Title: The Story of the White-Rock Cove

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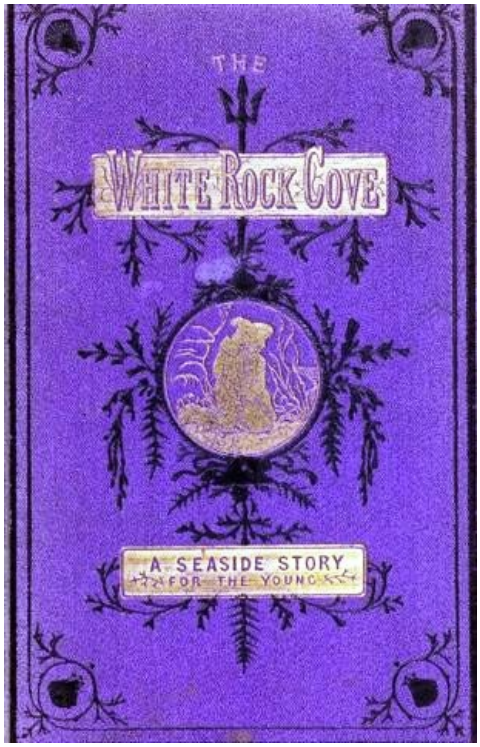
Release date: August 26, 2007 [eBook #22404]

Language: English

Credits: Produced by Marilynda Fraser-Cunliffe, Mary Meehan and the Online Distributed Proofreading Team at http://www.pgdp.net (This file was made using scans of public domain works in the International Children's Digital Library.)



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# THE STORY OF THE WHITE-ROCK COVE.

**With Illustrations.**

**LONDON:**
**T. NELSON AND SONS, PATERNOSTER ROW;**
**EDINBURGH; AND NEW YORK.**

**1871.**

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**WILLIE AND ALECK AT THE FOOT OF THE WHITE ROCK**

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# THE STORY OF THE WHITE-ROCK COVE.

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## CHAPTER I.

### LONG AGO AT BRAYCOMBE.

The Story of the White-Rock Cove—"*to be written down all from the very beginning*"—is urgently required by certain youthful petitioners, whose importunity is hard to resist; and the request is sealed by a rosy pair of lips from the little face nestling at my side, in a manner that admits of no denial.

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"*From the beginning*;"—that very beginning carries me back to my own old school-room, in the dear home at Braycombe, when, as a little boy between nine and ten years old, I sat there doing my lessons.

It was on a Thursday morning, and, consequently, I was my mother's pupil. For whereas my tutor, a certain Mr. Glengelly, from our nearest town of Elmworth, used to come over on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays for the carrying forward of my education; my studies were, on the other days of the week, which I consequently liked much better, conducted under the gentle superintendence of my mother.

On this particular morning I was working with energy at a rule-of-three sum, being engaged in a sort of exciting race with the clock, of which the result was still doubtful. When, however, the little click, which meant, as I well knew, five minutes to twelve, sounded, I had attained my quotient in plain figures; a few moments more, and the process of *fours into, twelves into, twenties into*, had been accomplished; and just as the clock struck twelve I was able to hand up my slate triumphantly with my task completed.

"A drawn game, mamma!" I exclaimed, "between me and the clock;" and then with eager eyes I followed hers, as she rapidly ran over the figures which had cost me so much trouble, and from time to time relieved my mind by a quiet commentary: "Quite right so far;—No mistakes yet;—You have worked it out well."

Frisk, the intelligent, the affectionate, the well-beloved companion of my sports, and the recipient of many of my confidences, woke up from his nap, stretched himself, came and placed his fore-paws upon my knees, and, looking up in my face, spoke as plainly as if endowed with the capacity of expressing himself in human language, to this effect:—"I'm very glad you have finished your lessons; and glad, too, that I was able to sleep on a mat in the window, where the warm sunshine has made me extremely comfortable. But now your lessons are done, I hope you'll lose no time, but come out to play at once. I'm ready when you are."

And Frisk's tail wagged faster and faster when my mother's inspection of my sum was concluded, so that I could not help thinking he must have understood her when she said,—"There are no mistakes, Willie; you have been a good, industrious little boy this morning; you may go out to play with a light heart."

I did not need twice telling, but very soon put away all my books and maps, and the slate, with its right side carefully turned down, that it might not get rubbed, wiped the pens, placed my copy-book in the drawer, and presented myself for that final kiss with which my mother was wont to terminate our proceedings, and which was on this occasion accompanied by the remonstrance that I was getting quite too big a boy for such nonsense.

