know; anyhow he was cross, and her old thoughts and feelings against her uncle came crowding in upon her. "Yet," the better voice whispered, "do not these gifts show that he has thought of you and prepared for this day? Surely that was good and kind of him."

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Lisbeth and Peter were hovering about in order to see Marjory after breakfast, anxious to know how their presents had been appreciated. Marjory's thanks left no doubt upon the subject. Both the presents were just what she liked and wanted.

Lisbeth eyed her critically.

"Yon's a fine new frock," she said. "But what way is't yer hair's no hingin' the day? Are ye no gaun to yon governess leddy?"

"Yes, but I never thought of letting my hair loose; it isn't Sunday."

"Na, but I would hae thocht ye nicht hae dune it just this first day, an' yer birthday too. Yer hair's some bittie langer than Miss Blanche's, I'm thinkin'," replied Lisbeth, with satisfaction in her tone.

"Aweel," remarked Peter, "it's no the outside o' her heid Miss Marjory's thinkin' o' the day, but the inside o't—to fill it up wi' buik-larnin'."

"Puir bairnie, I just hope yon governess winna be ower strict wi' her at the first.—Mind an' tell Peter an' Lisbeth if she's no kind to ye," said the old woman earnestly. She was more than half jealous of this new authority over Marjory's doings.

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The girl laughed joyously. "Don't you be afraid, you dear old things. I want to learn lessons, and I'm quite sure Miss Waspe will be kind."

Dr. Hunter walked with Marjory to Braeside on this first morning. She never forgot it. The slight chill of early autumn was in the air, here and there the leaves were turning gold and red, and a faint mistiness hung over the landscape. Here and there the gossamer threads so busily woven since yesterday stretched across their path, and Marjory liked to feel them touch her cheek as she broke through them. The doctor and she walked in silence, Silky in attendance; and Marjory's heart was beating quickly as they neared Braeside. This day of days, so eagerly longed for, had come at last; but what would it bring with it? This feeling of apprehension grew into an acute pain at last. Her ignorance of the things which most girls of her age were well up in assumed the most alarming proportions to poor Marjory, and she almost wished that her heart's desire had not been granted, that she could have been content with things as they were. She felt herself on the brink of a new world, and she feared to take the step across. She remembered Peter's story, and how the voice had called to young Malcolm that faith and a brave heart would carry him across the yawning chasm. She, too, must be brave and go to meet the unknown.

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When they reached the gate at Braeside, Dr. Hunter said, "Well, Marjory, you'll be all right now. Good-bye." And he stooped to kiss her.

Dismayed at the thought of going into the house and into that dreaded schoolroom alone, she caught her uncle's hand and said pleadingly, "Won't you come with me, Uncle George?"

Then for the first time the doctor noticed her pale face and quick-coming breath, and he was touched by her confidence in him.

"Of course I will," he said heartily. "I'll go with you right into the lion's den, or rather, in this case, it's the Waspe's nest, eh?"

Marjory laughed a little, which was just what the doctor wanted; and as they walked across the park to the house he chatted and joked with her until she felt much better.

Mrs. Forester and Blanche were at the door to meet them. Blanche, in high spirits, skipped down the steps, calling out, "Many happy returns of the day, without lessons. Come on upstairs to the schoolroom," she cried, giving Marjory a hug, "and see what's there. I shall simply burst if you don't come quickly."

"May I come too?" asked Dr. Hunter.

"Yes," said Blanche. "Father and mother are coming too."

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The little party went upstairs to the schoolroom. Blanche threw open the door with a flourish of triumph, and what Marjory saw caused her heart to beat faster than ever. The doctor rubbed his eyes and asked comically, "Am I dreaming? Is this a real schoolroom and a real governess?"

It was indeed a pretty picture that the door had opened upon. There were flowers in every available place in the room; and as Miss Waspe came forward, smiling a welcome, the sun just caught her fair hair, turning it to gold, and making her look like a spirit in a fairy bower. On the table there were roses, and where the books ought to have been was something which made Marjory's eyes grow big with wonder. It was nothing less than a new saddle—a small side-saddle; and Marjory, fascinated, watched Mr. Forester walk to the table and take it up; and then—oh! what could it mean?—he came towards her, saying, "This is something for you, Marjory, from Mrs. Forester and me. I hope you like it. Brownie seems to approve of it."

Marjory felt as if she were dreaming. How often had she wished she might learn to ride—more often than ever since Blanche's coming! She could hardly find words to stammer out her thanks, but her kind friends could see that she was surprised and delighted beyond measure.

Then Blanche came to her, holding out a dainty silver-topped riding-whip.

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"Here," she said; "this is my present. Only I don't believe you will ever use it; it will only be for show. Won't it be lovely going for rides together? Oh dear, *how* thankful I am to-day has come at last! This has been the very hardest secret I ever had to keep; and it's been such a business, first getting Brownie measured and then breaking him in to the saddle, all without you knowing. It was generally done while we were bathing, and I used to be very slow dressing on purpose." And, laughing merrily, she gave Marjory another hug.

"Let me too wish you many happy returns of the day," said Miss Waspe kindly, "and many happy days in this room, which Dr. Hunter thinks is not a real schoolroom," laughing. "It may not always look so festive as it does to-day, but then this is a birthday, you see."

The dreaded moment was over, Marjory had entered the new world, and never again would she regret the old one. She felt no fear when Blanche and she were left alone with their governess, for something had told her when she looked into Miss Waspe's eyes that she had no cause to be afraid. Nor had she. Miss Waspe understood girls and their ways; she loved them, and she had unlimited patience. Moreover, she was all eagerness herself to begin to teach her new pupil, and she promised herself many an interesting hour. She found that what Marjory had learned she knew thoroughly. She could read fluently and with intelligence, at figures she was quick and accurate, and she wrote a good hand. A little judicious praise was a great encouragement to Marjory, and the lessons begun that day were a source of delight to governess and pupil alike. Nothing seemed to come amiss to Marjory, and she progressed by leaps and bounds until Miss Waspe began to fear that the busy brain might wear out the body, sturdy though it was. But the girls had plenty of time for play and for exercise, and Marjory's health, so far from being any the worse for her studies, seemed rather the better.

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Blanche had already learned to ride, and Marjory had little difficulty after a few lessons from Mr. Forester's groom, so the girls had many a lively gallop across the moor or along the country roads.

The weeks flew by, and very soon, as it seemed to Marjory, the Christmas holidays began. None too soon for Blanche did they come, for she was by no means so devoted to her studies as Marjory was, and, fond as she was of her governess, she could watch her drive away to the station without compunction, knowing that three short weeks would see her back again, and lessons with her.

The friendship between the two girls had grown stronger every day. They shared everything—hopes and fears, pleasures and pains—and they were inseparable companions. Marjory's was the leading spirit. It was she who planned their expeditions and proposed each day's doings. Blanche looked up to her friend as being much stronger in every way than herself, and admired her accordingly, while Marjory would have gone through fire and water, as the saying is, for Blanche.

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One day, soon after the holidays began, the girls went for a walk to a pond about a mile out of Heathermuir, to see if it would bear for skating. There had been continuous frost for some days, and as the pond was a shallow one, Dr. Hunter thought it was quite safe for them to go. Mrs. Forester could trust Marjory to take Blanche anywhere, but as she had not yet learned to skate, the girls had promised that they would only go to see in what condition the ice was. If it would bear, they were to come back to Braeside for lunch, and afterwards Mr. Forester would go with them and give Blanche her first lesson.

As they were walking along, a collie came bounding up to Silky, and then to Marjory, wagging his tail, as if delighted to see her.

"That's the Morisons' dog," she said; "the boys must be home. Perhaps they're coming to the pond too."

"Oh, bother," said Blanche; "it won't be a bit nice having strange boys there while I'm learning. I don't like boys much, they are so rough and rude. I do hope they won't stay all day on the pond."

Marjory stole a glance behind. Sure enough there was a boy, but only one, coming along the road.

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"It's Alan Morison, the youngest one, all by himself, and he's got skates," she said, making a grimace at Blanche as she imparted the information.

"Well, of course he has as much right on the pond as we have, and it's horrid of me not to want

him, but I don't. What is he like?"

"I haven't spoken to him much. He doesn't care for girls, and neither does his brother; they both said so. They generally call out rude remarks after me. They think all girls are silly."

"Well, we don't want them to like us, I'm sure," replied Blanche; "we can do quite well without them; and these ones sound horrid from your description."

Marjory, afraid she had said too much in disparagement of the boys, hastened to say, "Oh, I don't suppose they would be rude to you; but they've known me ever since I was a baby, you see."

Footsteps could be heard behind them now, and very soon a mocking voice called, "Carrots, Carrots." At first the girls took no notice, walking along in their most dignified manner; but when the boy came quite close and deliberately shouted "Carrots" into Blanche's ear, Marjory turned upon him like a fury, crying, "Don't you dare to say that again, or I'll knock you down."

The boy burst out laughing, and straightway repeated the objectionable word. Marjory wheeled round in a moment. "Take that!" she said, delivering a blow with her fist which sent Master Alan Morison flying. He lost his balance and fell to the ground. He was up again in a moment, blood flowing from a slight cut in his forehead. Marjory, aghast at what she had done, stood rooted to the spot, expecting him to return the attack; but, to her surprise, he looked at her admiringly and said, "I say, you know, that was jolly good. I never thought a girl could hit like that. I couldn't have done it better myself, and you're only thirteen. I was fourteen last birthday."

Marjory began, "I'm so sorry," but Alan stopped her. "I tell you it was jolly good. I'm glad you can hit; you don't seem so much like a girl.—I say," turning to Blanche and blushing crimson under his freckles, "it was beastly of me to call names after you." The boy shifted uneasily from one foot to the other as he made his apology.

"Yes, it was rather," replied Blanche, "but it isn't the first time boys have done it. I suppose my hair is carrotty," ruefully, "but I think it is rather mean to tease me about a thing I can't help."

"I say, I'm awfully sorry," said Alan, more shamefaced than ever.

"Never mind," said Blanche graciously; "I'll forgive you this once. Come along; it's cold standing here apologizing and forgiving." And with a merry laugh she started on.

Marjory, ashamed of her part in the quarrel, asked Alan if his forehead hurt.

"No, it's nothing but a scratch, but I tell you," enthusiastically, "it was a splendid hit. Any fellow would have done the same if another chap had ragged his friend. I say," he continued bashfully, "would you two chum up with me? It's beastly dull for me at home now."

"Where's Herbert?" asked Marjory.

"Oh, he's at home, but he's no good to me now," kicking a stone with his foot, to the great satisfaction of the dogs; and then he continued, "Since he went into the sixth, he thinks of nothing but the cut of his coats and the shape of his collars, and whether girls think he's better-looking than the other fellows. It's positively sickening. And now we're at home he hangs about father, and won't do anything with me. He called me a 'kid' this morning, young silly ass that he is." Another stone went flying. "But look here," in a different tone and turning to Marjory; "you're not a bit like a girl if you can hit like that, and I should be awfully obliged to you if you would chum up with me. We could have jolly fun if you would."

"All right," said Marjory, sorry for any one who was lonely; "we'll be friends—that is, if Blanche wants to too; we always do everything together." And she looked at her friend.

Blanche was too sweet-natured to be selfish over this proposal; besides, she rather liked the look of this boy with his freckled face and honest eyes, so she said, "Yes, let's have a Triple Alliance, like we've been learning about in history, only much nicer," with a grimace; "it will be awful fun." And thus the friendship was begun.

When they reached the pond it appeared to be quite fit for skating, and Alan soon fastened on his skates and started off. They were pleased to find that there was no one else skating; in fact, they had it all to themselves. It was amusing to see the three dogs trying to follow Alan, especially fat little Curly, who rolled over several times in his frantic efforts to keep up with the grown-up dogs.

The girls watched Alan's movements with interest. He was a very good skater, and could do all sorts of figures on the ice, seeming quite at home upon it. He was shouting that he would teach them both all he knew, when suddenly there was an ominous crackling on the other side of the pond, and the dogs, who had gone over there unnoticed, began to bark and whine excitedly.

"Where's Curly? I believe he's fallen in," screamed Blanche, and she started to run across the ice.

"Go back!" shouted Alan. "Go round by the bank!" And in a moment he was off at full speed across the pond.

Curly was nowhere to be seen, and Silky and Neil, the collie, were barking furiously, leaping and splashing in and out of the water. Some one evidently had been trying the ice, and it had broken away from the edge, gradually cracking farther in. The big dogs had been able to scramble to the shore, but the little one, frightened, no doubt, by his unusual adventure, had been sucked in under the ice. The other dogs were making frantic efforts to reach him, but the pieces of broken

ice prevented them, and poor little Curly was some distance in; and as the pond was shallow, it would have been difficult for them to swim, even if they could have got under the ice.

Alan saw at once what had happened, and judging by the dogs' efforts the probable whereabouts of Curly, with a reassuring shout to the girls, he began stamping in the ice, plunging knee-deep into the water each time. In a few moments he pulled out poor little Curly—a helpless dripping object, with no signs of life in him. Alan scrambled to the bank and laid the dog on the grass. He tenderly wiped him as dry as he could with his pocket handkerchief—a regular schoolboy's one of generous proportions—and by the time the girls arrived, breathless after their run, he was wrapping Curly in his coat.

"Is he dead?" cried Blanche, the tears streaming down her cheeks.—"Oh, my darling little Curly, why did I let you out of my sight?"

"I dare say he won't die," said Alan, feigning a cheerfulness he did not feel. "The first thing to do is to get him warm. Where's the nearest house?"

"The Low Farm is the *nearest*," said Marjory doubtfully, "if Mrs. Shaw—"

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"Will let us in to make a mess of her kitchen," finished Alan. "She is a bit of a cross-patch, but we'll *make* her let us in. What's the good of a Triple Alliance if we can't fight? Come on, girls. United we stand!"

They ran off as fast as they could towards the Low Farm, Alan carrying Curly very close to him, so that the warmth from his own body might revive the little dog. Blanche kept asking if he seemed better, but the answer was always the same—he had not moved or shown any signs of life.

Once Marjory said, "I say, it was very good of you, Alan, and you're soaking wet, and you must be cold without your coat."

"Rot!" replied Alan, and Marjory said no more.

CHAPTER XI.

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THE MYSTERIOUS STRANGER.

"And thus the heart will break,
Yet brokenly live on."—BYRON.

Mrs. Shaw saw the children coming, and wondered what could be the reason of this unusual visit. She went to the garden gate to meet them, and saw at once by Blanche's tear-stained face that something was wrong. They told her what they wanted, and she invited them in without hesitation, taking them straight to the kitchen, where a bright fire was blazing.

Alan unwrapped poor Curly, and Mrs. Shaw fetched a piece of blanket for him to lie on, and gave him a spoonful of brandy, Blanche holding his mouth open. They all watched him anxiously. He soon began to move a little, and in a few minutes he got up, stretched and shook himself, and then went to his mistress to be caressed.

Blanche hugged and kissed him with every expression of delight. She had hardly realized how precious her little pet had become until she so nearly lost him. But Curly had been in Mrs. Shaw's kitchen before, and when he considered that he had received enough petting, he calmly trotted off to a corner of the room where he had once had a very good dinner, and began sniffing and nosing about. No dish was there this time, and so he trotted back again and sat down, looking expectantly at the group of amused watchers. Mrs. Shaw went and got some bread and milk for him, and he was soon very busy with it, seeming none the worse for his adventure.

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"Well, I must be going," remarked Alan.

"Oh no," protested Blanche; "it's too late for you to go home to dinner now. You must come to us. Marjory's coming."

"I meant to skate all day, and mother gave me some sandwiches."

"Sandwiches are but poor comfort on a cold day, Master Morison," said Mrs. Shaw. "I should be proud if the young ladies and you would have your dinner here—that is," she added, "if you don't mind having it in the kitchen. The parlour fire isn't lighted yet. I can send a message down to Braeside if you will stay." And she looked at the girls.

"It is very kind of you," said Blanche. "We should like to stay, if it isn't too much bother for you.—Shouldn't we, Marjory?"

"Yes," replied Marjory, much surprised by this unwonted friendliness on Mrs. Shaw's part. "And

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don't you think Alan's clothes ought to be dried?"

"Rot!" said Alan again.

But Mrs. Shaw was a managing person. She felt Alan's legs.

"My goodness!" she exclaimed, "he's wet through. Come with me at once," and she dragged the unwilling boy into another room. In a short time they returned, Alan looking a comical figure, dressed in a pair of knickerbockers many sizes too large for him, and a man's flannel shirt and coat. Marjory at once decided that these garments must have belonged to the mysterious husband in foreign parts.

Alan looked red and uncomfortable after Mrs. Shaw's ministrations, but Marjory said, "That's better. Now come and sit by the fire," pretending not to notice anything peculiar in his appearance. To tell the truth, he was nothing loath to sit by the cheerful blaze, for he had begun to feel cold and miserable as soon as Curly was all right, but he would have done anything rather than say so.

Mrs. Shaw's kitchen was cleaner than some people's dining-rooms. There was not a speck of dust anywhere, and not a thing out of its place. Her guests were amused to see their dinner come straight from the various pots and pans on the fire; but never was a meal eaten with a better appetite, and after the first shyness wore off, the party was a very merry one.

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Marjory noticed that Mrs. Shaw looked often at Blanche, and with an expression of tenderness which her face never wore for other people. Half sad, half tender, the look was, and Marjory wondered what it could mean.

After dinner was over, Blanche asked if they might go to the parlour and see the curiosities.

"I wonder if you'll get anything this Christmas," she remarked.

"Maybe," was the short reply.

Nearly every part of the world was represented in this little farm parlour. Here were corals and shells from the South Sea Islands; wonderfully carved ivory from India and China; a tiny nugget of gold from California; Indian arrow-heads, beads, and baskets. In fact, had she known it, Mrs. Shaw really possessed a good and valuable collection. Alan was handling what appeared to be a square block made of beautifully-polished wood, and he asked what it was.

"It's only a specimen block of various Australian woods," was the reply.

"But see, they're not glued together in any way. Perhaps it's a puzzle, and they all come apart." And he turned it over and over with boyish curiosity and interest.

"No, it's nothing but samples of woods. I've got a list of their names somewhere." And Mrs. Shaw went to a box to search for the paper.

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Meanwhile Alan pulled and thumped, and at last one of the pieces composing the box moved. The rest was easily done; one piece after another came away, and there, right in the middle of the block, was a small velvet case.

"Look! look!" he cried excitedly. "Come and see, Mrs. Shaw."

They all crowded round while Mrs. Shaw opened the case. Inside it was a beautifully-painted head of a little girl.

"Why, it's Blanche when she was small!" exclaimed Marjory.

Mrs. Shaw stood as if turned to stone for a minute. Then she covered her face with her hands and wept aloud. The children stood silent, frightened by this outburst of grief, and not knowing what to do or say.

At last Blanche took courage, and gently touching the weeping woman's arm, she said,—

"Please, don't cry. What is the matter? We are so sorry."

"Oh, my dear! my dear! that is the picture of my own little girl who died long ago. I took to you from the first because of the likeness. I've never seen her father since she died. It all happened long ago, before I came here. She was a delicate little thing, and one day, while her father was at home, I went away for the day to see my sister. The child had a little cold, and I said to her father that she had better not go out. But she begged so hard to go that he couldn't refuse her, and they went out. They went into a shop for her father to buy some tobacco. The child began playing with a kitten. She was very fond of animals, and while her father's back was turned, she ran out into the street after the kitten. She was knocked down and run over by a van, and she only lived a few hours. Oh, my darling! my darling!" the poor woman continued, unconscious of her listeners, "the light of my life went out when you were taken, and I am only just beginning to learn the lesson of my grief." Then returning to her story: "I blamed her poor father for her death, and I sent him away. That was seven years ago. He has written to me, and every year he sends me a parcel of things. He buys me something at every port he touches—he's a sailor, you know, a captain now—and I've never sent him a word of thanks, not one single word; and now this! This little box came last year, and I never even troubled to read this paper about it. Think how he planned it as a surprise for me, and what he must have paid to have it done. God forgive me! for I've been a

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wicked woman." And she wept afresh, rocking herself to and fro.

The children were awestruck by this recital. Alan took the paper from Mrs. Shaw. On the front page was a list of the various woods, as she had said, but inside were instructions for the opening of the puzzle box.

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"What was your little girl's name?" Blanche ventured to ask.

"Rose," sobbed the woman; "and she was just as sweet as her name; but I made an idol of my child, and that is why God took her away."

"Mother says," said Blanche shyly, "that when God takes little children He makes them very, very happy—happier than their own fathers and mothers could make them."

"Bless you, my dear, for your comforting words! Yes, I feel sure she is happy, and I know she would wish me to forgive her father, but I never could bring myself to do it till now. I'll write to him this very night, and ask him to come home when he can. To think of him planning this box, with her blessed picture inside it, all for me that's been so unkind and cruel!" And Mrs. Shaw sobbed again.

"Please, Mrs. Shaw, don't cry any more," begged Marjory. "It will be lovely when he comes home, and everything will be all right."

Mrs. Shaw pulled herself together, wiped her eyes, and stood up, saying, "I am a foolish woman to worry you young folks with my troubles. Come and look round the farm."

All thought of skating was given up for that day. Alan put on his own clothes, which were dry again, and the party went out to explore the farmyard. Silky and Neil were patiently waiting outside, and made a great fuss when the children appeared, Blanche with Curly in her arms. After thoroughly examining every hole and corner about the farm, the members of the Triple Alliance said good-bye to Mrs. Shaw, thanking her profusely for all her kindness, and then started homewards, going together to the Braeside gate. Before they parted Alan said,—

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"I say, look here, you two; should you mind if I asked you not to tell about this morning? It was a jolly good hit, and all that, but I shouldn't like Herbert to know about it. He'd chaff me so, and tell the fellows." And his face flushed crimson at the thought.

"More secrets," said Blanche. "I'll promise not to tell any one but mother. I simply can't keep a secret unless I tell her."

"Irishman!" cried Alan promptly. "Well, tell your mother if you like; and Marjory can tell her uncle, and nobody else. Do you agree?"

"I don't know that I shall want to tell," remarked Marjory, flushing in her turn. "It wasn't such a very nice thing for me to do."

"Well, I'm jiggered," said Alan inelegantly; "I thought the first thing a girl would want to do would be to go and blab about it all over the place." And he regarded Marjory as if she were a natural curiosity.

"And yet," she continued, "I suppose I ought to tell, because I think you behaved so well about it, making friends after it. And then think what you did for Curly."

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"Ra—ats! Good-bye, and long live the T. A.!" cried Alan, running off towards home.

It was nearly four o'clock when they said good-bye at the Braeside gate, and it was rapidly getting dark. Marjory went quickly up the hill, fearing a reprimand from her uncle for being out so late. The day had been an eventful one, but its excitements were not yet over. As she hurried through the wood, she heard a sudden crackling and rustling amongst the fallen leaves and twigs, and a man came from behind a tree and stood facing her.

"Don't be frightened, miss," he said in a low voice. "I'm a stranger here, and I want to ask if you can tell me where Dr. Hunter lives."

"He lives in that house up there," replied Marjory, pointing towards Hunters' Brae; "and this is his ground," she added, as much as to say, "What are you doing here?" Then she continued, "Do you wish to see Dr. Hunter?"

The man took no notice, and resumed his questioning.

"Isn't there a house on his property called the Low Farm? and can you tell me who keeps it?"

Marjory wondered who this man could be. His manner was straightforward, and from what she could see, his face was honest; still she felt somewhat suspicious. There had been rumours lately of poachers being about. Perhaps he was a thief, and would go to the Low Farm when all the men had gone home from work, and Mrs. Shaw would be unprotected. She reflected that if she withheld the information the man would probably get it from some one else, and she decided that it would be better to answer his questions, but to let him believe that Mrs. Shaw's husband was at home, so she replied,—

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"The Low Farm is down at the bottom of the hill, a little to the right, and people of the name of Shaw keep it."

"Oh," said the man, as if taken aback, "there is a Mr. Shaw then?"

"Oh yes," replied Marjory, delighted that her bait had taken, as she thought. Then she said quickly, "I must be going now."

"Good-night, miss, and thank you for the information. Please don't say you've seen me, if you can help it."

Marjory thought that the man's voice sounded hard and fierce, and, somewhat frightened, she hurried away without a look behind her. A sudden thought struck her as she ran through the garden. Could this stranger possibly be her father? Her absent father was continually in her thoughts; often and often she pictured to herself various ways in which he might return to her. This man had begun by asking for Dr. Hunter. For one wild moment the impulse to turn back was upon her, and then she told herself that it was impossible. She did not know many people, but she felt sure that this man was not quite like her uncle, or Mr. Forester, or Dr. Morison. Surely her father was not a rough-spoken man like this! Besides, would she not have known him at once? No; probably her first theory was the right one, and this was some poacher or thief—and yet he did not seem quite like a bad man either. It was a mystery, and she wished that Blanche or Alan had been with her.

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Dr. Hunter was not at home for tea; he had gone to the minister's, Lisbeth said, but would be back for supper.

When supper-time came Marjory gave her uncle an account of the day's doings, but did not mention her encounter in the wood.

"You've had a most exciting day, on the whole," he said. "I didn't know you could box, though; surely Miss Waspe doesn't teach you that as an accomplishment!"

Marjory laughed rather shamefacedly.

"No," she replied; "Peter showed me, but only a little. He says he was very good at it when he was a boy."

"So you knocked over this fourteen-year-old boy like a ninepin. Well, to be sure, I *am* surprised." And the doctor eyed his niece quizzically over his spectacles. "You're quite a dangerous young person to meet on a country road."

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"Well, he called Blanche's hair 'carrots,'" said Marjory, flushing.

"Just like a boy. If he were a dozen years older he would be writing sonnets to that same hair." And the doctor laughed.

Later on he said, "I heard from Mackenzie to-day that there is great excitement in the neighbourhood about poachers. The men are going out to-night to see if they can see anything of them. Mackenzie asked me to join them, but I'm getting too old for that sort of thing. Mackenzie isn't going himself, but I could see he was pretty keen about it. Of course these fellows are a nuisance, and perhaps if I preserved I should feel differently, but I must confess to a sneaking sympathy with them as it is. Don't you tell Forester or Morison, Miss Marjory." And the doctor laughed again.

But Marjory was thinking of the man in the wood. What if he should be suspected and taken? Somehow, although she had been suspicious of him, there had been something in his manner, a true ring in his voice, which belied her fears, and she felt that she would be sorry if he got into any trouble. It was some hours since she had seen him, and he had probably gone away by this time; but she felt uncomfortable about him, and as soon as the doctor had finished his supper and gone to his study, Marjory put on a cloak and slipped out.

It was a cold, frosty night, and there was no moon—just a night for poaching work, Marjory decided. She had shut Silky in the house, in case he might bark and attract attention, but once or twice she wished she had brought him. She crept down the garden, and through the gate into the wood, stopping now and then to listen. The night was intensely still, and there were no signs of life; the silence was broken only by the crunching of the frosty ground under her feet, until—listen!—what was that? There was a sound as of some person or some animal in pain. Oh, surely it was not some poor little rabbit or hare, or perhaps a dog, caught in a trap! She must go nearer and see what it was. She walked on in the direction whence the sounds proceeded, and there, lying on the ground, was the figure of a man—the man she had spoken to that afternoon. This was dreadful. Marjory had not known that a grown-up man could cry; his whole frame was heaving with convulsive sobs, and he murmured something she could not understand. She felt at a loss in the presence of such bitter grief, and did not know what to do or what to say. At last she took courage and said gently, "Can I do anything to help you?"

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The man sprang up, startled by Marjory's voice.

"Nothing can cure my trouble," he said bitterly. "But how come you out here this cold, dark night? I can't see you, but I know by your voice that you are the young lady I spoke to this afternoon."

"I came out to tell you that the keepers and some of the gentlemen are out after poachers to-night, and I—I thought—" Marjory stammered.

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"You thought I was one of them," finished the man, with a short laugh. "No, I haven't come to that yet, but I thank you for your kind thought. It's a long time since anybody troubled as to what would become of me." And his tone was very bitter.

"But you must be hungry and cold. Won't you come and have some food?"

"No, and thank you kindly. I am lodging at Hillcrest village, a matter of only two miles from here, and I'd best be getting back. But don't you worry about me, miss. I'm a rough man, but, thank God, I've been able to keep straight and honest. I'm in a tight place just now, but I'm sorry you should have found me as you did."

"I was once very miserable here in this same place," said Marjory shyly, "and then something happened which made my whole life different. Perhaps it will be the same with you."

"I'm afraid not; but I mustn't keep you here in the cold. Thank you kindly, miss, for what you've done for a stranger. May I ask you not to mention having seen me here? I have a good reason."

Marjory could no longer feel suspicious of the man, but at the same time she could not help wondering why he should wish to keep his movements secret.

"Very well; I won't speak of it," she promised, wondering if she were right in so doing.

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"God bless you, miss, and good-night to you."

The man strode away. She could hear his footsteps crackling through the undergrowth as she turned back towards home. Suddenly she was aware of approaching steps; in a moment the wood seemed full of dark figures, and she could hear men's heavy breathing. She started to run, but before she could reach the gate strong arms caught hold of her, a lantern flashed into her face, and the voice of Mr. Forester cried, "Hallo, Marjory! what are you doing here?"

CHAPTER XII.

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MARJORY KEEPS A SECRET.

"She doeth little kindnesses
Which most leave undone, or despise;
For naught that sets one heart at ease,
And giveth happiness or peace,
Is low esteemed in her eyes."

JAMES RUSSELL LOWELL.

Marjory had not thought of the possibility of the search-party being so near, and Mr. Forester's sudden appearance quite bewildered her for a moment. The men came crowding up, looking curiously at her.

She tried to free herself from Mr. Forester's grasp.

"No, you don't, my lady," said he, laughing, and tightening his hold upon her arm. "Having found you, I am responsible for you; besides, I don't approve of girls wandering about in the dark like this without giving an account of themselves."

"I'm not accountable to you, anyway," replied Marjory, her temper rising.

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"Highly-tighty! so we're going to ride the high horse, eh? Well, I consider it my duty to take you home and report upon your unlawful doings." And, still holding Marjory's arm, he began to walk towards the house. Silky, hearing the strange footsteps and voices, barked angrily; and Dr. Hunter, disturbed by the unusual commotion, came out of his study. Seeing that the dog seemed anxious to go out by the garden door, he opened it just as Mr. Forester and Marjory reached it.

Mr. Forester had only been teasing Marjory, and had not really meant to get her into trouble. He had intended to see her safely home and then to leave her, but it was too late now.

The doctor, much surprised, called out, "Hallo, Marjory! where have you been, and who's this with you?—Why, Forester, how do you do? Come in. But what is the meaning of it all?"

"The truth is," said Mr. Forester, laughing, "that I've been out with the keepers after poachers, and this," pointing to Marjory, "is the only one we've found."

"But what was she doing out by herself at this time of night?" asked the doctor.

Marjory said nothing. Her uncle looked at her, and Mr. Forester, thinking that he had better leave them together, passed on into the dining-room.

"I should like to know," said the doctor sternly.

Marjory, pale and tearful, remained silent.

"Did you go out to see after Brownie, or any of the animals?"

"No."

"Come, Marjory, I insist upon knowing the reason for this freak. The truth is, I have let you have too much liberty to come and go, and now you will not give an account of yourself."

Marjory raised her head, and looking at her uncle with fearless eyes, she said,—

"I would rather not tell you why I went, but I don't think you would be angry if you knew; it wasn't anything wrong."

Dr. Hunter looked steadily at his niece, but she did not flinch. There was a look in her eyes, half appeal, half defiant challenge, which reminded him of her father. Just so had he looked during their last stormy interview.

"Very well, my child; I believe you," said the doctor. He had never known Marjory to tell a lie, and he could trust her. Still, he could not help wondering what secret she was keeping from him.

He was turning away with a sigh, when suddenly he felt the girl's arms about his neck, and her wet cheek pressed to his. "Thank you, uncle dear," she murmured; "you are very good to me."

He returned the caress very heartily. Surely, indeed, if slowly, the better understanding was growing. They went into the dining-room to join Mr. Forester, the doctor's arm still round Marjory's waist.

"Smoothed it all over, eh?" asked Mr. Forester, smiling. "It's extraordinary the way the girls have of making their own tales good; isn't it, doctor? There's my Blanche now—she can simply twist me round her little finger, and make me say yes when I mean no, little beggar that she is," laughing.

"Blanche is a good girl, and so is Marjory," said the doctor.

"There now; didn't I say so? That young witch has simply made you think that to slip out on a dark night, get caught for a poacher, and then refuse to give any explanation, is the action of a pattern girl. Poor deluded old man!" And Mr. Forester shook his head and spread out his hands with a gesture of despair. "I tell you, these girls will make a fellow believe that the blackest of black is in reality the whitest of white, if only he will look at it in the right way—their way, of course."

"Don't you mind, Marjory; he's only teasing. We understand each other, don't we? Run away to bed and leave him to me. You have had an exciting day, and you must be tired and sleepy."

Marjory was tired, but she could not go to sleep. She was unable to forget that man and his trouble. What could it be? Then, too, there was Mrs. Shaw. She had learned to-day the cause of the stern expression in those dark eyes and of the sometimes bitter tongue. There must surely be a great deal of trouble in the world. Marjory was very sensitive to the pain of others; her heart went out at once to any one who was suffering; no matter who or where, she felt she must try to help them.

As she lay thinking about the stranger, a sudden light flashed across her brain. What if he were Mrs. Shaw's husband? He might have come just to see the place his wife lived in and the sort of people she worked for. Feeling sure that she would not forgive him, perhaps he would not try to see her, not knowing how her feelings towards him had changed. Marjory sat up in bed, her heart beating fast as in imagination she traced out this theory. The longer she thought about it the more sure she felt that it was the right one. It would explain the man's piteous grief and his bitter cry that nothing could ever help him. What was to be done?

It did not take her long to decide that she would go to Hillcrest village the next day, see the man, and boldly ask if he were Mr. Shaw; and then, if her theory proved correct, she would tell him what she knew—namely, that his wife had determined to write and ask him to come home. How she would love to play the good fairy to these people, and to see them happy after all their troubles!

Then her thoughts turned to her own affairs. She never ceased to long for her father, although her life was much brighter and happier than it used to be. Night and morning she prayed that he might be given to her. She would lie awake picturing their happy meeting, and sometimes the visions that she conjured up in the night were so lifelike that she would wake in the morning almost expecting them to prove realities. But the days and weeks went by, and nothing happened to bring any nearer that longed-for day when he should come.

Next morning Marjory signalled to Blanche that she would like to ride with her, and the answer came that she would be ready at eleven. Marjory asked Peter to saddle Brownie early, so that she would have time to go to Hillcrest before calling at Braeside.

Arrived at the village, she rode up to the post office, as being the most likely place at which to gain information with regard to a stranger, and asked the woman if she knew of any one lodging in Hillcrest. "Yes," was the reply; "there was a man staying at 'English Mary's' down the street."

Arrived at "English Mary's," Marjory made her inquiries.

"Yes, miss," replied the woman, "I did 'ave a lodger 'ere yesterday, but 'e up an' went this mornin' bright and early. Most respectable 'e seemed, miss; but 'e come in last night in a orful pickle, 'is clothes torn an' 'is face bleedin'; you never saw sich a sight as 'e was, miss. I was glad to get rid on 'im; the p'lice would 'ave bin the next thing, I s'pose. Paid 'is way though, 'e did, and 'e didn't make no bones about the bill."

"Did he leave his name and address?" asked Marjory, as soon as she could get in a word.

"Bless you, miss, I didn't want no address; the less I knows about 'im the better, strikes me. But 'is name was 'Iggs—so 'e said; but that might 'ave bin a *halibi*, for all I can tell—you do read sich things in the papers nowadays. Might I ask if you was wantin' any odd jobs done, miss? My old man's out o' work, an'—"

"Oh no, thank you," said Marjory, cutting the woman short; "I only wanted to inquire." And she turned Brownie's head in the direction of Braeside. "Good-morning. I'm much obliged to you."

Marjory was bitterly disappointed at the failure of her peacemaking mission, for she had set out almost certain of success. She wondered whether the man was really a bad character, and whether he had been set upon by the keepers, and so got his clothes torn. So it wasn't Mr. Shaw after all. It was very disappointing, and Marjory sighed. She smiled, however, as she thought over English Mary's voluble explanation and her queer language. The King would hardly recognize it as his.

Marjory found the study of the King's English very interesting. As Miss Waspé presented it to her, it was not contained in a lifeless grammar-book, the terror of many schoolgirls' lives, but it was a wonderful living medium of expression—a means by which she could translate her ideas and imaginings into musical phrases, and which enabled her to understand the spoken and written thoughts of others. Miss Waspé had a way of dressing up hard facts and tiresome rules in the most attractive clothing, and like the dog who unconsciously and gratefully swallows a pill in a succulent tit-bit, her pupil assimilated both with excellent results.

Blanche said to Marjory one day, "I *can't* think how you can like that horrid grammar. If I was a boy, or, according to *it*, *were* I a boy, I should call it a beastly grind; but as mother doesn't like me to use boys' words, I have to call it a horrid nuisance or some other tame thing like that. Anyway, I feel it is a b-e-a-s-t-l-y g-r-i-n-d, so there."

"I don't wonder your mother doesn't like you to use boys' words; you're much too pretty," replied Marjory. "They are far more suitable for me, because I am big and rough-looking, like a boy, and you are just like a piece of thin china—like that Dresden shepherdess in the drawing-room. You couldn't imagine her saying anything ugly."

"Why do you always make out that you're not pretty?" asked Blanche indignantly. "I think you're better than pretty, you're *grand*, with those great big stormy-looking eyes and your lovely wavy hair. I've never seen such long hair."

Marjory laughed. "And what about my wide mouth, and my long nose crooked at the point?"

"Well," admitted Blanche, "your mouth may be large, but it is a nice shape, and your lips are beautifully red, and your nose is really only a very tiny bit crooked; and so, Miss Marjory," triumphantly, "there's no reason at all why you should be allowed to use boys' words if I mustn't."

"I don't really know many; you see, I've hardly spoken to any boys except the Morisons."

"I knew lots in London."

"It does seem queer to think that you have lived in great big London and know all about it, while I have never been farther away than Morristown."

"Perhaps you'll come to London with us some day. Wouldn't it be fun? I wonder how you would feel."

Marjory thought over this conversation as she rode down the hill towards Braeside. She sometimes longed to go away and see something of that great world she had begun to realize of late. Her lessons were enlarging her ideas. Geography fired her imagination with its tales of far countries—their tropical beauty, or, it might be, their ice-bound grandeur, High mountains, terrible volcanoes, placid lakes, swift-flowing rivers—all these spoke to her of a wonderful world outside her own; and she longed to spread her wings and to fly out and away into its vastness. She often wondered how her uncle, who knew about all these things, could be content to stay year in and year out in one place, spending nearly all his time within the four walls of his own study, and her heart would go out to that unknown father of hers with his roving disposition; how well she could understand it! She would weave romances, with him as hero and herself as heroine—romances which always had the same happy ending; and then she would finish up by wondering if she would ever see him, and whether he would be the least bit like her pictures of him.

Marjory's thoughts wandered back to the man, and the mystery surrounding his appearance and disappearance. What did the woman mean by "*halibi*"? She supposed it must be a slang word, so it would be no use looking in a dictionary; perhaps it meant pretence.

She reached Braeside just as Blanche's pony was being taken round to the door by the groom, and to her surprise Alan Morison was there too, mounted on a horse which was rather too big for

him. He rode towards Marjory with a somewhat sheepish expression on his face.

"I say," he said, "I hope you don't mind my coming with you. I ran over this morning to see what you were going to do, and Blanche said I might come." And he looked doubtfully at Marjory.

"What Blanche says, I say," she replied heartily.

"Right you are, then." And Alan looked relieved.

Blanche soon came out, a trim little figure in her neat riding-habit. She called out "good-morning," and waved her hand to Mrs. Forester, who had come to see the start; but Marjory saw at once that there was something wrong—she even fancied that there were traces of recent tears on her friend's cheeks. Blanche in tears was a sight which put Marjory up in arms at once, and she was prepared to do instant battle with their cause, be it any person or any thing.

They started off in silence, after having agreed upon the direction of their ride, Marjory waiting for the explanation which she hoped would soon come, and furtively watching her friend. She was glad to see that the pale cheeks were gradually gaining colour from the exercise in the keen frosty air.

At last the explanation came.

"I say, isn't it perfectly horrid? Aunt Katharine and my cousin Maud are coming to stay. They've invited themselves because Uncle Hilary is away. They'll be here for Christmas; nothing will be a bit nice, and it'll spoil all our fun. They're coming the day after to-morrow. Mother says she is very sorry for me, but I mustn't be selfish. I don't like Maud much; she is older than we are, and she's a stuck-up thing," vehemently.

Here indeed was a blow. The three had planned many a happy day together, and this addition to the party seemed likely to be a disturbing one.

"How old is she?" asked Marjory.

"She's fifteen, but looks older."

"But will she want to come with us if she's as old as that?" suggested Alan.

"Oh yes, that's just what she likes—to come and lord it over other people, and have everything her way. Just because she's been on the Continent and been to theatres she thinks she knows everything. Aunt Katharine gives her anything she wants, and Maud makes other people do it too."

"How *devilish!*" said Alan emphatically.

"O Alan, don't swear," said Blanche, aghast.

"*That's* not swearing, bless you."

"I thought that anything about the devil was swearing."

"Oh no, I don't think so," put in Marjory. "Peter often talks about the 'deil,' and he's not a bad man."

"But somehow 'deil' doesn't sound as bad as devil," argued Blanche. "I think it is a horrid word; it frightens me."

"Very well, I won't say it again," said Alan consolingly. "But look here; we must make some plan of campaign as to our doings when this cousin of yours comes poking her beastly nose in. If there's anything I can do to annoy her, I'm your man. I'm a regular corker at all sorts of tricks, from apple-pie beds to booby traps. A little ragging sometimes takes all the side out of fellows at school, and it might work with her. Anyway I'm at your service, and it would be a good thing if we could turn her out a decent girl."

"We'll never do that," said Blanche decidedly.

"*We'll see,*" replied Alan, with a world of determination in his tone; and then they started off at such a gallop across the moor that all disagreeables were forgotten for the time being.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE OLD CHEST.

"What could be the wealth the casket held?...
Perhaps the red gold nestled there,
Loving and close as in the mine;

Or diamonds lit the sunless air,
Or rubies blushed like bridal wine.
Some giant gem, like that which bought
The half of a realm in Timour's day,
Might here, beyond temptation's thought,
Be hidden in safety; who could say?"

HENRY MORFORD.

Marjory obtained permission from her uncle to invite Blanche and Alan to spend the next day with her. It would be the last before the arrival of the unwished-for visitors, and they wanted to make the most of it. They decided to have a rat hunt in the morning, and in the afternoon Marjory intended to ask the doctor if they might try again to open the old chest. She thought Alan might be a help.