Then at a bound I disappeared through the window, which opened on the lawn, and let off my pent-up steam in the circumnavigation of the garden, with Frisk barking at my heels; clearing the geranium-bed with a flying leap, and taking the low wire-fence by the shrubbery twice over, to the humiliation of my canine companion, who had to dip under where I went over.

The conclusion of these performances brought me once again in front of the school-room window, where my mother stood beckoning to me. She had my straw hat with its sailor's blue ribbons in one hand, and a slice of seed-cake in the other.

"Here, Willie," she said, "put on your hat, for the sun is hot although there is a fresh breeze; and—but perhaps I may have been mistaken—I thought perhaps some people of my acquaintance were fond of seed-cake for luncheon."

"No indeed, dear mamma," I made answer speedily, "you are not at all mistaken: some people—that is, Frisk and I—do like it very much; don't we Frisk, old fellow?"

"And now," continued my mother,—who must certainly have forgotten at the moment her opinion expressed just five minutes before as to the propriety of kisses, for, smoothing back my hair, she stooped down to press her lips upon my forehead before putting my hat on,—"and now you are to take your troublesome self off for a long hour, indeed, almost an hour and a half: away with you to your play."

"May I take my troublesome self to old George's, mamma?" I petitioned.

"If you like," she answered; "only be careful in going down the Zig-zag; I don't want to find you a little heap of broken bones at the bottom of the cliff."

I confess myself to being entirely incapable of conveying on paper to my young readers the charms, the manifold delights, of that Zig-zag walk, which was our shortest way down to the lodge.

You started from the garden, then through the shrubbery, and from the shrubbery by a little wire gate you entered the natural wood which clothed the upper part of our hill-side. The path descended rapidly from this point, being very steep in parts, and emerging every here and there so as to command an uninterrupted view of the beautiful Braycombe Bay, which on this bright summer morning was all dancing and sparkling in the sunshine. Lower down, the wood gave place to rock and turf, until you reached the top of the shingle which the path skirted for a little distance; and, finally, crossing an undulating meadow, you gained the lodge, the abode of my friend old George, mentioned above.

It was not its picturesque beauty alone which endeared the Zig-zag walk to me, although, child that I was, I feel sure the loveliness of the outer world had the effect, unconsciously to myself, of brightening my little inner world; but over and above all this must be ranked my keen enjoyment of a scramble, and of the sense of difficulty and danger attendant upon certain steep parts of the descent. It was one of my great amusements to be trusted occasionally to guide my parents' visitors down by this path, for the sake of the view, whilst their carriages would be sent the long way by the drive to meet them at the lodge. There were precipitous places, where even grave and stately grown-up people would give up walking and take to running; and then again little perilous points, where ladies especially would utter faint cries of fright, and would require gentle persuasion to induce them to step down from stone to stone; whilst I, fearless from long practice, would triumphantly perform the feat two or three times, to show that I was not in the least afraid, devising, moreover, short cuts for myself even steeper than those of the recognized path.

I question whether the birth-day which conferred on me the privilege of going alone up and down the Zig-zag was the greatest boon to myself or to my nurse; the exertion involved in scaling the hill-side being to the full as wearisome to her as it was enchanting to myself. The emancipation, however, came early in my career, since my friend, old George, by my father's consent, assumed a sort of out-of-door charge of me at a period when most little boys are exclusively under nursery discipline. For my father reposed the utmost confidence in the old man's principles, and did not hesitate to let me be for hours under his care, saying, often in my hearing, that he would rather have me out on the water learning from him how to manage the boats, or climbing the rocks and exploring the caves under his safe guardianship, than learning from a woman only how to keep *off* the rocks and avoid tumbling into the water. He was an old seaman, united by strong ties of friendship and gratitude to our family. In earlier years he had served on board the same ship in which my father had been a young midshipman; and on one occasion, when my father fell overboard, at a time when the vessel was at full speed, had thrown himself into the water, and held my father's head up when he was too exhausted to swim, until the boat put out for the rescue had time to come up and save both lives, which the delay had placed in great peril. When, some years later, on my grandfather's death, my father came to live at Braycombe, he insisted upon Groves, who was just about to be pensioned off through some failure in health, coming to settle with his wife at the lodge, promising him the charge of our boats, so that he might have a taste of his old occupation. His daughter-in-law, widow of his only son, who had been drowned, obtained the situation of schoolmistress, and lived near to the old couple with Ralph, *her* only son, a lad some few years my senior, who was employed about the place under his grandfather's supervision, and helped in rowing when we went out upon the water.

A friendship firm and tender had grown up between myself and the old seaman, I accepting him as a grown-up play-fellow, and revealing to him in detail all the many plans continually suggesting themselves to my fertile imagination, and finding in him an ever ready sympathy, and, when possible, active co-operation in my schemes.