Marjory did not much like the idea of killing even a rat. She was not quite sure that it was right, but Peter had no such compunctions.

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"Vermin o' the land, an' mischeevius reptiles they are, an' the mair deid rats we see the morn's mornin' the better pleased Peter'll be," said the old man as they were planning the hunt.

Alan kept a ferret, which he offered to bring, and he thought he could borrow his brother Herbert's fox-terrier, which was a famous ratter.

"That's a' richt," agreed the old man. "An' I can get the loan o' anither dog frae the village, an' atween them a' they should create a bit disturbance among they lang-tailed rascals."

Alan looked at Marjory and grinned, remembering yesterday's conversation.

Poor Peter's heart had been sorely tried by the depredations of his long-tailed enemies. The hen-house, the barn, even the apple storehouse had been visited by them with disastrous results, so he rejoiced at the prospect of the coming conflict. The next morning, a stout stick in his hand and war in his eye, he stood awaiting the arrival of the party. Silky had been tied up, so that the ratters might have a clear field for action.

Marjory went down the hill to meet Blanche, and they arrived upon the scene just as Alan, punctual to the appointed time, came up with his ferret in a small bag, and his brother's dog, Jock, on a leash.

"He's awfully keen," Alan explained. "He only had half his usual last night, and nothing this morning; so I put him on the leash in case he might go tearing off after some rabbit, and I couldn't get him back again."

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There was some hitch about getting the other dog; it could not be found when the time came. Alan was secretly pleased that Jock should have to fight single-handed, for then all the honour and glory would fall to his share.

As for Jock, he was indeed keen. He seemed to know that there was excitement in store for him, and he was pulling and straining at the leash, jumping up and down, and giving little short yelps and barks.

"We'll try the barn first," ordered Peter, the commander-in-chief.

Alan handed Jock over to Marjory, and they went to the barn as directed. Alan put his ferret into a well-used hole.

"Let go!" he shouted to Marjory.

Jock was let loose, and the fun began. It was a most exciting time—scratching, scrambling, racing, leaping. In and out of barns and outbuildings went Jock, his heart in his work. The ferret, too, did his duty quite nobly. The spectators, waving their sticks and shouting encouragement, ran and scrambled too.

Old Peter, capless, his hair and beard streaming in the wind, danced and capered like a boy whenever Jock appeared victoriously shaking a rat between his teeth. The girls, too, kept in the thick of the fight, Marjory forgetting all her doubts in the excitement of the moment.

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One very large rat gave Jock a great deal of trouble. In and out of the barn it went, Jock in full cry after it, through the hen-run, scattering the flustered fowls screeching in all directions, round and round the yard it leaped rather than ran. At last it ran up the side of a large empty barrel and went over the edge in a second. Quick as thought Jock sprang after it; then came a terrific scrambling and scratching, a vicious scream from the rat, a yelp of pain from Jock, and, last, a moment's silence before the scrambling was renewed. They all went and peeped over the edge of the barrel, and there was Jock with the big rat in his mouth, making frantic efforts to scale the sides of his prison.

"Well done," shouted Alan in delight. "Isn't he a game little beast?" And he stretched over the top to give Jock a lift.

In his efforts to reach the dog he overbalanced, the barrel tipped over and rolled from side to side, and for a few minutes all that could be seen was a kicking tangle of boy, dog, and rat, for Jock would not let go his prey.

Peter stood shouting with laughter, holding his sides, and quite helpless, and the two girls were much in the same condition. Marjory was just trying as best she could to stop the barrel rolling and to help Alan out of it, though she was so weak with laughing that her hands seemed to have no strength in them, when the doctor's voice said, "Come, children, didn't you hear the dinner-bell?"

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They all, including Peter, straightened up as if by magic. Dinner already! They had never given it a thought. They stood irresolute, a queer-looking company, while Jock glanced around the group, as much as to say, "What's the matter with you all? Just look at my lovely rat."

The doctor stood leaning on his stick, contemplating his guests. Alan was the worst. His face was scratched, and blood and dust together had streaked it in a most unbecoming way; his clothes were torn, his cap was gone, and his never very tidy hair stood in a shock above his forehead. The girls, too, showed unmistakable signs of the fray. Their hair ribbons were gone, wisps of straw and hay were sticking to their clothes, and their cheeks were scarlet with exercise and excitement. Even Jock had one eye bunged up, but he was the coolest and most unconcerned of the party. He saved the situation by trotting across to the doctor, laying the rat at his feet, and then looking up at him with his only available eye, as if for approval.

The doctor could not resist this appeal. He stooped and patted the dog, saying kindly, "Well done, little man." And then turning to the children, "Now then, you three graces, be off with you. Go and wash yourselves clean, if you can, and don't keep me waiting any longer for my dinner. A hungry man's an angry man, you know." And he sent them off with a flourish of his stick.

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When they came to the dining-room the change in their appearance caused the doctor's eyes to twinkle, but he made no remark. Alan's face positively shone with soap, for though the application of it had made his many scratches smart, he had manfully persisted in the most vigorous cleansing operations. He had soaked his hair with water to make it lie down, but there was one lock in the region of the crown of his head which had refused to accept his ministrations. The girls, too, had smoothed their hair, brushed their clothes, and composed their countenances. All three looked as solemn as judges as they took their seats.

Marjory was afraid that their unpunctuality boded ill for the chance of getting the doctor's consent to their trying to open the old chest. They sat demurely, taking their soup in silence. After a little while sounds were heard like the fizzling of ginger beer in hot weather, and at last Blanche burst into a peal of laughter. Marjory looked anxiously at Dr. Hunter to see what he thought of this disturbance, but to her relief and surprise he was laughing too. Really her Uncle George was getting much nicer than he used to be, she thought.

"Well, Blanche, what's the joke?" he asked.

As soon as she could speak she replied,—

"It's Alan; he does look so *dreadfully* funny—one bit of hair sticking up, and the rest all plastered so smooth and meek-looking, and his face—oh dear!" And she laughed again. "I'm sure he was never meant to look so solemn."

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Alan instinctively put up his hand to try to persuade the offending lock of hair to keep its proper place, but as soon as he took away his hand up jumped the hair again. He blushed deeply, realizing that the attention of the party, and especially of the doctor, who, to him, was a most awesome personage, was fixed upon himself; but in the end he joined in the laugh against his appearance as heartily as the rest.

Thus the ice was broken, and conversation began to flow, soon developing into a graphic account of the rat hunt.

"I saw Peter careering about like a youngster," said the doctor, laughing. "He'll be sorry enough to-morrow when he's as stiff as a board, but I believe he enjoyed the fun as much as any of you." And he laughed again.

Marjory thought that this would be a good opportunity for her to make her request.

"May we try again to open the chest, please, uncle?" she asked.

"What chest, child?"

"Why, the oak chest in the old wing. We do so want to see what's in it."

"Nonsense, Marjory. I tell you it has been there ever since I can remember, and there's nothing in it as far as I know." Seeing the disappointment in the young people's faces as he said this, he relented, saying, "Well, well, I suppose I must let you have your way. You may try if you like, but I won't have you using any tools. It's a fine old piece of wood, and I don't want it spoiled."

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They readily promised not to do any harm to the box, and as soon as dinner was over they hurried off to the old part of the house, Alan feeling rather flattered by Marjory's suggestion that he might be able to find some way of opening the chest.

There was no sign of any lock except the one in front, which they had tried before, and in which none of the keys would turn. The lid fitted firmly and smoothly, and so tightly that its joining with the box was hardly visible. It was a magnificent specimen of cabinet work.

"Of course it may have a spring," said Marjory, "if only we knew where to find it."

At this suggestion they all set to work to push and thump and press, but as before their efforts were of no avail.

Marjory wondered to herself whether the same ingenious person who had contrived the secret door upstairs might have made this box.

"Suppose we turn it round, and see what the hinges look like," said Alan.

They managed to drag it out from the wall, bringing with it masses of black cobwebs and the dust of many years.

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Alan's idea was a good one; but there were no hinges to be seen.

"I believe the lock and the hasps are nothing but false ones to put people off the scent," said Alan. "What a beastly mess," rubbing the cobwebs off his hands on to his knickerbockers. "I believe this is a puzzle chest, and it opens in some secret way like Mrs. Shaw's box. We're having quite a run of secrets."

How Blanche longed to tell Alan of the room upstairs! It was all she could do to prevent herself from speaking of it.

Hot and breathless from their efforts in moving the box, the three sat down to rest and to consult as to their next attempt.

"I don't believe there is a lock at all," Alan repeated, and he began once more to examine the lid of the chest. After some little time he suddenly exclaimed, "I believe I've got it; look here!" He showed the girls that the construction of the lid at two of the corners was slightly different from the other two. "It's something to do with these corners, I'll be bound," he cried excitedly. "Here it comes!"

The girls looked on with intense interest. The big brass nails at the two corners came out, it seemed, and one side of the lid came right off. The row of nails all round the rest of it were long enough to go through the depth of it, and they fitted into corresponding holes in the box itself, so that once the one side was undone the whole thing simply lifted off. It was a most ingenious contrivance, and calculated to baffle even the most clever and curious person.

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The girls danced with excitement when they saw that, far from being empty, the trunk had all sorts of things in it. They had been very neatly and carefully packed amongst layers of paper. First came some dresses, amongst them a lilac-flowered muslin, which Marjory recognized as the very one which her great-grandmother Hunter wore in the big picture which hung in the drawing-room. It had probably been kept for that reason. The dress did not seem to have suffered very much from its long imprisonment. The ground of it had turned yellow, but the lilac flowers were as fresh as ever. It was made entirely by hand, and it had a very short-waisted bodice and a frilled skirt. Rolled up with it was a pair of silk stockings and some dainty satin shoes, all yellow with age.

With a feeling of awe the girls unfolded these treasures of a bygone day, as if they feared lest the owners of them might rise up and forbid them to go on.

"Fancy uncle never knowing that all these lovely things were here!" cried Marjory. "Oh, what's this?" as she lifted out a bundle wrapped in linen.

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"I believe it's somebody's wedding-dress," said Blanche, as she helped to undo the wrappings.

It was a wedding dress, and there was a veil with it, and a wreath of myrtle. Fastened to the wreath with white ribbon was a lace-edged paper, with the following words written on it in a fine Italian hand, "Alison Grant married John Hunter, October 15, 1843."

"That's my grandmother," said Marjory. "Uncle George says she was very beautiful and very good. I expect she must have put all these things here. It seems funny, though, that she put her wedding dress away when it was quite fresh; it doesn't look as if it had been worn."

"Perhaps she meant to keep it for her daughter," suggested Blanche. "Old-fashioned people used to do that. My mother didn't. She wore hers when she went to parties, and then had it dyed and made into a petticoat!"

"My mother was the only girl of the family who lived to grow up, and grandmother died when she was a little girl, so of course nobody knew about the dress being here."

Alan was more interested in the next find, which was a complete court suit—silk stockings, buckled shoes, and all. Then came an old uniform, moth-eaten long before Dame Alison's careful hands had folded it away. Its gold lace was tarnished almost beyond recognition, and on it was a label written in the same delicate handwriting, "Worn by General James Hunter at the battle of Waterloo, June 18, 1815, where he was mortally wounded."

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"Isn't it ripping?" exclaimed Alan. "I should have liked to see the old chap who wore this."

At the bottom of the chest were some fencing-sticks, a couple of old pistols, a box with some tarnished medals once the pride of a soldier's heart, a bundle of letters, and, last of all, a worn portfolio tied with ribbon; and inside was written, in the handwriting of Alison Hunter, Marjory's grandmother, "Chronicles of the Hunter family." She had evidently meant to arrange them in book form some day. There were old letters, newspaper cuttings, and a genealogical tree traced

in the same fine hand. Inside the sheet of paper containing this there was another paper which appeared to have verses of some sort written on it. The light was growing dim, and Marjory could hardly decipher the words, "Copied from the County Records at Corrisdale Castle, through the kindness of Sir Alexander Reid, being ancient prophecies concerning the Hunter family."

Here indeed was a find. This piece of paper appealed more to Marjory's imagination than did the dresses or even the uniform. What a pity it was getting so dark! It must be near tea-time, and they must put away the things. They did so very reluctantly, laying them all back as they had found them, with the exception of the portfolio, which Marjory determined to carry off to her bedroom, where she could read its contents at her leisure. Alan showed her how to fix the lid of the box on again, and exactly how to undo the nails in order to take it off. Regretfully they left their treasure trove and went to tea.

Dr. Hunter did not appear until Mr. Forester came to fetch Blanche; but when he did come he was overwhelmed by excited descriptions of the wonders that had been found in the old chest.

As he and Blanche were leaving, Mr. Forester remarked, "Our fellows had a bit of a brush with a man the other night," with a meaning look at Marjory; "but he managed to give them the slip somehow, and made off, the thieving rascal."

Marjory coloured, but said nothing, and the doctor remarked cheerfully, "Well, well, he'll live to fight another day."

"Yes, and to poach too," said Mr. Forester good-humouredly. "I begin to think that Hunters' Brae favours these fellows," he called over his shoulder as he left the house with Blanche and Alan.

"Perhaps he's right—eh, Marjory?" asked the doctor in a bantering tone as he shut the door.

"He *wasn't* a poacher," declared Marjory stoutly; and then, realizing what a slip she had made, she bit her lip and coloured again.

"Oh, ho! then there *was* a man," said her uncle quickly. "The cat's out of the bag now. Ah, Marjory, there's no mistaking you for anything but a Hunter; it's in the blood, my dear. Good-night." And he went laughing to his study.

Marjory was very grateful to her uncle for his trust in her with regard to her escapade, and felt much relieved that even to-night, when the subject was revived by Mr. Forester, he had not questioned her. It made her feel that she could never wish to deceive him or to abuse his confidence.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE PROPHECIES.

"According to Fates and Destinies and such odd sayings."

SHAKESPEARE.

Marjory went to bed with a glow of happiness in her heart. Her uncle had called her a true Hunter. How often had she brooded over those looks of hers, which could not be said to resemble in any feature those of the Hunters whose portraits hung on the walls of the old house! How many times had she wished herself a boy who could carry out the traditions of the family! Foolish troubles these were, no doubt, but they were real enough to the lonely child, living with her own fancies for company. True, she had not thought about them so much of late; but although they were not uppermost in her mind, they were still there. And now those words of the doctor's brought comfort for the memory of many a lonely wakeful hour, when Marjory should have been sleeping the untroubled sleep of childhood. A true Hunter!—in spite of that unknown father, perhaps long dead; in spite of her ignorance; in spite of her looks. A true Hunter! How her heart thrilled at the words!

Fired with these thoughts, she took out the old portfolio and began to read the copy of the prophecies about her family. As she sat alone with these old-time records, the candlelight flickering on their pages, she felt almost as if she were in the presence of these ancestors of hers.

She found her grandmother's writing rather difficult to read, it was so fine and delicate, and time had faded the ink to a pale gray.

As for the old prophecies, they were nothing but a set of doggerel verses which any sensible person would probably have laughed at, but they were made serious and impressive to Marjory by the fact that her grandmother had thought it worth while to copy them, and had made notes of her own as to the fulfilment of their predictions.

With great difficulty Marjory deciphered the following lines:—

"Come list to me, who'er ye be,
Who care for sayings true,
For, sooth to say, me trust ye may—
Prophesy these things I do:

"Since days of old the Hunters bold
Upon the muir held sway;
The Hunters' line shall ne'er decline
Till the muir doth pass away.

"By land and sea these brave men free
Their king shall nobly serve;
Their blood shall flow, their riches go
For the sovereign's cause they love.

"When bright days shine, the Stuart line
Shall hold these Hunters dear.
Should storms befall, a Hunter shall
Take his death-blow without fear.

"*N.B.*—Fulfilled after the battle of Culloden in 1746, when Colonel George Hunter was executed for his devotion to the cause of the Young Pretender.

"In Church and State these Hunters great
A foremost place shall take;
With words as bold as theirs of old,
They shall speak for conscience' sake.

"*N.B.*—Probably refers to speeches made by Alexander Hunter in the House of Commons against the taxation of the Colonies, in 1765, and to the Reverend John Hunter, a famous divine who lived in the reign of George the Second.

"Should Hunter of this noble race
Pride of his house forget,
Ancestors grim shall punish him,
Till his fault he doth regret.

"*N.B.*—Perhaps this refers to that James Hunter who, through his reckless extravagance, sank deeply into debt, and was confined for many months in the old Canongate Tolbooth in the city of Edinburgh, during the reign of George the Third. His debts were paid by his elder brother, who sold a great part of his property for that purpose—notably that portion of his lands to the south of the loch, and that on which the mansion of the Murray family now stands."

"Fancy that!" said Marjory to herself. "I never knew that all that land once belonged to us. No wonder if the ancestors did punish James; they wouldn't like to see their property disappearing."

Then came a verse which caused the girl's heart to beat fast and her face to flush:—

"The ladies fine of Hunter line
Are fair as fair can be.
Should tresses dark a maiden mark,
Her beloved must cross the sea."

A note followed:—

"It is a curious thing that among all the written descriptions and the paintings at my disposal I can find no record of a dark-haired daughter of the house; fair hair and blue eyes are the rule.—A. H."

It is easy to see that any one of these so-called predictions was more than likely to be fulfilled under any circumstances, and that very probably the whole thing was written in the first place as a joke. Moreover, Marjory was not a Hunter by name, being the child of a daughter of the house and not of a son. Still, she took this saying to mean herself: she, Marjory Davidson, and no other, must be the dark-haired maiden whose beloved must cross the sea. It must mean that, sooner or later, her father would come to her across the sea.

It was little wonder, then, that she tossed and turned upon her pillow that night, and that, when at last she did fall asleep, her dreams were a confused mixture—rats flying from a terrier of impossible size, shadowy processions of ancestors in their picture-frames, and a long row of ladies with flaxen locks pointing at her and calling to her, "Tresses dark a maiden mark."

Next morning, full of enthusiasm, she showed her uncle the portfolio, directing his attention to the copied verses. Contrary to all her expectations, he only laughed at them, and made no remark about the dark-haired maiden. It was not that he did not notice that particular verse, but he did not wish Marjory to think that there was any reason why she should apply it to herself, and he did not wish her head to be filled with romantic nonsense. So he took away the portfolio, much to Marjory's disgust, for she had looked forward to showing it to Blanche and Alan. Still, she had a good memory, and could repeat every word of it by heart, and was not likely to forget it.

The words repeated themselves over and over again in her head. She could not get rid of them, or of the thoughts and fancies to which they gave rise.

Marjory did not see the Braeside visitors till the Sunday morning, when they met in the churchyard. Mrs. Hilary Forester was a very grand personage, but looked good-natured. Her daughter Maud, whom she considered to be little short of an angel, certainly did not look like one just then. Something must have put her out that morning, for the look she gave Marjory as the introductions were made was not by any means calculated to make a good impression upon that young person, already predisposed to dislike the new arrival. 207

Marjory saw the eyes of mother and daughter travel over her person from head to foot—or rather, as she expressed it to herself, from hat to shoes—and she felt as if that cold scrutiny would shrivel her up. She herself, although she did not stare, quickly took in the details of Mrs. Hilary Forester's very fashionable attire. She had never seen anything like it in Heathermuir before. The ladies at Morristown always seemed to her to be very grandly dressed, but nothing like this.

"I wonder if she is at all religious," was Marjory's mental comment. To her mind, a display of finery was not compatible with what she called religion.

Then her eyes fell upon Blanche's mother. She too was richly dressed, but Marjory knew without being told that her clothes were in much better taste than those of her visitor. Still, Marjory had never looked upon Mrs. Forester as very religious; for the child had somehow come to understand the word as being synonymous with sour looks, long faces, unattractive clothes, and disapproval of most pleasant things. Mrs. Forester was sweet and good and kind, and much nicer than any of the people whom Lisbeth had pointed out to her as "releegious."

Marjory had yet to learn that religion is a life, not a profession; that in its reality it is a wellspring of cheerfulness, of love and charity for others, of praise and thanksgiving—a life which, instead of holding itself aloof from the world as a wicked place, lives in it, works for its good, believing that nothing which God has created can be altogether wicked. Mrs. Forester and Miss Waspe were gradually suggesting these new ideas to the girl, more perhaps by example than by precept. 208

Marjory followed Miss Maud into church. She did not much like the look of her, she decided. Waspy had said one must never judge hastily of people, but she did not feel that she was going to like this girl; even her back view looked stuck-up!

It really did; for Maud could never forget that she was Miss Hilary Forester, and she gave a self-satisfied little waggle to her skirts as she walked, which said very plainly, "Look at me! Don't I strike you as being more attractive than most girls?"

This attitude on Maud's part was hardly to be wondered at, seeing that she had been spoiled and petted all her life. Everything that she said and did was extravagantly praised by her adoring mother, and she had grown up with exaggerated ideas of her cleverness, her looks, and her own importance. What wonder, then, that the poor child held her head high and waggled her skirts? But Marjory knew nothing of these causes, and, seeing only their effects, her feelings towards the newcomer had not softened at all by the time church was over.

The three girls walked together as far as the turning to Braeside, and conversation flagged considerably. 209

"Are there many parties here at Christmas?" asked Maud.

"I don't know," replied Blanche.—"Are there, Marjory?"

"Not that I know of."

"What a dead-and-alive place to live in!" exclaimed Maud.

"It isn't!" said Blanche, firing up.

"Don't be so touchy, Blanche," said her cousin. "You don't seem to be at all improved since I saw you."

Just then Silky, who had been sitting by the milestone as usual, watching for his mistress, bounded forward to meet her, jumping and barking round her with every sign of delight. In so doing he brushed against Maud, and she was not at all pleased.

"What a horrid, rough dog!" she cried. "Do send him off, one of you! I hate a great lumbering beast like that!"

"He isn't either horrid or rough," said Marjory indignantly, "but I think I'd better go. Good-bye, Miss Hilary Forester.—Good-bye, Blanche.—Come, Silky darling." And she walked on.

Maud laughed. "'Love me, love my dog,'" she quoted loudly, so that Marjory might hear. And then to Blanche, "This friend you talk so much about seems to be somewhat of a savage. I shall try to tame her, though, for I rather like the look of her." 210

Marjory marched on, very indignant. It was hateful, she thought, that this outsider, with her

smart frocks and her superior ways, should come and spoil their good time. She allowed herself to think very hardly of Maud, although Miss Waspe's warning against hasty judgments came into her mind more than once.

Marjory walked on, forgetting to look behind to see if her uncle were coming. Some one called suddenly, "Miss Marjory!" She turned quickly, and saw that Mary Ann Smylie was trying to catch up with her; so she slackened her pace, and waited for her old enemy, wondering what she might want.

Mary Ann, still self-conscious, still overdressed, nevertheless showed a difference in her manner to Marjory.

"I only wanted to tell you something I thought you would like to know," she said, panting after her quick walk.

"What is it?" asked Marjory, curious to know what this something might be.

"Mother told me that your uncle had sent a letter to foreign parts; she wouldn't say who to, because she's not supposed to tell anything about post-office business, you know. It was last Thursday, when she was stamping the letters for the evening mail, suddenly she said 'Hallo!' very surprised like. When I asked her what it was, she said, 'Hunter's Marjory would like to see this,' but she wouldn't tell me any more except that it was a foreign letter. It must have been to your father, I believe, though I always thought he must be dead. Of course, I don't know for certain that it was to him, only I thought I'd tell you about it." And Mary Ann looked at Marjory with a deprecating little smile, as much as to say, "I am trying to make amends for what I once said to you."

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Marjory thanked her, and then, remembering her uncle, she said that she must wait for him.

"In that case," remarked Mary Ann, "I'll be off; he gives me the shivers. Mind you, I don't know for certain about that letter; I only think," she called back.

Marjory had plenty to think about as she sauntered back in the direction of the church to meet her uncle. Could it possibly be that he had heard something of her father? If so, how very unkind not to tell her. She had a right to know; she *would* know; and she worked herself into a very excited state.

When her uncle joined her, she gave very short replies to his questions and remarks, and at last she burst out, "Uncle, do you know anything about my father?" in a very peremptory tone.

The doctor started. "My dear child," he said testily, "haven't I told you over and over again that I have not heard one single word from your father since I wrote and told him of your mother's death? I do not know whether he is alive or dead, but I know this—he is dead to you." And his voice rose with passion. Then, after a pause, he said rather sadly, "Can't you be content, Marjory? Have I not done my best for you? I had hoped that you were happier lately."

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Marjory was touched by the feeling in his voice. "So I am, uncle, much happier; but I can't help thinking and wondering about things sometimes," she said wistfully. "No one can be exactly like a real father and mother—at least, not quite," she added quickly, fearing to wound her uncle afresh.

They finished their walk in silence, each busy with thoughts which, could they have read each other's minds, would have filled them with astonishment. The little storm blew over as other storms had done, but Marjory could not forget what Mary Ann had told her about the letter.

Next day, when she went to Braeside, Marjory spent rather a painful quarter of an hour with Mrs. Hilary Forester. Blanche and Maud had gone out for a walk, and Marjory was shown into the morning-room to wait for them. There she found the lady, sitting in a capacious armchair by the fire, toasting her feet upon the fender, displaying elaborately-embroidered stockings and many rustling frills.

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"Good-morning, Mrs. Forester," said Marjory shyly.

"Mrs. *Hilary* Forester, dear child," amended the lady. "Blanche's mother is *Mrs.* Forester, having married the eldest son, and one must be exact, you know."

"I beg your pardon," said Marjory, covered with confusion.

Blanche's Aunt Katharine looked at her critically. "I suppose your mother plaits your hair in that pigtail to save trouble, but they are not worn in town, you know."

"My mother is dead," said Marjory stolidly.

"Dear, dear, yes, of course, now I remember Rose—that's Mrs. Forester, you know—Rose did say something to that effect, but my memory fails me so often; it is a great affliction. Well, it's a good thing your poor father has you left to comfort him. My darling Maud is my one comfort, I'm sure, while her father is away in those dreadful foreign places. Perhaps I spoil her a little," complacently; "but then I dare say," playfully, "that your father spoils you."

"I haven't got a father either," said poor Marjory dully.

Mrs. Hilary carefully adjusted her gold-rimmed eyeglasses, and looked at Marjory over the top of

them.

"Well, to be sure, I certainly understood—at least I thought—but there, my memory does fail me at times; still, I was certainly under the impression that your father was Dr. Hunter—the great Dr. Hunter."

"No, he is my uncle; my name is Davidson," explained Marjory.

"Oh yes, yes, to be sure, now I come to think of it, Rose did say something about it, and I remember wondering whether you belonged to *the* Davidsons, you know."

"I don't know," said Marjory doubtfully, wishing that Blanche and Maud would come to her rescue.

"I must look it up for you, dear child. It is such a comfort to know that one belongs to *the* branch of a family, you know. As I tell Maud, it makes all the difference to a young girl in these days when mere money, that root of all evil, is so much thought of; not but that it is a comfort too, in its way—in its way," she continued thoughtfully; "but at this time of year one ought to think of doing little kindnesses, leaving money out of the question—I mean we should not let it be our sole comfort at such a time, you understand."

Marjory did not understand, and as she did not know what to reply to this harangue, she said nothing. But silence did not suit Mrs. Hilary.

"You are very quiet for a girl of your age," she said. "Now my Maud has a continual flow of merry chatter, and I encourage the darling. I think it is so nice for a young girl to have plenty to say, and to have her own little opinions about things. For instance, Maudie chooses all her own hats and frocks, and decides what we shall do and where we shall go. It is perfectly delightful for me, and saves me so much thought and worry; I suffer so with my bad memory, you know. Come now, can't you chat to me? Any little village gossip or small happenings at home?" ("atome," as she pronounced it). "No? Well, dear me, what was it that darling Maud said about you? I know she said something, but my memory is *such* a trial. Oh yes, there was something about a dog; and you called Maud a savage, and she rather liked you for it. Dear child, she has such a sweet, forgiving nature."

"I never called her a savage," protested Marjory. "I—"

At that moment Blanche and Maud came bursting into the room.

"What's that about calling names?" cried Maud. "I called *her* a savage," nodding at Marjory, "but I didn't mean any harm, and you've got it all mixed up, you dear darling old muddle-head of a mother." And she rushed upon Mrs. Hilary and hugged her until the poor lady had no breath left with which to protest.

Marjory looked on in wonder. When Maud had done with her mother she turned to Marjory.

"Now, *don't* look at me like that," she said plaintively; "you're going to like me in the end; I'm going to make you. I know just exactly what you're thinking—that I'm a horrid, stuck-up, thoroughly spoilt and disagreeable girl. So I am; but I'm all right when you know me, though you've got to know me first, as the song says. True, I don't like dogs—nasty lumbering things that spoil one's best clothes; but that's not a crime—it's an opinion. I always have my own way, everybody gives in to me, and so long as I can 'boss the show,' as our American cousins say, I can be quite charming. Now you look as if you liked bossing shows yourself, Miss Marjory—people with long noses always do; so one of us will have to give in. I wonder which it will be. But I must have you like me; I am perfectly miserable if people aren't fond of me." And she looked at Marjory with a comic yet pathetic appeal in her eyes.

"Dear Maudie has such quaint little sayings," said her mother. "I don't know how she can remember them all."

"Well, which is it to be?" demanded Maud, dramatically striking an attitude. "Is it peace or war?"

"Oh, peace, I suppose," replied Marjory, laughing; and then as an afterthought—"for the present."

This girl with her airs and graces and her comical ways was something quite new to Marjory, and she stood contemplating this wonderful and puzzling creature, when the creature suddenly seized her round the waist, waltzing out of the room with her, and calling Blanche to come too.

"Darling Maud has such wonderfully high spirits," murmured Mrs. Hilary to the empty air. She had probably forgotten that there was no one left in the room.

CHAPTER XV.

TWELFTH NIGHT.

"And hopes, perfumed and bright,
So lately shining wet with dew and tears,
Trembling in the morning light—
I saw them change to dark and anxious fears
Before the night!"—ADELAIDE PROCTER.

Blanche had told her cousin something of Marjory's history, and Maud was prepared to be much interested in her, for her life had been so unusual, so different from that of ordinary girls.

"I've never met anybody just like you," she said to Marjory as they walked across the park, "and I want to know all about you and your belongings, and above all, I ache to find out what is in that forbidden room, and why you mustn't go into it."

This was a sore subject with Marjory. She felt more than half ashamed of her uncle's eccentricity in this matter.

"I don't think there is anything in it except my mother's things," she replied. "Everything that belonged to her is there, except this chain with the locket and coin on it that she said she wanted me to have and to wear always. Lisbeth says I used to wear it when I was a tiny baby." And she pulled the chain outside her coat to show it to Maud. 219

"Oh, how sweet!" cried Maud as she opened the locket and saw the face of Marjory's mother. "How I wish you'd got her now!" impulsively squeezing Marjory's arm. "And what's this?" looking at the other trinket which hung on the chain.

"It's the half of a coin with a hole bored through it."

"So it is. And look, there's one-half of the date on it—87. Let's see. This is 1902. That's" (and she counted rapidly on her fingers, contrary to all approved systems of mental arithmetic) "fifteen years ago—before you were born, and of course the very year I was born. It was the Queen's Jubilee year, and that's why I was called Victoria—Maud Victoria my name is. Think it's pretty?" she asked, with her head coquettishly on one side.

"I like Maud," said Marjory. "Victoria sounds rather too grand for an ordinary person."

"But I'm not an ordinary person. Well, don't mind me; let's think about this coin. The question is, Where's the other half? Somebody must have got it. More mystery. Why, Marjory, you are like a girl in a book where all sorts of impossible things can happen. *I'm* going to write a book some day—from a girl's point of view—and I intend to make all parents and guardians and governesses, *et cetera*, sit up. Why should boys have everything jolly, while girls are made to be so prim and proper? Read a boys' book and you will find it full of fun and adventures and excitement, but girls are supposed to care about nothing but wish-wash, about self-denial and being good, and all that. Course I know we ought to try to be good, keep our promises, and never do mean things, or tell stories; every decent girl tries; but we don't want it continually poked down our throats till we're sick of it. My theory is that girls ought to have just as good a time all round as boys, if not a better." And the irrepressible Maud laughed merrily. 220

"Here comes Alan," said Blanche, secretly wondering what he would think of the visitor. When she heard the announcement, Maud gave a tilt to her hat and a toss to her hair, which she wore hanging, as if to prepare herself for an encounter.

Alan approached the girls rather shyly, introductions were made, and after a little consultation Maud decided that they would make an expedition to the pond. Strange to say, by the time the pond was reached, Alan had dismissed all thoughts of booby traps and apple-pie beds, for Miss Maud had quite won him over by her expressions of opinion upon things in general and upon boys in particular. He felt that it was more than possible, without loss of dignity, to "chum up" with such a girl. The only thing he did not like about her was the way she waggled her skirts, and he decided that some one ought to tell her not to do it, although he would have hesitated long had such a task devolved upon himself. 221

So the Triple Alliance became a quadruple one, and on the whole things went well with its members. It must be admitted that Marjory understood Maud much better than did her cousin Blanche. Blanche was an unimaginative, rather matter-of-fact little person, and was apt to take all Maud's sayings literally. For instance, when her cousin said, as she often did, "Don't I look sweet in this dress?" or "this hat?" as the case might be, Blanche would think her vain and conceited, and feel ashamed of her, whereas Marjory would know at once that it was only Maud's fun, and would laugh at these sayings of hers.

As the days went by, Marjory found herself really liking this bright, merry girl with all her airs and nonsense. She noticed her devotion to her mother, and saw that in spite of her talk about always taking her own way, she very seldom did anything that was really in opposition to her mother's wishes. True, she laughed at her indulgent muddle-headed parent; but though it shocked poor Blanche's ideas of what was fitting, this laughter was nothing more than affectionate raillery and a sign in itself of the excellent understanding which existed between mother and daughter. "Mamma does forget so," she would say. "Papa says sometimes he believes she forgets that he ever existed." 222

To Dr. Hunter, Maud was an entirely new phenomenon, and he studied her with curiosity. He had not been much better pleased than the children when he heard of the expected visitors, for he still wished to keep Marjory away from strangers if possible; but he had not the heart to separate

her from her friend at Christmas time, and so he allowed her to go to Braeside just as usual.

Maud conquered the doctor as she had conquered Alan. For calm self-assurance, irrepressible spirits, and undoubted charm he thought he had never seen her equal, and, compared with the girl of his former experience, seemed an inhabitant of another world.

Mrs. Hilary, too, was quite a new specimen of womanhood to him, good-natured incapacity personified, as she was. Sometimes, when she made some more than usually foolish remark, the doctor would catch Maud's eye, and they would enjoy the joke together. Then he would rebuke himself and inform himself that it was altogether out of order that he should countenance such disrespect, and, what was worse, that he should thoroughly enjoy the fun himself.

On Christmas evening, when he was first introduced to Mrs. Hilary, he was quite bewildered by the vagueness of her conversation. Endeavouring to make himself agreeable, he began to make inquiries as to the whereabouts of Mr. Hilary Forester, who was travelling abroad.

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"Well, I had a letter from him two days ago," she replied, "from Texas, or Mexico—those foreign names are so alike, and I never was good at geography, and the letters take such a long time to come that by the time they get here the place is different—I mean, he has gone somewhere else, so that I really never know exactly where he is." The doctor murmured something sympathetic, and Mrs. Hilary continued, "I hope Texas or Mexico, which ever it is, is a British possession. I always feel safer about Hilary when he is under his own country's protection, for one never knows what foreigners are going to do, there are such dreadful stories in the papers nowadays." And she beamed upon the bewildered man of science. "And then there's the climate, too, to be considered," she went on; "some of these foreign places have their winter while we have summer, or is it the other way round? I never know, it is so dreadfully confusing, especially to me with my bad memory; perhaps it is that they have summer while we have winter, but anyway I think the English arrangement is much to be preferred. I am a good Conservative, you know; besides, I think it is so charming to love one's own country, and all that. By the way, about that letter.—Maudie darling," she called to her daughter, "just go and fetch me daddy's last letter; it's the top one on the left-hand side of where the papers are—not the bill side, darling, but the other one. You'll find it at the back, under my handkerchief satchet; and mind, dearest, that you don't crush my lace collar; it's just been cleaned—if it's there."

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To the doctor's astonishment Maud went off obediently. Mrs. Hilary's instructions had conveyed nothing to him.

"It is so much better to decide things at once," said that lady, with a charming smile. "I shall feel quite worried now till I know whether Hilary is in Mexico or Texas—at least, when the letter was written; one can't expect to know where he is now," with a sigh. "I was so hoping that the new postmaster-general might make some better arrangement; but I dare say he is much worried, poor man, so we must hope and trust for the best."

Maud returned with the letter, and the question was settled. Mr. Hilary Forester had written from Galveston, Texas, and his wife was relieved when the others laughingly assured her that he was not amongst savages or wild beasts, and that the arrangement of the seasons was much the same as in England.

There was to be a real party at Braeside on Twelfth Night. All the young people of the neighbourhood had been invited, and after much persuasion on Mrs. Forester's part, the doctor had consented to let Marjory go. She looked forward to it with much pleasure, for she felt that with Blanche, Maud, and Alan as allies she could face the strangers with confidence. Mrs. Forester, with her usual tact, had asked her to arrange some of the games for the younger children, so that she might feel that she was being useful—a feeling which gives confidence to the shyest of girls.

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The doctor had ordered her a new white frock for the occasion, with stockings and shoes to match. Lisbeth was in raptures over it, and how it would become her little mistress; and it must be confessed that Marjory could not think of the fairy-like contents of a certain long drawer without a thrill of pleasure.

The day came, and Lisbeth, who insisted that she must dress Marjory for her first party, spread all the finery on the bed quite early in the afternoon. She lighted the fire to make the room cheerful, and she brought an extra pair of candles so that Marjory should have plenty of light.

Poor Peter had been very bad with rheumatism the last day or two, and could do nothing but sit in his armchair in the kitchen watching Lisbeth or doing little jobs for her, such as cutting skewers or "sorting" her string bag. He was much interested in the party, and Marjory promised to go to the kitchen and show herself when she was all ready.

Lisbeth was much concerned to see her husband so crippled, but she would not allow anything more than that he was "just a wee bit colded," and blamed the weather as being the cause. She was afraid her master might be inclined to find fault with Peter for his helplessness. "Rain and snaw, and frost and fog, and wind like newly-sharpened knives—a body doesna ken what's coming next," she said indignantly when she went to tell the doctor about it. He reassured Lisbeth by his kindly sympathy, and the old woman wept with joy when he told her that so long as he was alive there would be a home for his faithful servants at Hunters' Brae, whether they were past work or not.

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The party was to begin at seven o'clock, and Mrs. Forester had promised to send a carriage for Marjory at half-past six, so that she should be there in good time and feel at home before the other guests arrived.

But things were to turn out very differently from all expectations. Contrary to his usual habit, Dr. Hunter had not appeared at early dinner that day, nor had he left any message; but it was concluded that he had gone to the Morisons', or to the minister's, perhaps. He did not return during the afternoon, and when tea-time came and still he did not appear, Marjory began to feel anxious. He never went out for so long a time without telling her or leaving a message.

Lisbeth asked the man who brought the afternoon's milk from the farm if he would go to the doctor's and the minister's and inquire whether her master were there, and he good-naturedly agreed to do so—perhaps with visions of a reward in the shape of a good cup of tea in the Hunters' Brae kitchen on his return.

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He came back with no news of the doctor; he had not been seen out that day.

Marjory had her tea alone, and a feeling of dread weighed upon her. It seemed so strange for her uncle to be away so long, and on this particular day too. He had been so interested about the party, and her frock, and all the arrangements. What could it mean?

Suddenly, as she sat puzzling over it, a thought struck her. Quick as lightning she ran to the hall, took up a candle, and went along the passage to the old wing. It was about five o'clock, and the place was dark as night. Her footsteps echoed through the empty rooms and passages till she reached the place where the secret chamber was. Tremblingly she felt along the wall. Would she be able to find the spring? She now felt almost certain that she would find her uncle here. Perhaps he would be angry with her for disturbing him; he might be finishing some very important experiment. Should she go in? She hesitated, but only for a moment; something seemed to urge her on. After some searching she found the spring; the door flew open, and, holding her candle high, she went in. She could not suppress a cry of terror when she saw that her uncle lay stretched upon the floor. He moaned a little as she went towards him, and she was thankful to hear his voice. Broken glass was strewn upon the floor, and there was an unpleasant chemical odour in the room. She knelt beside her uncle, and found that his head and face were cut, that blood was flowing freely, and that his poor hands had suffered in some dreadful way. She took her handkerchief and gently tried to wipe his face. He murmured faintly, "Brandy—my cupboard—keys," and she understood what he wished. She felt in his pocket for the keys, and, saying that she would be back directly, she took the candle and went quickly to the study, found the brandy, and got back again without being seen. She did not call Lisbeth, as she felt sure that the doctor would be very sorry if his hiding-place became known, and she hoped that he might be able to get to his study before she gave the alarm.

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Dr. Hunter swallowed some brandy, and it revived him. After a little while Marjory asked him if he thought he could go to his study, and he replied, "Yes, lassie; but you must help me."

Marjory's heart beat fast and her hands trembled as she assisted him to rise. The least movement of his injured hands made him wince. Very slowly and painfully the two made their way down the stairs and across the old hall, till at last they reached the doctor's study. The exertion had been too much for him, and he fainted. Marjory rushed to call Lisbeth, saying that the doctor had come home, and that there had been an accident.

Full of concern, the old lady bustled along from the kitchen. "Mercy on us! what's this?" she cried when she saw her master. But she wasted no time in words; she hurried away and soon returned with a basin of water and a sponge, and a bottle of spirits, which she held under the doctor's nose—an old-fashioned but often efficacious remedy.

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"We maun hae Dr. Morison," she said; "an' how we're to come by him beats me. Jean's awa to Braeside to help at the party, an' Peter he canna walk a step; thae good-for-noughts" (which was her name for the garden assistants) "is a' gane hame; an' as for me, I couldna get the length o' Heathermuir on my ain feet."

"I'll go," said Marjory decidedly.

"What? An' walk twa mile at this time o' day, an' maybe more nor that if the doctor's no at hame!"

"Well, I'll go on Brownie; then I can go after him wherever he is. O Lisbeth dear, do you think uncle's very bad?" And Marjory looked anxiously at the white face and still form on the couch.

"I canna say. Dinna tell Peter, but just gang yer ways the quickest that ye can."

How thankful Marjory felt now that she had insisted upon Peter teaching her how to saddle Brownie! She was soon on his back, off and away to Heathermuir, glad to have something to do, her heart aching with anxiety as to the seriousness of her uncle's injuries. The love for him which had been steadily developing of late gained sudden force to-night, and she felt how precious he was to her.