From which digression, explanatory of the relationship subsisting between old George—as he had taught me from infancy to call him, *Mr. Groves*, as he was more properly designated by the neighbourhood—and myself, I must return to the bright June morning upon which, after my usual fashion, I descended the Zig-zag, running, scrambling, sliding, with Frisk scampering and capering at my side, making wild snaps at pieces of cake which I broke off for him from time to time, and held up as high as I could reach, that he might have to jump for them.

We were not long in gaining the lodge, which, by the carriage drive, was nearly three-quarters of a mile from the house. I produced a series of knocks upon the door, like those of a London postman, though, as old George was wont to remark,—

"What's the use, Master Willie, of knocking like that; you never stop to hear me say 'Come in,' but just burst open the door and drive in like a gust of wind promiscuous." But, in self-defence, I must explain that my defective manners in this particular were entirely due to my old friend himself, who, from earliest infancy, had trained me in all manner of impertinent familiarities. It was traditional that I cried to go to him whilst I was still in arms; that I made attacks of an aggravated character upon his brass buttons before I could walk alone; and I could just remember experiments upon his white beard, as trying doubtless to him as they were interesting to myself, conducted with philosophical determination on my part, in order to ascertain whether it came off by pulling or not! In all of which proceedings my friend greatly encouraged me, so that the blame of my failure in the laws of etiquette lay at his door.

Only Mrs. Groves was in the cottage when I rushed in eagerly upon the morning in question. She was busy in culinary mysteries, but assured me her master would be soon in, and, in the meantime, I was to make myself at home; which I did at once.

"And your dear ma, how's she?" inquired the good lady presently, settling a cover on a saucepan in a decisive manner, and sitting down during a pause in her operations. "I saw her drive by yesterday; and Susan told me she'd been at the school. A blessed time children have of it these days, going to school; it's very different to what it was in my time."

"Then you didn't go to school?" I asked, being privately of opinion that she was rather fortunate as a child.

"Oh yes, sir, I went to school, but not like the schooling children has now-a-days, with a high-born lady like your ma going herself to see them;—our old dame, she teached us all she knew—to read, and mark, and learn,—"

"And inwardly digest?" I suggested, as Mrs. Groves hesitated in her enumeration of accomplishments.

But there was not time to satisfy me concerning this branch of her education, for old George appearing at the moment, I flew to meet him, and we strolled down to the water's edge together.

"I've been longing to see you," I exclaimed. "It's about Aleck, my cousin Aleck, I wanted to tell you. He's coming, and uncle and aunt Gordon, on Thursday week; that's only just a fortnight, you know."

Aleck was my only boy cousin, and ever since there had been a notion of his coming to Braycombe, I had been thinking and dreaming of him incessantly. My aunt Gordon had been in very delicate health, and the doctors ordered foreign air and constant change for the summer months, and a winter in some warm climate. There had been some hesitation as to how my cousin, their only child, should be disposed of. He was not very strong, and school life, it was feared, might be too great an ordeal for another year; so my parents had written, offering that he should spend that time at Braycombe, and share my tutor's instructions. The decisive answer from my uncle had only just arrived, and I was in a tumult of joy and excitement that it was in favour of my cousin's coming to stay with us, and that the actual day of our visitors' arrival had been fixed.

George listened with every appearance of interest to my communication.

"I'm glad your cousin's coming, Master Willie, as you're pleased," he said.

"But aren't you glad, too, for your own sake?" I asked. "It will be so nice having him to play with us."

"Oh, I'll be pleased to see him, never fear for that," responded George. "I knew his father when he was but a little fellow like yourself."

"Mamma calls me her *big* boy," I threw in, disapprovingly. "But what do you think Aleck will be like?"

"Well, sir, I should expect very much such another young craft as yourself; or, now I come to think of it, perhaps a year older or so."

"Not a year," I replied; "ten months and a half. I asked mamma his birth-day. Do you think he'll be as tall as me? because papa and mamma say I'm tall for my age."

"His father stood six feet one the day he came of age. I daresay his son will take after him," said George.

"And be as tall as that?" I inquired, feeling rather anxious, until reassured, at the transformation of my cousin in prospect into a young giant.

I suppose that few children had ever seen less of other children than I had up to this time. There were but three gentlemen's houses in our neighbourhood: the Rectory, where lived the elderly clergyman and his wife, who had never had a family; the Elms, a country seat, where Sir John and Lady Cosington and two grown-up daughters resided; and Willowbank, another country place, occupied by a young married couple, with one little baby. Elmworth, our nearest town, was seven miles off; and this distance almost entirely precluded intercourse with any of the families there.