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Never had Brownie indulged in such a mad gallop as this. His mistress gave him his head, and he took full advantage of the opportunity. He flew like the wind, and clattered into the courtyard in front of Dr. Morison's house.

The doctor was not there; he had been called to Hillcrest village, she was told. Waiting to hear no

more, Marjory started off again, and Brownie felt that their mission was as yet unfulfilled. On he went through the lanes, up hill and down, his hoofs striking fire as he tore along. They passed the Braeside carriage going to fetch Marjory to the party. The horses shied at the flying apparition. Marjory shouted, "I'm not coming!" but did not slacken her pace.

The party! It seemed hours, days, since she had seen her white frock lying on the bed, and had looked forward to wearing it. Instead of that, here was she tearing madly across the country, her poor uncle lying, it might be, at the point of death. Nothing was the same as it had been in the morning. Would things ever be the same again? What if her uncle should die? No, no, she would not allow herself to think of it; she must not think, she must act, and she urged Brownie on.

At the top of the hill just out of Hillcrest, to her great relief, she met Dr. Morison riding. She quickly explained her errand, and it was now his turn to ride hard. 231

"Don't wait for me," said Marjory; "I'll follow."

Brownie had done his work well, and must be considered. Now that the doctor was on his way to her uncle, she felt that she might slacken her pace. Then she began to wonder as to the cause of the accident, but could only suppose that the doctor had been trying some dangerous experiment; and then, anxious and alone on the hillside in the darkness, she sent up a real prayer to Heaven for the safety of her uncle, whom she now knew to be very dear to her. Countless proofs of his goodness and thoughtful kindness crowded upon her memory, and looking back over the years, she saw his figure in its attitude of protection and care for his dead sister's child. Then the reaction came, and Marjory wept bitterly.

CHAPTER XVI.

MISS WASPE GIVES GOOD ADVICE.

"Man's books are but man's alphabet.
Beyond and on his lessons lie—
The lessons of the violet,
The large gold letters of the sky,
The love of beauty, blossomed soil,
The large content, the tranquil toil."
JOAQUIN MILLER.

When Marjory reached home, finding that the doctor was still with her uncle, she put Brownie into the stable, rubbed him down, and gave him a good supper and much petting, which was highly approved of by the affectionate little animal, for he rubbed his velvety nose up and down Marjory's sleeve, as if to say, "Thank you; you are very kind."

Dr. Morison had got his patient into bed and comfortably settled there by the time Marjory went back to the house. She lingered near the bedroom door, so that she might catch him as he came out and hear what he had to say. She thought he looked rather grave as he left the room, but as soon as he saw her his face brightened, and he said cheerfully,— 233

"Not so very bad. He must be kept very quiet, of course. I've told your old woman what to do. I'll look in first thing to-morrow. How did it happen?"

"I don't quite know," replied Marjory, afraid of a cross-examination, "but I think he must have been trying some experiment."

"H'm!" said Dr. Morison. "Well, good-night, Marjory. Don't be over-anxious; he'll do." And then, as if in answer to her unspoken question, "You may go in and see him if you like."

Marjory went in, and found her uncle in bed, his head bandaged, and his hands lying on a pillow in front of him and covered with wool dressings. It made her feel, as she afterwards said to Blanche, quite faint and fluttering inside to see him lying like that, so helpless. What could be seen of his face was very pale, and his eyes looked unnaturally large and bright.

Lisbeth was standing by the bed watching her master, on guard lest he should move a muscle.

The doctor smiled as Marjory went towards him, and she stooped to kiss him. He seemed very weak and soon closed his eyes.

Lisbeth fetched a chair, so that Marjory might sit beside him while she went to the kitchen to prepare what was wanted, giving strict injunctions that the patient must not move. 234

After a little while the doctor said in a low tone, "Marjory, did you give me away?" a note of half-comic, half-pathetic inquiry in his voice.

"No, uncle; I only told Dr. Morison I thought you had been trying some experiment, but I didn't

say where. Nobody knows where I found you."

"Good little girl!" he said, closing his eyes again and smiling contentedly. The thought that his den might have been discovered had been worrying the doctor. Its secrecy had been one of its great charms to the eccentric man, and the knowledge that it was no longer secret would have been a real trouble to him.

He did not talk any more, and Marjory asked no questions, though she was naturally very anxious to know exactly how the accident had happened.

Mr. Forester came up later in the evening to inquire how things were going. Lisbeth had sent a message by the coachman who had come for Marjory that there had been an accident to Dr. Hunter, and that she would like Jean to come back at once unless she was very badly wanted.

Mr. Forester was very kind. He told Marjory how they had all missed her, and promised that some day they would give another party expressly for her. He did not tease her at all, and Marjory liked him better than she ever had as yet. She could not have stood any teasing, poor child, after all she had been through. The sight of her uncle, injured as he was, hurt her sorely. She could not see suffering without feeling pain herself, and it was a pale-faced girl, on the verge of tears, who answered Mr. Forester's inquiries. 235

When Marjory went to her room her things for the party were still lying on the bed. The sight of them struck a chill to her heart, for it made her realize how little one can tell what a day may bring; how evening may see changes undreamt of in the morning. The party which had seemed all-important when she woke that day had dwindled away into nothing, blotted out of sight by the happenings of the last few hours. Still, her chief feeling was one of great thankfulness that the doctor thought her uncle would get over this trouble; and that she had been of some use to him was also a comforting thought. She fell asleep thinking how she would try to nurse him and to take care of him until he was better.

When the doctor was able to talk more, he explained to Marjory that he had been trying a dangerous experiment that day. He had heard the dinner-bell ring, but was loath to leave his work, and in the end had forgotten all about it, having become entirely absorbed in his occupation. Something—perhaps a flaw in the glass—had caused one of the tubes he was using to burst, and the chemicals burnt his hands. At the sudden shock he started back, and in some way lost his balance and fell, striking his head on a corner of the table and falling on to the broken glass. He must have lost consciousness from the blow on his head, and he could not tell how long he had lain as Marjory found him, but he had felt so weak that every effort to rise made him faint again, and he supposed he must have lain for a long time in a half-conscious condition. 236

It was some weeks before he was quite himself again, and Marjory made a most devoted nurse. She could hardly bear to leave him in case he might want her when she was gone. Her feeling for him was a revelation to herself, for she knew now that she really loved this uncle of hers whom she had once thought to be hard and cruel and indifferent to her. She considered him very much changed, but in reality the change was in herself. Blanche's friendship, the kindness of the Foresters, Miss Waspe's wise and careful teaching, had all combined to expand her really warm and loving nature, which had threatened at one time to become soured and warped for want of love's sunshine. Her uncle, as Mrs. Forester had predicted on that memorable day in the plantation, had met half-way any advances that she had made, and the result had been the establishment of much happier relations between them. Now that he was ill and dependent upon her, it was Marjory's delight to wait upon him, and to fetch and carry for him, and her uncle was deeply touched by the girl's whole-hearted devotion to him. 237

Marjory did not see so much of Blanche and the others after the doctor's accident, for she did not join their expeditions, but she usually managed to meet her friend once a day to exchange news. Herbert Morison had now joined the company, and Alan was half inclined to resent this, although the girls had made no objection. He came to see Marjory one day—in fact, as soon as he thought he might venture to do so without being in the way—and he freely expressed his opinion upon the subject of the new member.

"It's all very fine," he said, "for Herbert to come tacking himself on to my friends. I wasn't good enough for him before. He only makes an ass of himself, and I'm sure Maud laughs at him. It all happened through him going to the party. He said afterwards that she was ripping, and licked all the others into fits; and now it's a new tie every day, and a polish on his boots fit to dazzle you, so that he hates to get 'em muddy, and always wants to go the easiest way everywhere. Rot, I call it. He asked Maud yesterday if she liked his tie—silly booby!—and she said it was useful as a danger-signal, cos you could see it a long way off. Crikey! how red he got; and to-day he put on a very sad-looking gray one." And Master Alan went off into fits of laughter at the recollection of his brother's discomfiture.

"Oh, well," replied Marjory, always sorry for the man who is down, so to speak, "he can see that Maud likes pretty things, and I suppose he thought he was pleasing her." 238

"But that is just what I think is such rot," replied Alan emphatically. "Why should a fellow try to please with his *ties*?" in a tone of disgust. "He ought to *do* things, and not be such a muff. Herbert didn't use to be like that; he's got it from those beastly sixth fellows. Course I know he's a good-looking chap. I don't mind saying so to you, though I wouldn't to any of the fellows; 't isn't the thing. I shall never be like him; and of course the mater's awful proud of him."

There was just a suspicion of brightness in Alan's eyes just then which Marjory did not fail to see, and she said quickly,—

"O Alan, I'm sure she's just as proud of you. Mothers are always proud of their children."

"But I'm so short. She's always telling me I shall never be tall, like Herbert," ruefully.

"But that doesn't matter a bit. Lots of little men get to be quite famous. Think of Napoleon, and Moltke, and that dear German Emperor Wilhelm—the old one, I mean. Miss Waspe said she saw the Kaiser Wilhelm and General Moltke once when she was in Germany, and her recollection of them is that neither of them was big; and anyway," she added consolingly, "you're only fourteen, and you may grow a bit yet."

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So Alan took comfort, for he had a high opinion of Marjory's wisdom.

"I say," he remarked, "I do think you know a lot, considering what a short time it is since you began lessons. Fancy your knowing about those men being small! I didn't." And he looked admiringly at Marjory.

"We have a rather nice lesson with Miss Waspe about famous men and women, and she tells us stories about them, and describes them so beautifully that I can see them quite plainly. It is so splendid to think they were really alive and walked about just like ordinary people."

Alan agreed, and there was a short silence. Marjory felt sure that the boy had something else to say, for he seemed rather fidgety, and got up and walked about the room, fingering things here and there, and clearing his throat several times. She kept silent to give him an opportunity to unburden himself. At last, rather red in the face, he said,—

"I say, you know, I felt beastly the other night when I heard about you riding after father in the dark. If I'd only known, I would have done it. It was awful rot me going to the party; I hated it when I knew."

"But I'm glad you went to the party. Blanche would have been very disappointed if you hadn't gone."

There was still something else to come.

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"I say, you'll let the Triple Alliance be on again next holidays, won't you?" looking rather anxiously at Marjory.

"Yes, of course, and we shall have lots of fun." And Marjory's hearty tone set all Alan's fears at rest.

The holidays came to an end. Maud and her mother went home, the Morison boys returned to college, and Blanche and Marjory were to begin lessons again.

Dr. Hunter was up and about by this time, and able to use his hands, so that Marjory went back to her studies with a light heart.

When they had settled themselves in the schoolroom on the first day of the new term, Miss Waspe said, "Now, children, I generally give what Blanche calls a 'good talk' when we begin afresh, and I want to say a few things to you to-day. If there is anything you want to know, tell me, and I will try to help you if I can. First of all, I want you to understand and to remember that you don't come here only to learn lessons and repeat them. That is only a small part of your education, and there is much besides. You have to learn to make the best of your lives, to learn how to *live*; to be good girls, who will grow into good women; to be true and honest, strong and fearless, thoughtful for others—in fact, to be *gentlewomen*. All this is not easy—not nearly so easy as learning a page of history, for instance, and then repeating it to me. I want you to understand—and especially you, Marjory, who have begun so-called lessons rather later in life than most girls—that it is not the amount of information you possess and the studies you have gone through that is the important thing; it is the way you have worked, the sort of girl that you are, the life you are living, that matters. We are beginning again to-day. Let us all do our very best, so that at the end of the term we may have really gone forward. The lessons I have been talking about are never finished; our education goes on as long as we are alive. Now," with a bright smile, "my speech is done, and I hope it hasn't been too long. It is your turn now. Have either of you any problems for me?"

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"I have," replied Marjory. "I want to know whether it is ever right to tell a lie, or a kind of a one, for the sake of somebody else." And she blushed very red.

Miss Waspe looked at her in surprise. Marjory had always seemed to her to be so absolutely straightforward and honest that she could not understand the reason for such a question.

"I don't believe in a 'kind of a lie,'" she replied, "A thing is either true or untrue, and I don't think it could ever be right to tell an untruth under any circumstances."

"Not if you can see quite well that if you tell this lie it will prevent something bad happening to some one else?" asked Marjory appealingly.

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"No," was the decided reply. "Tell the truth at all costs, and trust the results to a higher power than yours. Wrong cannot make right."

Tears stood in Marjory's eyes, but she said no more, and Miss Waspe did not question her. The truth was that ever since Marjory had told the man in the plantation that "people" of the name of Shaw kept the Low Farm, allowing him to think that the husband was at home, she had felt uncomfortable about it. Certainly she had said it for Mrs. Shaw's sake, to prevent a suspicious-looking person from going to the farm when its mistress was alone; but she had not been able to silence her conscience, and had at last determined to ask Miss Waspe what she thought. Her words had only confirmed Marjory's uneasy feelings, and she could not give the circumstances as an excuse without breaking her promise to the man.

"I've got a problem too," said Blanche, "and it's this: Is a secret a proper secret if you tell only one person, and you are certain that other person will never tell?"

The others laughed, and Miss Waspe said,—

"I don't quite know what you mean, dear."

Blanche explained. "Well, it's like this. I simply can't keep a secret. I feel as if I shall burst if I don't tell somebody, so I always tell mother, and then it's all right, and, of course, I never want to tell anybody else. Do you think it is right for me to do that?"

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Miss Waspe could not help smiling at this confession, and she replied, "I think if you tell the person who wants to confide in you that you must tell your mother, and the person still chooses to trust you with the secret, then you are quite right to tell her."

"But supposing," argued Blanche, "that the person tells you the thing before he or she says, 'Don't tell any one,' ought I to try to do without telling mother? It would be an awful risk," she added solemnly.

"Well," replied Miss Waspe, "personally, I don't like secrets, except, perhaps, about presents or pleasant surprises for people. I think I should advise you, for the present, at any rate, to make the stipulation that you be allowed to tell your mother anything and everything, but at the same time you must learn to control yourself and keep your own counsel so far as other people are concerned."

"I'll try," said Blanche, looking very solemn, "but I haven't much hope."

After that the girls teased their good-natured governess with many other "problems," as they called them, such as, "Whether would you choose to be very pretty and very poor, or very rich and quite plain?" and another, "Whether would you prefer to walk in a very fashionable place with a person you love, who is so badly dressed as to attract attention, or with a nicely-dressed person for whom you did not care so much?"

Miss Waspe rather encouraged the girls to give their opinions on all sorts of subjects, as she liked them to think.

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"Learn to think and to see," she would say. And one day she told them how, when she was a girl, she had been made to learn some lines by heart, which had helped her to begin thinking for herself. "I think they frightened me into it," she said, laughing. "They were written by Carlyle; you will know something of his works some day, I hope. This is what he says: 'Not one in a thousand has the smallest turn for thinking; only for passive dreaming, and hearsaying, and active babbling by rote. Of the eyes that men do glare withal, so few can see.' It sounds rather like a scolding, doesn't it? Well, I don't want you to be like that; I want you both to think and to see, and you will find much happiness to think about and many beauties to see."

Certainly Marjory's world had grown much wider and brighter by this woman's thought. The romance and wonder of reality put before the girl had opened up possibilities of interest in every direction to her who was so eager to learn and so quick to see. To give an instance: it may be remembered that in her days of loneliness Marjory had woven fairy stories about the flowers and trees in the garden and the woods. Knowledge had now replaced these fairy tales with facts far more marvellous than any of her fancies had been.

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These were happy hours spent in the schoolroom at Braeside. They never became irksome to Marjory, but they made her long to see more of this "great, wide, beautiful, wonderful world."

Two things were often in her mind at this time—the prophecy about the dark-haired maiden, and the letter of which Mary Ann had told her. She built many hopes upon that letter; night and day she prayed that her father might be found and brought back to her.

The postman only came once a day to Hunters' Brae, and the letter-bag was always taken straight to her uncle's study; so, although Marjory watched carefully for any sign, she did not know whether a reply had been received to that letter her uncle had sent to foreign parts.

One day, coming out of church, Mary Ann managed to whisper to her, "That letter came back, so I expect your father's really dead."

This was a great blow to Marjory. She had hardly realized how much she had hoped, and this bitter disappointment seemed to leave her nothing to hope for. Still she refused to give up altogether, for there was just the chance that the letter might not have been written to her father, as Mary Ann had not actually seen the address on it. Marjory reasoned with herself in this way, for she felt that her life would be strangely empty without the hope of some day finding her father.

CHAPTER XVII.

ON THE LOCH.

"Whoever plants a seed beneath the sod
And waits to see it push away the clod,
He trusts in God."—ANON.

The months went by, and Marjory and Blanche were happy together. They watched the spring change to summer, and the summer to autumn, with the greatest delight. It was the first time that Blanche had seen the delicate shoots of the snowdrops and crocuses bravely pushing their way through the hard earth, the first time that she had been able to watch the miracle of seed and leaf and flower, and to trace the life of the young birds from their hatching to their flying from the nest. These were annual pleasures to Marjory, but they were much increased by the sweetness of Blanche's companionship. How she delighted in showing her friend where the first bluebells would be found in the wood, and in taking her to search in the most likely places for birds' nests! In one of these searches they found a great treasure. They were walking by the loch, when, amongst the reeds which grew along the water's edge they saw a reed-warbler's nest. What an ingenious construction it was—long and deep and pointed, woven between the reeds, and so firmly fixed and of such a shape that the eggs could not be shaken out, even by the roughest of winds. Marjory was very anxious that Blanche should see a pewit's nest. There were always a certain number of these birds about the moors, and the girls spent a whole morning searching for a nest. But these birds hide their nests so carefully that they are most difficult to find. After much patience and walking up and down over the same ground, causing great uneasiness to the parent birds who circled overhead, crying mournfully, they at last discovered a nest. It was just a little hollow in the ground with some grass in it, and there were the eggs, four of them, so wonderfully speckled that they matched the colour of the ground, and laid so neatly in an almost perfect circle, the large ends outwards and the very narrowly-pointed ones meeting in the centre.

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"Oh," cried Blanche, "I've seen eggs like these in London shops; they call them plovers' eggs, and people eat them at dinner-parties."

"What a shame!" said Marjory indignantly.

"Well, you eat hens' eggs," argued Blanche.

"But they're quite different. Somebody feeds them every day, and they don't even have to make their own nests; and then, when they do lay an egg, they make a great noise to let everybody know about it. But these dear birds do it all themselves, and they take such trouble to hide their eggs, and are so worried if they think any one is too near them. Oh, I simply *couldn't* eat a plover's egg."

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"I couldn't either, now that I have seen the nest," said Blanche. "Somehow you don't think of all the trouble the birds have when you just see the eggs in boxes in a shop window."

Time slipped away, the weeks bringing their share of lessons in term time; of riding, boating, and pleasures of all sorts in the holidays. Marjory's fourteenth birthday came and went, Christmas Day passed, and another year began. This time the Twelfth Night party was a great success, and both Marjory and her uncle went to it.

In spite of her happy life, Marjory never lost her longing for her father. She dreamed of him, planned a future for herself in which he was always the prominent figure, and determined that if she ever were her own mistress she would travel from country to country in search of him, for since the day when Mrs. Forester had quoted her old friend's words, "A fine fellow Hugh Davidson was. I always feel that he may turn up again some day," she had never quite lost hope.

Easter fell early that year; the season was very mild, and there were lovely sunny days for being out of doors when the holidays began.

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Maud Forester and her mother were at Braeside again, and the Morison boys were at home, so the party was a merry one. Herbert's admiration for Maud still flourished, and he joined the girls in all their doings.

All went well until one day when Alan was taken by his mother to Morristown to be measured for some new clothes, much to his disgust, for he would have preferred to sacrifice the clothes rather than one of his precious holidays. Dr. Hunter had gone there too on business. Before leaving in the morning he had charged Marjory not to go on the loch during his absence—not that he expected bad weather, but he never felt quite comfortable about her going out when he was away, although she was quite capable of managing the boat. Many a time they had sailed from one end of the loch to the other, and she had done everything from start to finish as well as he could have done it himself.

Marjory readily promised; she had quite expected this, for her uncle never left Heathermuir for a whole day without giving her this injunction. She was to spend the day at Braeside, and she went down there after driving her uncle to the station.

When she entered the morning-room she found Mrs. Hilary finishing a late breakfast, with Mrs. Forester, Blanche, and Maud in attendance. Mrs. Hilary was saying, "Yes, he's really coming home at last, after being away more than a year, on the *Campania*, he says—the White Star Line, you know, or is it the Cunard? I really never remember. One lot always end in '*ic*,' and the other in '*ia*,' and it is so confusing. It would be so much better if they didn't give them these long classical names, wouldn't it? I never was good at the classics, you know. Ah, here's Marjory. Good-morning, child; how rosy and healthy you look, quite a picture, and your dark hair makes a nice contrast with the other girls."

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Marjory became rosier still, and sat down as much out of sight as possible.

"Yes, as I was saying," continued Mrs. Forester, thoughtfully gazing at a piece of toast, "he's been to Brazil, and Morocco, and Mexico, and Alaska, and all the well-known places that it's proper to go to, and all through the United States too. He must be a regular walking geography by this time, if he doesn't forget it all on that dreadful voyage. One gets so confused with those foreign places—at least I do; and really, by the time I've crossed from Calais to Dover, I've gone through such terrors of mind and body that I'm quite upset, and I can hardly remember what I've seen or where I've been. That's where I think a guide-book such a comfort. One can put a mark against each place one goes to, and that makes it quite certain, you know. I wonder if Hilary has a guide-book. But men are different, I suppose," she said, with a sigh of resignation at the superiority of the sterner sex.

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The girls slipped away as soon as they conveniently could. They had no very definite plans for the day, and one suggestion after another was made as they walked towards the park.

Herbert Morison soon joined them, and they continued to stroll somewhat aimlessly through the park, the dogs at their heels. There seemed to be a spirit of depression upon them that morning, which was a most unusual experience for them.

"We miss Alan, don't we?" remarked Maud, after one of the awkward silences which seemed inevitable that morning.

The other girls agreed, but Herbert said nothing, as he did not quite see what difference a "kid" like Alan could make.

Suddenly Maud clapped her hands. "I know," she cried; "we'll all go on the loch; it'll be just lovely." She had caught sight of the water shining silvery blue through the trees, and certainly it did look inviting. "Come on," cried Maud excitedly; "you'll take us, won't you, Marj?"

Marjory reddened. "I'm sorry I can't. I promised uncle that I wouldn't go on the loch to-day."

"What rubbish! Why, it's as calm as a mill pond."

"Not quite; there's a bit of a wind; besides, uncle said I wasn't to."

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"We needn't sail; we could row," suggested Herbert.

"Oh, rowing's no fun; besides, it's such hard work.—I'll make it all right with the doctor, Marj. You see, he didn't know Herbert would be here."

Herbert looked decidedly uncomfortable and as if he wished he were not there. The truth was that he did not feel by any means at home in a sailing-boat, and would have very much preferred to row, or, better still, not to go on the water at all. However, if Maud wished it, there was no more to be said. The Foresters had a rowing-boat which would quite well have accommodated the party, but Maud had made up her mind for a sail, and a sail she would have, or nothing.

Blanche felt very much divided between her duty to her guest and to her friend. She was half ashamed that Maud should suggest taking possession of Dr. Hunter's boat against his orders, and was inclined to wish that, if Maud insisted upon going, Marjory would give in and go too.

"Come, Marjory," coaxed Maud, "don't be silly. It'll be all right, I promise you."

"It's no use; I won't come," replied Marjory stoutly.

"Well, I call it very selfish of you," said Maud, her temper rising. "And I'm sure the doctor never meant that you were not to go at all, only that you were not to go alone; and I'm also quite sure that if he were here he would let us have the boat this minute."

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"Yes, if he were here and could go with you himself," retorted Marjory.

"Oh, very well, if you won't take us, Herbert will.—Won't you?" And Maud turned appealingly to him.

Poor Herbert was in a tight place, as he would have expressed it. First and foremost, he was anxious to please Maud and to stand well in her estimation, but he had no confidence in his own powers of managing a sailing-boat; besides, he knew something of the loch and its ways, and how storms little and big could rise suddenly and without warning. Another thing—he did not much like the idea of going off in Dr. Hunter's boat without his permission, for although pretty, spoiled

Maud had no dread of the stern, eccentric doctor, Herbert did not by any means share her fearless attitude towards him.

Poor Herbert was hesitating on the side of prudence, when Maud decided matters by saying with a pout,—

"You don't seem very keen either. I must say I think it's awfully mean of you two.—Come on, Blanche; you and I will go, and it'll be their fault if we're drowned."

Thus hard pressed, Herbert said he would go. After all, it was a lovely day, and the water looked calm enough. True, there was the little breeze that Marjory had spoken of; but if it didn't come to any more, he might pull through all right. Thus once again was illustrated the truth of the old saying that "Fools rush in where angels fear to tread." How many lives are lost through ignorance and foolhardiness!

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Poor Marjory was in a state of mind bordering on distraction. Ought she to disobey her uncle and go with them? She felt sure that, although he would not confess it, Herbert was a novice in the art of sailing, and she feared what might happen should the wind increase. She could only hope that this would not be the case, that Maud would soon tire of her whim, and that they would all come back safe and sound.

They started off gaily, Maud waving her hand to Marjory.

"Good-bye, you dear little monument of obedience," she cried. "You won't enjoy your morning half as much as we shall."

Blanche looked inquiringly at Marjory, and for the first time in the course of their friendship her look met with no answering smile. Marjory was too anxious, and besides, she felt inclined to blame Blanche for yielding to her cousin's persuasions; while Blanche, on her part, thought that Marjory might have stretched a point and gone with them.

However, the start was made in fine style, and all went well at first. The sun shone and the skies were blue; the fresh green of spring was showing everywhere, and the young people's spirits rose as the pretty little boat sped on.

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Marjory walked slowly along by the loch, with Silky and Curly for company. Had she done right or wrong? The question repeated itself over and over again in her mind, until she felt too confused to think. Her anxiety was growing. She would hardly admit it to herself, but she feared that each quarter of an hour brought increased force to the breeze that had been blowing when they started. She watched the white sails getting smaller and smaller. How she wished that they would turn back! Once when a bend of the shore hid the boat from sight, she turned sick and faint with fear for its safety; and then, when it appeared again, she scolded herself for being so foolish.

The wind was certainly rising. There was an angry-looking cloud on the horizon, and the sunshine, once so brilliant, was now faint and fitful.

At last the boat turned, but with the turn Herbert's difficulties began. Things were getting serious. Marjory watched Herbert's every movement with eager anxiety. Would he do it? *Could* he do it? She looked at her watch. It was just half-past twelve, and all the men about Braeside would have gone to their dinner; besides, it would take her some time to run there for help. The Low Farm was perhaps a little nearer, but not much, and something, she hardly dared to think what, might happen while she was gone.

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A sudden gust of wind lifted her hat from her head. This, at any other time, would have been a mere frolic to this child of the moors, but now it caused her real alarm. This same wind that played with her hat and her hair, and that swept her petticoats about her, could do far more mischief to the little boat with its flapping sails. It was nearly opposite to her now, and still about half a mile from the landing-stage. Marjory put her hands to her mouth.

"Shorten sail!" she called. "Shorten sail!"

Herbert appeared to be losing control of the boat and of his own wits, and the boat seemed at the mercy of the wind.

Marjory called frantically to them to take in a certain sail and reef another—directions which, even if they could have heard them, would have been as Greek to the occupants of the boat; but the wind carried her voice away, and she stood helpless, watching Herbert's bungling attempts. Another moment, and the mast was broken, and in falling dealt Herbert a blow on the head which stunned him for the time being.

Quick as thought, Marjory threw off her coat and boots and was in the water, calling Silky to come too. Curly had been well trained, and was a very clever, sensible dog by this time, and she ordered him to go home and fetch his master, hoping that he might attract some one's notice.

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Straining every nerve, Marjory swam towards the boat. "Throw out the towline!" she screamed to the girls as soon as she was near enough for them to hear her. Maud, now thoroughly frightened, did as she was bid, and Marjory called to Silky, "Seize it, good dog! seize it!" The water was not very rough, but she knew that it was deep in this particular place, and the boat was being driven like a bird with a broken wing.

Silky, good dog that he was, got hold of the rope, which happily had some floats attached to it, and began swimming steadily back towards his mistress. Marjory caught the rope, and by its means drew herself to the boat, carefully got into it, and in a very few minutes, having done what was necessary, she took to the oars. Blanche was lying in Maud's arms, overcome by terror, and Herbert was quite stupefied by the knock on his head.

Help was nearer than Marjory had imagined. Looking to the shore to see if she could put in at once without having to row against the wind all the way to the landing-stage, she saw a man waving his arms as a signal to her. She bent all her strength to her task, and it was no light one.

The man on shore, having taken off his coat and his boots, was wading in, ready to receive the boat. The storm was coming on apace, great drops of rain began to fall, and the sky was dark and lowering.

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A few more strokes were all that was needed to bring them within reach of strong arms; but why did Marjory feel so tired, and as if she could not go on? She *must* go on! How thankful she felt that there was some one at hand if she should fail—if—One last stroke, and then a confused sound of shouting, a grating noise as if some one were shooting a load of stones. It must be Peter in the garden, and she was dreaming—dreaming.

Curly had trotted off obediently in the direction of Braeside. Mr. Forester, strolling across the park, expecting to meet the girls returning home for lunch, was very much surprised to meet the dog, who behaved in such a way as to arouse his fears of something being wrong. To begin with, Blanche and her dog were inseparable companions, as a rule, and it was strange that Curly should come home alone. Besides, he seemed in such an excited state; he kept jumping up at Mr. Forester, and then running forward and barking as if he wished his master to follow. Curious, and somewhat alarmed, Mr. Forester went after the dog, and arrived upon the scene just in time to see the boat come in. An exclamation of dismay broke from him as he saw the condition of its occupants, and he rushed forward to help the man to draw it up on shore.

CHAPTER XVIII.

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THE STRANGER RETURNS.

"We fell out, my wife and I,
And kissed again with tears."

TENNYSON.

Marjory was the only one of the four who suffered seriously from that day's doings. Blanche soon came to herself in her father's arms; Maud, though thoroughly frightened, had kept her head, and escaped without even a wetting; and Herbert's bruises, though painful, were nothing to be alarmed about as soon as he had recovered from the stunning effect of the blow on his head.

The stranger who had so unexpectedly come to their aid produced a flask from his pocket, and Blanche and Marjory were each given a dose of brandy.

Marjory thought she must still be dreaming when she opened her eyes and saw her friend the tramp or poacher—for it was he—bending over her anxiously.

To Mr. Forester's inquiries she replied that she felt all right now. He wished to take Blanche home as quickly as possible, and the man assured him that he and Herbert would see Marjory safely up to Hunters' Brae, at the same time asking that a groom might be sent to fetch the doctor, as he was sure one would be needed.

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Mr. Forester thanked the man, promising to send for Dr. Morison, though he thought it was hardly so serious as all that, for Marjory was such a strong, sturdy girl, so different from his delicate little Blanche, he thought, as he pressed his precious child closer to him. He bade Marjory good-bye, saying that he must take Blanche home to her mother, and that Maud had better come too. Maud would have liked to stay with Marjory, but feeling that taking her own way had caused enough trouble already, she reluctantly obeyed her uncle.

Although Marjory had said she felt all right, she found that when she tried to stand up and walk she felt strangely weak, and there was a sharp pain in her side, so that she was very glad to lean on the arm of her mysterious friend. She was too tired to be curious, and she accepted his help and kindness without question.

He and Herbert between them managed to get her home, and then handed her over to Lisbeth's care. She, poor woman, was too much taken aback to ask the stranger who he was, and he slipped away unnoticed and unthanked.

Herbert decided to wait until his father came, so that he might give him an account of the true state of affairs; and it was well that he did so, for, even had she been able, it is doubtful whether

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Marjory would have been willing to say much about her own part in the day's happenings.

Herbert did not spare himself to his father, but told the story as quickly as he could, and then waited anxiously for the doctor to come back from his patient.

"Well, my boy," he said, when at last he appeared, "I'm afraid she'll be worse before she's better, as the saying is. Curious thing—an old weakness of her childhood, which her uncle and I both thought she had outgrown! That swim in her clothes, straining every nerve, then rowing back, wind against her, four of you in the boat—too much—caused strain. This will mean weeks of lying up, poor child; seems worried too—wants to know if she did right. Bless her! she did more than fifty girls in her place would have done. But come along, boy. It might have been worse; she'll get over it all right. Come; you need a good square meal after all this, and a little doctoring too." And he patted his son on the shoulder affectionately, for he felt sorry for the boy's distress.

He drove him home, and then, without waiting for anything to eat himself, the good man was off again to Braeside to see if anything were wanted there. He found that the girls were not much the worse for their adventure—a little hysterical and excited, but that was all. He was pleased to find that Maud, who had been the first cause of all the mischief, had given a true and honest account of the whole thing, and was now bitterly sorry for the part she had taken.

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"Promise you won't scold Herbert," she pleaded; "it was all my fault. I made him do it. He didn't want to himself; I know he didn't."

"Don't you worry about him; I've just taken him home to a good dinner," said the doctor, smiling. "And now I'm going back to dress those bruises of his. He looks more like a defeated prize-fighter than the handsome, elder son of a celebrated country practitioner that he was when he left home this morning. I must do something for him before his poor mother comes home," laughing, "or she won't recognize her son." And the genial doctor hurried off again.

Dr. Hunter was surprised and disappointed when he saw that Peter had come to the station to meet him, for he had expected Marjory; but when he learned the reason, he was very much concerned—concerned and grieved too, for he could not but gather from Peter's account that Marjory had gone on the loch in spite of his prohibition. He remembered the girl's face as she had given her promise—the dark eyes looking so honestly into his, the expression of the mouth so firm and steadfast. He sighed, and tried to make excuses for her in his own mind, but try as he would he could only feel bitterly disappointed. He went straight to her room when he arrived. Marjory met his look appealingly. "I couldn't help it," she murmured, as he sat down by the bedside and took her hand.

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"Never mind to-night, child," he said gently, patting her hand; "you shall tell me all about it to-morrow."

But Marjory, since her better understanding of her uncle, had grown very sensitive to his moods and feelings, and she felt a shadow of displeasure in spite of his caresses. She was too weak and tired to talk, and after he left her she lay dreaming and thinking and wishing that he knew. She thought of Blanche too, and the look that had passed between them when the boat started. This was the first real trouble there had been since their friendship began. How she wished that she could explain everything!

But help came in the person of Dr. Morison, who called again in the evening to see how his patient was getting on. He was able to tell the doctor the whole story, with those particulars which poor old Peter did not know. Marjory was greatly relieved when her uncle said to her, "Dr. Morison has told me all about it. You're a good girl, Marjory, and I'm proud of you."

Marjory was greatly soothed and comforted by these words, and though she was very wakeful through the night, her mind was at rest.

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Next morning Blanche and Maud came to see her, tearful and sorry for the trouble they had thoughtlessly caused. Blanche admitted that at first she had blamed Marjory and thought it selfish of her not to go with them, but that she knew now that Marjory had been right in obeying her uncle.

"But what I think so awfully hard is that we were the ones who deserved to suffer, and yet you who were so good and brave have to be ill like this." And Maud burst into tears. "It was only yesterday," she continued, between her sobs, "that mother remarked how healthy and rosy you looked, and now you are so pale; I can't bear it." And she hid her face in her hands.

"Please don't cry," Marjory said. "I'm not very ill, you know; only Dr. Morison says I shall have to lie down a lot until I get quite all right again. Everybody is so kind to me, it's not a bit hard. Please don't cry." And she stretched out her hand towards Maud, who seized it and covered it with impulsive kisses.

"I hope I shall never, never do such a thing again," said Maud. "It was all through me wanting my own way; it's like a sort of mania that gets hold of me sometimes. Oh, I do feel such a beast, I can't bear myself; and poor mother is so cut up about it, and talked to me so this morning. She's awful sweet, my mother, really, though she does forget so, and says such funny things."

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The girls' visit did not last long, as Marjory was to be kept quiet for a few days. They had all been wondering who the friendly stranger could be who had helped them the day before, but no one had been able to give any information about him.

Soon after the girls left, Dr. Hunter came into Marjory's room, his face beaming with pleasure.

"There are visitors downstairs," he said, "but I'm afraid I mustn't let them come to see you to-day; perhaps they could come again to-morrow. Who do you think they are?"

Marjory suggested the Foresters, the Mackenzies, Mrs. Morison; but no—it was none of these.

"Do tell me," she begged of the doctor.

"Well, it's Captain and Mrs. Shaw from the Low Farm. It was he who carried you home yesterday. I declare it's quite a romance. Mrs. Shaw is absolutely transformed; I never saw such a change in any one in such a short time. Certainly happiness is a great beautifier."

"Oh, I *am* glad. Then she's forgiven him? I expect that's what makes her feel so happy."

Dr. Hunter looked serious. Perhaps he was thinking of some one else who had nourished hard feelings against another for many years.

"Do ask them to come back to-morrow, uncle," said Marjory. "I should love to see them."

Captain and Mrs. Shaw came again next day, and Marjory was allowed to receive them. As her uncle had said, Mrs. Shaw was a very different-looking woman from the one she had hitherto known. She came into the room smiling, followed by her husband, who hung back, fearing lest he should intrude.

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"Please come in," said Marjory; "I do so want to talk to you. Please tell me all about everything," she said, when they had finished their inquiries as to herself, and she had thanked the captain for his timely assistance.

"I've not got much to tell," began Mrs. Shaw. "I wrote to him to the care of the company in Liverpool which he used to belong to, but the letter didn't get there till he'd started on a long voyage. I didn't write it that day I said I would. I couldn't make up my mind to do it somehow. Well, the company forwarded the letter, and it followed him from one place to another, and I heard nothing of him till he came to my door the night before your accident, and glad I was to see him, as I needn't tell you. The next day he was strolling about the place, waiting for me to get ready to come up here, when he saw you in the water; and a good thing he was there to see." And she beamed upon the captain.—"Now it's your turn," she said.

"Well," said he, "that night after you left me, miss, I had a very narrow shave. I was just upon caught for a poacher." And he laughed heartily at the remembrance. "You see," he continued, "what put me altogether out in my bearings was you saying that 'people' of the name of Shaw kept the Low Farm; and when I said, 'There is a husband, then?' you said 'Oh yes' so quick and pat that I made quite a mistake. Of course you didn't say he was there, but I took it up so, and, like a fool, I thought she'd forgot me and married again, as she hadn't seen me for so many years. If it hadn't been for that I should have gone to her then."

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"I am so very sorry," said Marjory. "I thought you might be a—" She hesitated, wondering what she could say, and how she could ever have taken this man for anything but the honest British seaman that he was.

Captain Shaw laughed his big hearty laugh.

"Took me for a burglar—shouldn't wonder. I begin to see," as he noted the flush on Marjory's cheek, "ha, ha, ha!" And he threw his head back and thumped his knee. "Well, to be sure; so you thought I was a bad character, and wanted to put me off the scent. Clear as daylight and very cleverly done, but you made a little mistake, miss, as we're all liable to do." And he laughed again. Then he continued, "It was very good of you to come and give me warning about the keepers. I've often thought about the sweet young lady who came out in the dark and the cold to speak to me. I was very miserable then, and you wanted to do me a good turn, though you had done me a bad one all unbeknown to yourself or me either, and I want to thank you heartily, miss."

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"I went to Hillcrest the next morning to see you," said Marjory shyly, "for I suddenly thought perhaps you might be Mrs. Shaw's husband. I can't think now why I didn't know it when I first met you. When I got there you had gone away, and English Mary said your name was 'Iggs, and she quite thought you were a poacher, although you did pay your bill!"

Captain Shaw laughed again.

"You see, miss," he explained, "I didn't want it to get about the place that Captain Shaw was here, if Mrs. Shaw didn't feel inclined to take any notice of him. Higgs was my mother's name and is my second one, so I thought no harm, and it was to save her," nodding towards his wife. "But did you indeed take all that trouble for a poor man you didn't know, and had reason to believe was a suspicious character? Well, all I can say is that my wife and I," looking at Mrs. Shaw, "are deeply grateful to you for your goodwill."

"But you haven't finished your story, quite," suggested Marjory, flushing at his praise.

"Well," he continued, "I'd made up my mind that if the wife would have nothing to say to me, I'd take an offer I'd had—good ship, long voyage, and three days to think it over. Off I went, and I didn't get her letter for some time. When I did get it I didn't answer it—I don't quite know why, except that I'm not much good when it comes to writing down my feelings—and I thought the

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best answer would be myself at her door. What with one thing and another, I was away longer than I expected. Then we were quarantined for fourteen days—no end of a tiresome business. But I got here at last, and found a warm welcome. 'All's well that ends well,' miss, and now I'm sure we've bothered you long enough.—Come along, missus."

"But you *must* let me thank you for all you did for me; you were more than kind."

Captain Shaw was marshalling his wife out of the room, and he turned and said, "I don't want any thanks—it was little enough I did; besides, one good turn deserves another, you know. Think of those keepers!" laughing again at Marjory's poacher theory. "All we want is to see you up and about again, miss; and the sooner we can welcome you at the Low Farm the better pleased we'll be—eh, Alison?"

Left to herself, Marjory lay thinking. How happy these two seemed now that they were together! How thankful she was that things had come right for them in the end! She had so often reproached herself for that suggestion of a lie. What very serious consequences it might have had—indeed had, for it had added another year to the separation of these two good people! Then she fell to musing over the great happenings that may come from apparently small causes.

Marjory had plenty of time to think in those days. After the first week she did not feel ill, only tired and rather weak, but she was ordered to be continually on her back. A great doctor came from Edinburgh to see her, and he only confirmed what Dr. Morison had said—that she would be quite well in time, but that complete rest was the only cure; she must not try to walk or move about.

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Poor Marjory—she had begun very bravely, saying it was not at all hard, but indeed she found it to be very hard, especially when she began to feel much better and stronger, and still had to keep lying down.

Blanche had to begin her lessons alone this term, and she and Miss Waspe missed Marjory very much; the schoolroom did not seem the same place without her, they said. The governess loved Blanche, sweet-natured as she was, and good and industrious too; but she did miss her other pupil, with her bright, eager ways, and her intense interest in things. Miss Waspe liked to watch the light of understanding flash into Marjory's eyes as she explained some intricate question, and the instinctive comprehension of something said or read which might have meant difficulty to a slower mind.

At last, after much wheedling and coaxing, the doctor gave permission for the lessons to be given at Hunters' Brae, Blanche and Miss Waspe going up every morning. This arrangement was very satisfactory to all parties, and Blanche remarked that, apart from the "jolliness" of being together, she would have an easy time, because, as Marjory was an invalid, there could be no scoldings.

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Captain Shaw came frequently to see his little friend, and told her many tales about his travels. It was he who helped the doctor to carry her out into the garden on the great day when she was first allowed to go. Peter, too, whiled away many an hour for the invalid with his stories and old legends.

No father could have been more devoted than Dr. Hunter was to his niece during this time. Anything and everything that he could do to brighten the days for her was done; it was his greatest pleasure to grant her slightest wish. It seemed as if he could not do enough for her. He behaved like a delighted schoolboy the first time she was allowed to walk a little.

During this time there had been frequent conferences between Mrs. Forester and Dr. Hunter. Marjory felt rather curious to know what they were about. She was soon to know, and the knowledge caused her some dismay.

"Would you like to go to London, Marjory?" asked her uncle one day.

"To London?" echoed Marjory. "Not without you," decidedly.

"To London, and then to the seaside with the Foresters. You would like to go with them, wouldn't you?"

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"And leave you alone here? No, I don't want to go away," she pleaded.

"Dr. Morison thinks it would be good for you."

"Dr. Morison knows nothing at all about it," said naughty Marjory. "I won't go. I don't want to go away from you."

Her uncle kissed her.

"My dear child," he said, "I am going away myself abroad, to America, and these good people have promised to take care of you until I come back." And he watched Marjory's face.

"To America!" she repeated, much surprised. "O uncle, what for?"

For one brief moment she thought of her father. Could the doctor be going to find him? But the answer came,—

"There is a science congress to be held in New York which I should very much like to attend; and

there will be one or two men there who are studying the same subjects as I am, with whom I wish to compare notes. Will you allow me to go, little one?"

"I suppose I must," grudgingly.

"I thought you would have liked to see London and go to the seaside; you used to be so anxious to travel."

"Yes, but I'd rather go to America with you," wistfully.

"That is out of the question," said the doctor decidedly, "on account of your health; besides, what should I do with you while I went to my meetings and sat on my commissions, *et cetera*? No, no; you must be content, and perhaps you'll go next time." And he kissed Marjory, feeling that the affair was settled.

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CHAPTER XIX.

IMPORTANT LETTERS.

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"Circumstances are like clouds, continually gathering and bursting."

KEATS.

The manager of the A1 Shipping and Transportation Company was sitting in his office in the largest building in the main street of the town of Skaguay in the far-away North-West. That office was the centre of the business activities of an immense district, and the work of its manager demanded much time and energy.

He was not an old man, but his hair was gray and his forehead lined and furrowed. A pair of piercing dark eyes looked from beneath thick grizzled eyebrows. It was a strong and striking face, severe in its lines, but when lit up by one of its rare smiles the hardness disappeared in a wonderful way. He was sitting at his desk apparently studying some papers that lay before him, but there was a dreamy, far-away look in his eyes which told that his thoughts had travelled beyond the walls of his office and the business of the day.

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"Two of them," he muttered, turning over the papers. He took one up and began to read as follows:—

"DEAR DAVIDSON,—You were good enough to say that you would be glad to hear from me when I had reached home again, and the suggestion was one more addition to the numerous kindnesses I received from you during my visit to your part of the world, and for which I once more thank you most heartily. Through your instrumentality I was enabled to see into the life of the country and to catch the spirit of its people in a way which I could not otherwise have done, and I am very grateful to you.

"I do not intend to talk about myself, however, but about you. Do you remember the one and only occasion on which you allowed me to see something of the real man beneath the outer shell of the genial manager of the A1 S. and T. Co.? Pardon me if I hurt your feelings by alluding to a painful subject, but I have my reasons, as you will see later. On that occasion I remember that I, like a blundering fool, got on to the subject of my return home to my wife and child, and I began telling you of my Maud—her sweet ways, her looks, her cleverness, and all that. You had confessed to feeling a bit 'under the weather' that day, and I said, 'Why don't you take a holiday and pay a visit to the old country with me?' 'The old country!' you said. 'Why, man, I haven't seen it for fifteen years. It has no attractions for me now. If I had a child living, I would be a different man.' And there was such a world of sadness in your tone that I'm blest if I didn't have to get up and look out of the window. Then you told me how your wife had died, back in the old country, and how all your hopes had died with her; and from the way you spoke I guessed that you were not in the habit of telling your story, and I felt honoured by your confidence. Then you showed me a locket with a picture of your wife inside it, and attached to the locket was the half of a coin. 'We split this for luck when we were young and foolish,' you said, and your laugh was one of the most heartbreaking sounds I ever heard in my life. Well now, having got to my point at last, it is my firm belief that you have a child living, and by all accounts as sweet a little maiden as the heart of man could wish, and the discovery came about in a very simple way.

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"Some two years ago my brother took a place in Scotland, at Heathermuir, near Morristown. While I was on my travels my wife and daughter went up there to visit them twice, and Maud made the acquaintance of a girl named Marjory Davidson.

She goes by the nickname of 'Hunter's Marjory'—I suppose, because she lives with an old uncle at his place called Hunters' Brae. I did not pay much attention to Maud's chatter, for it was a great mixture of shut-up rooms, ghosts, old houses, oak chests, boating, drowning, and all the rest of it. Of course I never for one moment connected this child with you in any way—that is, not until yesterday. There had been some talk about summer holiday plans, and wonderings as to what my brother was going to do, for there had been vague rumours of his coming south with his wife and girl.

"By the way, Maud," said my wife, 'before we leave town I want to buy a really nice present for Marjory.'

"A reward for saving my precious life, I suppose," said mischievous Maud. This Marjory did some very plucky thing when they were out boating together. I don't quite know what it was, but it doesn't matter at present.

"No," said my wife, 'not that exactly, but a little keepsake—something that will last.'

"You're afraid she'll forget, like you do, mother dear.'

"At this juncture, with a feeble attempt at correction, I intimated to Miss Maud that she was impertinent to her mother.

"Mother understands—don't you, darling?" was the reply; and mother was immediately nearly hugged to death, and I got nothing but a crushing look. But to resume.

"What would you think of a gold chain?" asked my wife.

"She's got one.'

"I never saw her wear one.'

"No; because she wears it inside her dress. She showed it to me once, and there is a dear little locket on it, with a picture of her mother inside, and a half coin with a hole in it—a Jubilee one.'

"I started up at this, and gave those two such a cross-examining as they never had in their lives. They thought at first that I had taken leave of my senses. But I've got the whole story now, and I am quite convinced that this Marjory Davidson, whose father's name was Hugh, and who has lived in hopes, ever since she could think, that her father might turn up, is your daughter, though it is a mystery to me why you did not know of her existence. But come and see for yourself. I made my wife and daughter promise to say nothing. I gather that there was some trouble between you and the old man, so it's best for us to keep our own counsel for the present. I hope you won't think me an interfering ass, but I haven't a doubt in my mind that it is as I say—you have got a child to live for, and the sooner you come and see her the better. Let me know when to expect you, and I'll come and look after you. Make your headquarters with us as long as you like.—Believe me yours faithfully,

HILARY FORESTER."

Mr. Davidson laid this letter aside and took up another one. It was written in a large, irregular hand, and ran as follows:—

"THE LOW FARM, HEATHERMUIR,
Northshire, Scotland.

"DEAR SIR,—I take the liberty of writing you this letter, hoping it finds you well, as it leaves me at present. I wish to tell you that it's all serene now with me and my wife, she having forgiven all bygones and let them be. Your kindness to me whilst I was laid up at your God-forsaken place—begging your pardon, sir, but I was anxious to be off again, as you know—but your kindness, as I say, and good advice, was such that I make bold to dare and ask you to forgive bygones, like as my good wife has done. I'm sure your Miss Marjory is as sweet a young lady as you could wish to see, and your living image, eyes and hair and all. It is said about here—begging your pardon, sir—that, because the old man was rough on you, you won't acknowledge or take notice of your child. They say he's too proud to ask you to come home; and she, poor lamb, don't even know that she has a father. Things ain't as they ought to be altogether in this world, but you can do a deal to put some of them straight, sir, if I may make bold to say so. It is some time since I seen you, but directly my wife told me Miss Marjory's name and story, I knew you was her father. I haven't breathed of this to any one, let alone Miss Marjory herself, but I am sure that if you was to come you would see that I am right. I do beg your pardon if anything I have written is not as it should be betwixt you and me, sir; but I am now so happy myself through the forgiving of old bygones that I am all for trying to make things straight; which, hoping you will soon do, I am your obedient servant,

Mr. Davidson smiled as he put down Captain Shaw's letter. He had received both the communications within a mail of each other, and one supplied information that the other lacked. He had turned the matter over in his mind this way and that, and he now felt very little doubt that this Marjory Davidson was indeed his child. And yet why should the fact that he had a child have been kept from him all these years? What reason could his brother-in-law have had for withholding the knowledge from him? It was all a mystery. He looked back over the lonely years since his wife's death, remembering how in the bitterness of his grief he had thrown himself heart and soul into his work, and had laid the foundations of a fortune. He thought of the time when the rush of gold-seekers to the Klondike had first started, and he had left the company he then represented to start on his own account in the shipping and transportation business, seeing at once that here was a certain road to success. And so it had proved, for to-day his was the best-known and most highly-respected name in all that broad region. But there had been times such as that to which Mr. Hilary Forester had alluded in his letter—when money, success, popularity, all seemed as nothing compared with a wife, a home, a child to love him. He envied the poorest labourer with these blessings. He now felt like a man in a dream. Fifteen years! He saw in fancy the little child he would have loved to take upon his knee; the growing girl learning her first lessons. How he would have cared for her and watched over her, trying to be both father and mother to the motherless child! Now she was growing quickly to womanhood, and he knew nothing of her, nor she of him. A great wave of indignation against his brother-in-law swept over him; it was a downright crime to have kept him in ignorance all these years, and the man should be brought to book. All the old bitterness against his wife's unreasonable brother took hold of him, and Captain Shaw's suggestion as to the forgetting of bygones seemed for a time little likely to be acted upon. But this mood passed, and then a great tenderness towards this unknown daughter of his welled up in his heart, and he made up his mind. He would go as soon as he could, and find out the truth.

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Other influences were at work to bring about this meeting of father and child. Dr. Hunter, yielding at last to the voice of conscience, had written to Hugh Davidson, but he had sent the letter to the care of the company to which he had belonged in the old days. This company had since gone out of existence, and the letter had come back, as Mary Ann had told Marjory, and nothing more was done for a time.

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Mrs. Forester, ever since the beginning of their acquaintance, had made periodical attacks upon the doctor, declaring that it was his duty to take steps to bring back Marjory's father. It must be remembered that Mrs. Forester knew nothing of the part Dr. Hunter had played, and blamed the cold-heartedness of a man who could leave his child unclaimed for fifteen years.

While Marjory was ill, Mrs. Forester renewed the attack with many arguments. At last one day, in a moment of expansion, the doctor confessed what he had done. In the face of Mrs. Forester's amazed displeasure, his reasons for his conduct seemed absurdly inadequate. She told him in no measured terms exactly what she thought of him, and indignantly reproached him for the course which he had taken. She quite pooh-poohed the suggestion that Hugh Davidson might be dead, as the letter had come back.

"I know he isn't dead," she protested. "I feel it as strongly as if he were standing before me at this moment. *That child's father is alive*, Dr. Hunter, and you have got to find him!"

The doctor made a mental reflection as to the "queerness" of women, with their intuitions and unfounded assertions, without reason or logic to guide them, but before he and Mrs. Forester parted that day he had promised to take steps at once. In the end he decided to go to America and meet face to face the man he had wronged, and ask his forgiveness. It was the least he could do. One stipulation he made: Marjory must not know the real object of his journey, in case nothing came of it.

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The first step was to find out where Hugh Davidson was likely to be found, if alive. Dr. Hunter felt as though he were beginning to search for the proverbial needle in a haystack; but by Mrs. Forester's advice he entrusted the matter to his lawyers, and in an incredibly short space of time he heard from them that the man he wanted was now the manager of the A1 Shipping and Transportation Company at Skaguay, Alaska, the largest organization of its kind in that part of the world.

So the doctor made up his mind to go in search of his brother-in-law. His friends the Foresters (he told no one else of his real intentions) tried to dissuade him, representing to him the length of the journey and its fatigues, the heat at that time of the year, and any and every reason they could think of to alter his purpose. But the doctor did nothing by halves, and having once realized the great wrong he had done, he would not spare himself anything till he had tried to make reparation, and it seemed that a personal meeting could do more in that direction than any number of letters.

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"Besides," he said, "it'll do me good. I begin to think that I've kept myself and Marjory shut up too long. I shall never be anything but an old fogey, but a little change and knocking about may make me a more agreeable one."

The scientific meetings at New York served as a plausible excuse for his going, and the Foresters kept his secret.

Marjory felt as if she were living in a dream, such impossible things seemed to be happening.

Could it be true that she was going to London, and her uncle to New York? One thing she begged of the doctor: that they might both be at home again in time for her birthday—that important fifteenth one when she was to see and know so much; and her uncle promised that it should be so if possible.

If the skies had suddenly fallen, Lisbeth and Peter could hardly have been more surprised than they were when the doctor announced his plans for his and Marjory's departure. Such a thing had never happened before, and they felt doubtful that they would ever see their master again if he went to "foreign parts." But when they became more accustomed to the idea, it lost some of its terrors, and they began to take a keen interest in the preparations for departure.

The house was to be left in charge of Lisbeth and Peter, who, as their master knew, would take care of it as if it were their own. 285

"Look after Miss Marjory's room," he said to Lisbeth one day.

"Ay, an' I will that," responded the old woman. "It's to be Marjory's ain come she's fifteen, an' that's no sae lang."

The doctor had always spoken of his sister as Miss Marjory; he had never got into the habit of speaking of her as Mrs. Davidson to his servants, and it was always "Miss Marjory's room" to them.

There was quite a little crowd at the station to see them off on the day of their departure. The Foresters and Marjory and her uncle all went together to Liverpool, so that Marjory might be able to see the doctor start on his voyage.

It was a time of wonder to the country girl, who had never seen any place larger than Morristown. The long journey, as it seemed to her, the many crowded streets of the city, the noise and bustle of the docks, bewildered her, and she hardly knew whether she enjoyed these new sensations or not, they were so overpowering.

When at last it was time to say good-bye to her uncle, she clung to him, begging him not to go and leave her. "Take me with you," she sobbed. Poor Marjory! it was her first parting, and she had not realized what it would mean. This great ship towering above her like a monster ready to swallow her uncle out of her sight, the unknown miles of ocean that lay between him and his destination—all this seemed terrible to the girl. She could not let him go without her. 286

The doctor folded her in his arms, kissing her many times. "There, there, my child; it won't be very long before I come back, and I hope you will be very glad to see me. Be brave now, and wish me a good voyage. Good-bye, my own little girl." And he was obliged to put her from him. She was led down the gangway by Mr. Forester; blinded by her tears, she could not see the way before her. People crowded behind them, there was much shouting of good-byes, the clatter of gangways being withdrawn, a straining and creaking of ropes, a throbbing of engines, and the great ship began to move—stealthily, it seemed to Marjory, as though it knew the heartaches it was causing, and felt ashamed of its part in tearing so many people away from their friends.

"Come, cheer up, Marjory," urged Mrs. Forester. "Give your uncle a smile to take with him. Wave your handkerchief—quick! they're off!"

Marjory's kind friends stayed with her until nothing more could be seen. She watched the tall, bent figure standing at the rail until it merged into the misty outline of the ship. She strained her eyes to the very last, and then she turned away, white and trembling and tearful. 287

"I didn't know I should care so much," she whispered half apologetically to Mrs. Forester.

"You see, you are such good friends with your uncle now, dear, that it is very hard to part with him, I know; but cheer up, and look forward to his coming home. It won't be very long."

Blanche had thoroughly enjoyed her visit to the docks. Mr. Forester had taken her over the ship; she had seen the saloons and staterooms, and had been on to the captain's bridge, and thought it great fun. She was sorry for Marjory's trouble, but she could hardly see the reason for its intensity. She had often been parted from her father for more than two months, which was all the time the doctor expected to be away. Dr. Hunter never made much fuss over Marjory that she could see—"Nothing like daddy does over me," she reflected. Still, it was very sweet of Marjory to care so much.

Yes, Marjory did care. She had grown to love dearly the silent, stern man who had been father and mother to her. He was gone. Her life would be strangely empty without him, and she would count the days until he came back to her.

CHAPTER XX.

THE DOCTOR'S DISAPPOINTMENT.

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"Oft expectation fails, and most oft there
Where most it promises."—SHAKESPEARE.

Dr. Hunter attended the most important meetings of the Congress of Scientists which was being held in New York. He was quite unprepared for the reception that was given him there. Of a very quiet and retiring disposition, and having lived the life of a recluse for many years, known to the world only by his writings, it never seemed to have occurred to him that his name was a famous one in other countries as well as his own. His first appearance was greeted with acclamation as soon as his name was mentioned, and during his stay in New York invitations were showered upon him, reporters called upon him at his hotel, and paragraphs referring to him appeared in all the papers, although he steadily refused to be interviewed.

He was thankful when the day of his departure came, as he shrank from so much publicity. He remarked afterwards that he felt as a hunted criminal might who saw in every casual passer-by a possible detective. 289

He was careful not to mention his destination to any one but the clerk from whom he purchased his ticket, but next day in a paper which he bought in the train he saw the inevitable paragraph,

"Dr. Hunter, the famous scientist of London, England, left this city to-day for Montreal, *en route* for the North-West."

The learned gentleman might have been heard to mutter words not usually included in his vocabulary when he read this. As he had only taken a ticket to Montreal, the latter part of the announcement, although it happened to be true, was an absolute invention on the part of the light-hearted paragraphist who had penned it.

Escaped from New York and the social obligations his position had entailed upon him, Dr. Hunter gave himself up to the enjoyment of his trip. From Montreal he travelled on the wonderful Canadian Pacific Railway, and he never ceased to wonder at its construction—the amazing manner in which difficulties that appeared to be insuperable had been overcome, and the way in which the brain of man had enabled him to carve a path for himself up and through mighty mountains.

"To think that one can be climbing the Rockies and at the same time partaking of an excellent dinner served as in a first-class hotel!" he remarked to a fellow-traveller. 290

"Yes indeed, we make ourselves pretty comfortable in these times," was the reply. "My father was a pioneer and crossed the plains in '47. He has some rare tales to tell of roughing it in the old days." And the friendly stranger entertained the doctor with an account of some of those early experiences.

The doctor was struck by the geniality of his fellow-travellers for the most part, and the very intelligent way in which they answered his inquiries. He was able to say on his return that he had met with nothing but kindness from beginning to end of his trip.

He was greatly looking forward to his meeting with Hugh Davidson. How surprised he would be! The doctor's feelings had changed so completely that a meeting with this man now seemed of all things the most desirable. He had purposely refrained from sending any notice of his visit beforehand, taking an almost childish delight in the idea of suddenly and unexpectedly appearing before his brother-in-law.

At last the long journey was accomplished, and he found himself outside the offices of the A1 Shipping and Transportation Company at Skaguay.

Stirred by unusual feelings, he went in rather nervously. 291

"Can I see the manager?" he inquired of a clerk who came forward. The young man opened a door with a flourish and ushered him into the manager's room.

A man rose from a desk, but it was not Hugh Davidson. This was a youngish man, fair haired and clean shaven.

Much taken aback, the doctor murmured, "I beg your pardon; I expected to find Mr. Davidson here."

"Mr. Davidson is not here at present," said the man courteously. "Is there anything I can do for you in his place?"

"Oh no, thank you; my visit is purely a personal one. As a matter of fact, I am his brother-in-law, and intended paying him a surprise visit. Here is my card; perhaps you can tell me when he is likely to be in."

An expression of concern passed over the other man's face.

"I am exceedingly sorry," he said, "to inform you that Mr. Davidson sailed from New York for England this very morning. You must have passed each other on the way. *Most* unfortunate," he added sympathetically.

The doctor was nonplussed for the moment. Here was an unexpected turn of events; he had not

contemplated such a possibility, and was undecided as to his own best course of action. At last he said, with an attempt at a smile, "Business, I suppose;" but the other replied, "No, I should gather that it was principally upon private affairs that he has gone to England; but Mr. Davidson is a very reticent man, and he gave me no particulars. I represent him here until he returns, and beyond that it is really no business of mine; but I certainly received the impression that some personal matter was calling him."

Somewhat dismayed, the doctor asked himself if it were possible that after all his brother-in-law had heard of his child's existence from an outsider. In such a case his own conduct would appear blacker than ever.

The manager's representative was really sorry for the doctor's disappointment. The old man seemed to him a pathetic figure, weary with many days of travelling only to find that his journey had been taken in vain, so far as its chief object was concerned. He suggested a cable message. "You could send it from Victoria, to the care of the Steamship Company, or to his private address in London—perhaps the latter would be the better plan." And he took a paper from the desk and read, "Care of Hilary Forester, Esq., 50 Royal Gate, London, S.W."

A smothered exclamation escaped the doctor. "I'll send a message," he said. "When is there a steamer back to Victoria?"

"Well, if you don't much mind what you go in, there is one to-morrow, but it won't travel quicker than eight knots an hour in smooth water," with a laugh.

"I'll take it," said Dr. Hunter decidedly. "It is important that I should get back as soon as possible."

Poor old man, he had been so anxious to tell his tale himself to Hugh Davidson, to throw himself upon the generosity of the man he had injured. He had wished to entreat him not to tell Marjory of the part he had played; he could not bear that her memory of him should be embittered by the knowledge of that wrong—that wrong which by reason of his biassed mind had seemed right, until the fearless words of a good and gentle woman had aided the voice of his own conscience and pronounced it wrong.

But now Marjory would hear the story from other lips, and what would he seem in her eyes? Would she banish him from his place in her heart? Would she think bitterly of him and reproach him with those fifteen years of silence? Would she not blame him for keeping her away from the world, even from the knowledge of the true personality of her mother, into whose room he had not allowed her to penetrate, in case that what she saw there might influence the childish mind in a way her uncle did not wish. It was not to be expected that the girl should understand his reasons.

He determined to start on his homeward journey the next day, and to send the cable message from the first possible point.

Meanwhile his new friend offered the hospitality of his home to Dr. Hunter, and the invitation was given in such a hearty way that it would have seemed ungracious to refuse it. He thought that evening that many people at home would open their eyes were they able to see the well-appointed table at which he was a guest, and the charming and cultured woman who presided over it, and he felt glad that he had been allowed to have this glimpse of home life in that far-away corner of the world. It was a peaceful home life, all the more attractive in that its background was rough-and-ready Skaguay—a plain town enough to look at, but one full of thrilling human interest, of tragedy and comedy. Through its streets had passed a motley procession of men—some on their way to fortune, some to disappointment, but all battling with the realities of life. The doctor was struck by the simple and straightforward outlook of these people, their sincerity, and the pleasure they found in their life; far as it was from any of the great world centres, every hour of every day seemed to be full of interest.

They spoke of Mr. Davidson, and there was nothing but praise of his sterling integrity, his upright and honourable life, his unflinching kindness and charity towards others.

"There's not a man in this town, or, for that matter, in the whole of this vast district, who doesn't know and honour the name of Hugh Davidson," said the manager's representative enthusiastically; "and as for myself, sir," thumping the table with his closed fist, "I am proud to be associated with such a man."

The doctor's heart smote him. This then was the black sheep—the man he had not considered fit to have the care of his own child!

He started off again next morning, and the journey back seemed long and tedious by reason of his impatience, although he could not but be struck by the beauty of the scenery as the ship steamed slowly along, threading its way amongst the many islands which lie across the course of the inland passage, as it is called.

After the doctor had dispatched his message, his one thought was, Would they wait for his return before telling Marjory what had happened? If only they would. And yet, after his conduct in the past, he could hardly expect any consideration from Hugh Davidson. To his great relief he received a message at New York from Mr. Davidson saying that he would await him in London.

Meanwhile Marjory, unconscious of the coming change in her fortunes, was enjoying new sights

and experiences. She was not yet allowed to walk much or to exert herself in any way. They spent a week in London with the Hilary Foresters before going to the seaside. Marjory felt a mild surprise when she heard it remarked on all sides that "town was very empty." To her it seemed full to overflowing, and more like one of the anthills that were Peter's abhorrence in the garden than anything else. The continuous stream of human beings flowing in all directions was a never-ending source of wonder to her.

"Every single one of these people must have a story, you know," she said to the others one day. "Some are good and some are wicked, I suppose."

"I think they're all much of a muchness," replied Maud thoughtfully. "Good people can be bad, and bad people can be good. The best nurse I ever had turned out to be a thief, and I was so sorry when she went away. I tell you I loved that thief. You've no idea what a good, kind nurse she was; and it was found that she stole for the sake of somebody else who was poor."

"Well, but it can't be right to steal," argued Blanche.

"No, of course not, silly. But what I mean is that even wicked people may have some good in them. I've always thought that there ought to be something between sheep and goats—not quite so good and not quite so bad as either; or they might have points, such as length of horn, or silkiness of coat and thickness of fleece, and so on."

"Would an extra fine goat be an extra wicked person, or a shade better than an ordinary goat?" asked Marjory, laughing. 297

"Of course he would be better. A wretched, thin, mangy animal would be the worst, and they would gradually go on improving till the best goat was just the next thing to the worst sheep." Maud laughed.

Blanche was rather shocked. "I don't think you ought to make fun of those things, Maud," she said, reddening.

"I'm not making fun, my serious little cousin. I only mean to show that I think it's very hard to decide where the good begins and the bad leaves off, and that everybody has some of each. You see, I'm older than you, and I do think sometimes, although you might not guess it to look at me—eh?"

"Miss Waspé quoted some rather nice lines to us one day," said Marjory. "They were by Robert Louis Stevenson, I think. I don't know if I can remember them properly, but they were something like this,—

"There's so much bad in the best of us,
And so much good in the most of us,
That it hardly becomes any of us
To talk evil of the rest of us."

"Awfully jolly," agreed Maud. "I couldn't have put it better myself; it's exactly what I think."

The passing crowd was a never-failing source of interest to Marjory, and one of her favourite occupations was to go to Kensington Gardens or to the Park and watch the people, weaving their life-stories in her imagination. Driving about, shopping with Mrs. Forester in such shops as threw the most important establishments in Morristown far into the shade, in the streets, or even looking out of the windows at 50 Royal Gate, there was this never-ending procession to speculate upon; so, although the time was spent quietly, there was not a dull moment in that week. 298

Then came another move, the excitement of another railway journey, and then at last the sea. Marjory's wonder and delight were indescribable. She had dreamed of the sea all her life. Her uncle had always promised that some day he would take her to the seaside. He had always vaguely said to himself that the child should be taken about when she was old enough; but the years had slipped by until she was nearly fifteen, and yet she had never seen the sea till now.

"Her beloved must cross the sea," she whispered to herself, as she stood at the water's edge for the first time, looking over its shining expanse, dancing and sparkling in the sun like myriads of diamonds in a setting of blue. Nothing but the sea as far as the eye could reach—what a sense of freedom and space and unbounded possibility! How she loved to watch the rise and fall of the waves with their fringes of white, to listen for the clatter of the shingle as it rushed along, keeping pace with each receding wave! But, best of all, she loved to stand barefooted on the shining sand when the tide was low, and to feel the water lapping gently over her ankles. 299

The three girls (for Maud had begged her mother to spend at least half their holiday at the little, unfashionable place Mrs. Forester had chosen) spent long days by the sea—days of delight for all, and of the gathering of health and strength for Marjory.

In the mornings the other two would usually bathe, Marjory looking on from her deck-chair, and finding much amusement in the antics of the bathers. She liked to watch Blanche in her pretty bathing suit, her hair rippling over her shoulders, and Maud, too, with her coquettish little cap amongst her fair curls. Thanks to her friend's tuition, Blanche was now quite a good swimmer, and was endeavouring to teach Maud, and they had great fun over it. Marjory herself was not allowed to bathe; she might only wade sometimes at low tide.

The girl would lie and dream of what the sea might bring her if dreams could ever come true, but

her visions showed her nothing of a great ship with precious freight for her on board which one day very soon was to come from the New World to the Old, and make the old one new for her. Marjory knew nothing of this, and yet she was strangely content and happy in these days as she lay dreaming in the sunshine and listening to the singing of the sea.

CHAPTER XXI.

HOPES REALIZED.

"A kind, true heart, a spirit high,
That would not fear and would not bow,
Were written in his manly eye
And on his manly brow."—BURNS.

Home again at last! How good it was to see the doctor at the station, to drive with dear old Peter and Brownie along the familiar road, to breathe the sweet pure air scented with pine and heather!

"After all," Marjory said to her uncle, "there can't be any place in the world just like dear little old Heathermuir. I love every bit of it."

"East, west, hame's best," quoted the doctor. "No, my dear, there's no place like it, not even New York!" with a smile at the recollection of his late experiences.

"What a lot you must have to tell me!" said Marjory. "And, uncle dear, I hope you haven't forgotten that to-morrow is my fifteenth birthday, and you've always promised to tell me everything I want to know on that day."

"Yes, yes," replied the doctor evasively. "By the way, Marjory, you'll find a surprise awaiting you at the Brae; we've a new member of our household," smiling.

"Who can it be?"

"Wait and see. It's a kind of a sort of a birthday present, but I am not sure that you will be altogether pleased."

Marjory laughed.

"It sounds as if it might be some sort of an animal. O *uncle*," in dismay, "I *hope* you haven't brought a monkey from America!"

"No," laughing.

"Perhaps it's a parrot, then, or—no—*surely* not a nigger!"

"No; it's not a coloured gentleman or lady, as I have lately been taught to call them."

"Oh dear, I do wonder what it is! But there's the house at last, and dear old Lisbeth's round smiling face, and my darling Silky. Oh, it is good to be at home again!" And Marjory nestled close to her uncle for a moment, and then sprang out of the cart and began hugging Lisbeth in the most boisterous fashion.

But who was this standing shyly in the background? Here was indeed a surprise. This girl with the smooth sleek head, the neat gown and spotless apron and cap, could it be Mary Ann Smylie, the rich miller's daughter? Yes, indeed it was. But what could it mean? Quite bewildered, Marjory held out her hand to the girl. "I am glad to see you, Mary Ann," she said.

Tears were in Mary Ann's eyes as she replied, "Thank you, Miss Marjory; I'm very glad to be here." And she disappeared at once in the direction of the kitchen.

"This *is* a surprise," said Marjory, looking inquiringly at her uncle and then at Lisbeth. Each seemed to expect the other to speak.

"Weel, it was this way," began Lisbeth. "Yon puir lassie's feyther, no content wi' bein' just a plain man like ony ither miller, must needs try to mak a big fortune, and some o' thae speculatin' deils—I canna ca' them by ony ither name—got hand o' the auld man, an' ae fine day his fortune's awa—the vera hoose he's livin' in no his ain, a' signed awa, an' he in debt. His puir silly wife was clean dementit, an' this girl wi' naething but her buik-learnin' an' sic like rubbish to stand by. There was naebody wantit her to teach their bairns, and yon grandee o' a schulemistress telt the puir lassie she wasna competent for teachin', an' that efter a' the guid money her feyther had spent upo' her learnin'. Weel, Mary Ann she comes to me, an' says, 'Will ye gie me wark at Hunters' Brae?' says she. 'The doctor's awa,' says I, but she begged that hard I couldna say no to the creature. 'I'm willin' to learn,' says she, 'an' if so's I could wait upo' Miss Marjory I'd be more nor set up.' She cried sae, and looked that peekit an' meeserable, I hadna the heart to send her

off, sae I e'en kept her here, thinkin' the doctor, guid man, wouldna blame me for the bit she ate an' drank till he cam hame."

"Yes," put in the doctor, "when I got back yesterday I found Mary Ann comfortably settled. I suppose she thought that if she had won over Lisbeth the rest was easy," laughing. "I'm sorry for the girl, and I dare say she can be made useful here in many ways. As you are getting on, Marjory, it will be nice for you to have a maid of your own to look after your fallals; but the question is, Do you like the girl well enough to have her about you? This is your home, and I don't want to insist upon anything that would be unpleasant to you."

Marjory remembered her old grudge against Mary Ann, but she could hardly connect the quiet, subdued person who had just disappeared, weeping, with the frizzy-haired, overdressed, and affected girl at the post office.

"Poor Mary Ann! Let her stay, uncle. I'm sure we shall get on quite well."

"That's settled then," said the doctor, with relief. He had been a little afraid that Lisbeth's philanthropy might not be quite to Marjory's liking.

Dr. Hunter was strangely restless that evening—sad and merry by turns. Marjory herself felt very excited as she thought of the morrow.

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When she went to bid her uncle good-night, he drew her to him very tenderly. "So you are really glad to be at home again, my child," he said, stroking her hair.

"Very, very glad," was the reply, and the dark eyes shone with tears.

"You love the old place, then?"

"Oh yes, I do; but it wouldn't be the same without you." And she rubbed her cheek against his.

"And you love your old uncle in spite of all his mistakes and queer ways?"

"I love you better than any one else in the whole world," she said simply.

He kissed her very tenderly, and then put her away from him with a sigh. "Go, my child, sleep well; to-morrow is a new day, and begins a new life for you."

"Better than any one else in the whole world," he repeated to himself when Marjory had left him. This had been his heart's desire, his scheme from the beginning—that his beloved sister's child should be his, and that he should be her all, and first in her affections; and now had come his punishment for that selfish wish. The child had made this open avowal of her feeling for him on the eve of the very day on which he must renounce her, must give her up to another with a better right than he to that first place in her love. He had done wrong; he had made what amends he could, and the rest was in God's hands. Would this girl, growing sweeter and more lovable year by year, take away her affection from the uncle and give it all to the father? Would she forget the old man and all his care for her? Then he thought of the honest eyes as they had looked into his, clear and steadfast. Surely he had caught a glimpse of the loving, faithful heart within; surely that heart would prove large enough for love of both. He could no longer expect to be first, but surely he was wronging the child and all that he knew of her by the mere suggestion that she would change towards him, and the memory of her look and her caress comforted him.

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Marjory's fifteenth birthday had come at last, and she stood in her mother's room.

The sunlight streamed across the faded hangings and the panelled walls, flooding the place with brightness. It seemed hardly possible that it had been unused for so many years. Lisbeth had worked in it so faithfully week by week that, beyond the fading of the curtains and the rugs which lay about the polished floor, there was nothing to indicate that it had been unoccupied for so long.

There were flowers about the room; there was a work-basket on a small table by the window; and an embroidery frame with a half-finished piece of work in it stood near, just as if its owner might have been working at it yesterday. It was altogether a dainty apartment, and bore evidence in every corner of the girlish fancies of its former mistress. The pictures on the walls were all of a romantic description; the books on the shelves could almost have told the tale of Marjory Hunter's childhood and girlhood. Fairy tales there were in plenty, and the rest were of the tender, sentimental kind—love poems and the like. If Blanche Forester had been describing the collection, she would have said that there was not a single dry book amongst them—the word "dry" in her vocabulary meaning anything from uninteresting to instructive! Had the doctor only known it, he need not have feared the attraction of these books for his niece. Marjory required something stronger and more active in character—stories of great men and women, histories of the world and its wonders, something stirring and stimulating.

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Marjory stood in her mother's room—alone. Her feelings as she entered this chamber of her dreams were those of awe and expectation of she knew not what. She gave one quick glance around, but she had eyes for nothing at present but a picture—a picture of a man with a strong, handsome face, and dark hair and eyes which she knew resembled her own. Beside it was another picture—that of a fair-haired girl, her mother. "How sweet she must have been!" thought Marjory, and her eyes turned again to the other picture.

That other picture, would the doctor have confessed it, was one of the chief reasons why he did not wish Marjory to enter her mother's room. With that speaking, impressive portrait of her father continually before her eyes, could the child be taught to ignore and forget him? The doctor had an almost superstitious dislike of having anything moved at Hunters' Brae. His sister had ordered Hugh Davidson's portrait to be hung in her room; there it must stay, but Marjory should not see it until he thought fit.

Marjory now stood gazing at the picture. This, then, was the hero of her dreams and hopes, that father who had been the central figure in many a tale of stirring adventure, hairbreadth escape, and brave deed—tales which she had told herself many a time. But this was a figure even more splendid than that of her imagination. The strong, square chin and determined mouth, the flashing, piercing eyes under the dark brows—all spoke of the strength and courage of a Cœur de Lion or a Napoleon.

She could not take her eyes off the picture. How proud of him she would have been! was her sad thought, but it seemed no use hoping any more. She must begin afresh to-day, and try to be content without him. It would be very hard, for the hope had been very dear to her.

Suddenly there was a knock at the door, and a strange voice called, "May I come in, Marjory?"

Who could this be, calling her by her Christian name, and yet in a voice she did not know? She must be dreaming; but no—the voice called again, "May I come in, Marjory?"

"Come in," she said, turning towards the door with a puzzled and inquiring expression on her face.

"I've brought you a large and handsome birthday present," said the doctor's voice, as he almost pushed Mr. Davidson into the room. Then he shut the door, and left the father and daughter confronting each other.

There was a moment's silence. Marjory looked at the tall man with the noble gray head, the lined forehead that told of years of sorrow and care. Time had set its marks upon the face, but it was the face of the picture. At last—somehow, and from somewhere—her father had been brought to her. The man held out his arms, and she crept into them, sobbing with wonder and delight and other feelings to which she could not have given a name, as he murmured, "My own little girl, come to me."

That moment seemed to sweep away all the sad memories of her longings and yearnings. Never again would she feel that she was an orphan, really belonging to nobody. Her father, her very own, had come to her at last. How good it was!

It may well be imagined that these two had much to say to each other. Mr. Davidson told his child of her sweet young mother, as he took her round the room, showing her the various treasures, which were in their places just as they had been in the old time when he knew that room so well. In the work-basket was a dainty little garment which had been intended for Marjory. It was not finished; the rusty needle, with its thread yellow with age, was still in it, just as the worker had left it. Mr. Davidson took up the little bundle of muslin and lace and reverently kissed it.

"Thank God for you, my darling," he said, "and for this good day that gives you to me!" And he kissed Marjory again.

Marjory showed her father the locket and chain which she always wore. Yes, he knew it; it was one he had given to her mother. But he did not add that at that time it had contained a picture of himself. And the coin? Yes, he had the other half; and he told Marjory how he and that other Marjory had split it for luck, and how each had promised to wear it always.

There was much questioning and answering of questions between them, and at last came the inevitable one which Mr. Davidson had expected and dreaded,—

"Why did you never come before?"

He looked into his daughter's eyes.

"Can you trust me when I tell you that there was a reason I cannot explain which made it impossible until now, and when I tell you that it was not my fault, and that as soon as the reason was removed I came to you? Will you be content to believe me, and ask no more questions?"

Marjory returned her father's look, a world of trust and confidence in her eyes. "Yes," she replied; and from that moment they understood each other.

And Marjory never knew the answer to that question. Mrs. Forester kept her own counsel, and so did Mr. Hilary Forester, and they were the only people besides the principals themselves who knew the truth.

"My beloved did cross the sea, after all," said Marjory to her uncle, when they joined him later.

"Quite right; so he did," replied the doctor.

"And you believe the old prophecy now?" triumphantly.

The doctor laughed.

"I can hardly say that," he answered. "It has just happened so, that's all."

The doctor had persuaded Mr. Davidson to wait until Marjory's birthday before making himself known to her, in order that the day might be a red-letter one in her life. The Foresters had kept the secret carefully, Captain Shaw had kept his, and not a whisper had gone abroad of the wonderful event about to happen, and all had fallen out just as the doctor had planned and wished.

There were great rejoicings at Hunters' Brae that day, and in the evening there was a large and merry birthday party. Mr. and Mrs. Forester and Blanche, Mr. and Mrs. Hilary Forester and Maud, the Morisons, with Herbert and Alan, all came with a welcome for Mr. Davidson and congratulations for Marjory. 311

Earlier in the day, Captain and Mrs. Shaw had come together, as they had done once before, to be congratulated on their own happy reunion.

"There's nothing like the forgetting of old bygones," said the captain, as he wrung Mr. Davidson's hand, "and there's no happiness so sweet as when it's been long in coming, sir. I wish you and dear Miss Marjory many happy returns of the day."

The doctor had been wondering what Mr. Davidson's plans for the future would be. Would it be part of his punishment that the father would take his child to far-away Skaguay and keep her to himself? It would be natural enough, perhaps, but he thought with a pang of the difference it would make to him. Life at Hunters' Brae would be sad for him without the girl. This matter weighed heavily upon his mind, but he dared not speak upon the subject for fear of hastening a decision.

At last one day Mr. Davidson spoke his mind. He must go back to Alaska, and would take Marjory with him, but—and here Dr. Hunter's heart almost stopped beating—he would retire from business. He had enough and to spare for Marjory and himself, and he looked forward to settling down at home. 312

"Here, here!" interrupted the doctor then. "The Brae will eventually be Marjory's. If you can forgive the past, Hugh, make this your home. You shall not regret it, I promise you. I do believe I have laid that old ghost of jealousy at last. All I have is to be Marjory's. My old age would be comfortless indeed if I were doomed to spend it here alone. Perhaps that is what I deserve, but do give the old place a trial. The child loves it."

"It is associated in my mind with the happiest time of my life," replied Mr. Davidson earnestly. "No other place could seem so like home to me."

And so it was settled. Marjory was delighted at the idea of travelling with her father—of crossing that wonderful sea which had brought her beloved. She was enchanted by the prospect, but, as she said, it would not have been so delightful if she had not been able to look forward to coming home again at the end of her travels—home to her uncle at Hunters' Brae.

There was a certain clause in the doctor's will which he discussed with his niece and her father before they started on their journey. He had made the stipulation that, when the time came that Marjory should become possessor of Hunters' Brae, and of all that he had to leave, she should adopt the surname of Hunter. Marjory clapped her hands when she heard this. 313

"There's the prophecy again," she cried, quoting,—

"The Hunters' line shall ne'er decline
Till the muir doth pass away."

"Nonsense!" replied the doctor. "It is merely a question of title and property. Had there been a male Hunter living, the Brae would have been his; and it is stated in the original deeds that, in the event of the sole descendant being a girl, she must take the family name, and give it to her husband when she marries. The person who wrote that rubbish probably knew of this when he scribbled his so-called prophecy."

"You are always so scornful about those prophecies, uncle dear," said Marjory, laughing. "I think they are so interesting and so true. I shall copy them out and put my notes to them, as my grandmother did."

So Marjory was quite happy at last. Her childhood had had its troubles—very real ones while they lasted. Then friendship had come to lighten them, and wise, loving words from a motherly woman, who had taught her to look away from self, to find happiness in thinking of others. In so doing, she had found her way into her uncle's heart, and the finding of it had brought ample reward. And now had come this crowning joy of all—the meeting with her father at last, the realization that he was all and more than all her fancy had painted him. She felt that her cup of happiness was full. Looking back over the past, she could sing with the poet,— 314

"What had I then? A hope that grew
Each hour more bright and dear,
The flush upon the eastern skies
That showed the sun was near.
Now night has faded far away,
My sun has risen, and it is day."

THE END.

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