In consequence of this, I had been completely without companions of my own age up to this time. In books I had read much of children's amusements with their companions; and although the perfect happiness of my own home left nothing really to be wished for, if ever a wish *did* occur to me for anything I had not, it was for a play-fellow and companion somewhere about my own age; and now, when this wish of mine was really on the eve of being realized, I was filled with vague dreams and anticipations of all the delight which it was to bring to me. When George and I had mutually agreed that my cousin Aleck—allowing for the difference of age—might be reasonably expected to be somewhat taller than myself, we sat down on the beach, and began to discuss certain plans of mine for giving him a suitable welcome.

Dim ideas, the result of "Illustrated London News'" pictures, were floating in my mind—bouquets, triumphal arches, addresses, and so forth—even although I wound up by saying—

"Of course, not like that exactly; only something—something rather grand."

**OLD GEORGE AND WILLIE.**

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Old George, however, kindly and wisely pulled my schemes down, and laid them affectionately in the dust:—

"You see, Master Willie, anything written, even in your best hand, wouldn't come up to what you will say in the first five minutes by word of mouth; and then the school banners, though very suitable for a feast—and I'm sure my Susan would be right pleased to look them up for you—would be no ways suitable. '*A merry Christmas and happy New Year*,' or, '*Braycombe Schools, founded 1830*,' would look odd-like flying in the avenue at this time of year. And though I'd be glad to do anything to give you pleasure, I'd rather be opening the gate to your uncle and aunt and cousin, as they drive up, than firing off a gun, which might disturb their nerves, not to say frighten the horses."

All of which was perfectly unanswerable. But as old George put on his spectacles in conclusion, I knew he meant to consider the subject with attention; and I therefore remained quietly at his side, sending flat stones skimming along the water, or throwing in a stick for Frisk to fetch out again, until, as I expected, he signified to me that he had thought of what would do.

He said that the light arch which supported the central lamp over the gate might be very easily decked with evergreens for the occasion, and the word *welcome*, traced in flowers, put up so as to appear very pretty with the green background; whilst the flag-staff at the top of the hill, just by the shrubbery, should display all the flags that our establishment could boast of.

Groves' scheme, though not quite so extensive as those which had floated through my childish imagination, was sufficiently attractive to be very welcome; and I eagerly insisted upon our immediately returning to the lodge, where George took certain measurements of the arch which impressed me wonderfully with a sense of his superiority, and wisdom.

By which time Mrs. Groves looked out to say that her husband's dinner would be spoiled by waiting, or eaten by the dog, "which there was no driving off." And I, thus reminded of the time, settled the difficulty about Frisk by taking him up bodily in my arms, and, hurrying off, reached home only just in time to get ready for dinner before the gong sounded.

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# CHAPTER II.

## ALECK'S WELCOME.

It is almost unnecessary to remark that the fortnight preceding my cousin's arrival was one of the longest I had ever spent—even longer than those preceding birth-days or Christmas. However, the long looked-for Thursday came at last.

I pleaded hard for a whole holiday, but my mother would not be persuaded; so I had to do my morning lessons as usual, and confessed, after they were over, that the hours had passed much faster than I at all expected.

In consideration of the travellers having, in all probability, had but little time for refreshment,

dinner was to be rather earlier than usual; and Aleck and I were to have it, for once, with the elders of the party. Luncheon was also early; and not having the time to go down to the lodge before it, I went out into the garden with my mother to help in gathering a nosegay for my aunt's room.

How fresh and beautiful everything looked that morning, as we stood there amongst the flowers, my mother selecting the materials for the nosegay, and I holding the basket, and handing her the scissors as she wanted them, or executing at intervals little by-plays with Frisk. I remember feeling a kind of intense thrill of happiness, which to this day is vividly recalled by the scent of those particular roses and geraniums; and also a sort of dim wonder about the unhappiness which I had heard and read of as the fate of some—pondering in my own mind how it felt to be so very unhappy, and whether people couldn't help it if they would only go out into the fresh air and warm sunshine, and enjoy themselves as I did. From which speculations I was recalled by my mother saying,—

"I think we have enough flowers, Willie; perhaps just one creeper for the outside of the vase. There—we shall do now."

Then we went in by the school-room window, and I fetched the large vase from the east bed-room, and stood by my mother whilst tastefully and daintily she arranged the flowers as I thought none but she could arrange them. She had nearly completed her task when my father came into the school-room.

"I am sending the carriage early, dear," he said to her; "for although I think they cannot arrive until the 4.50 train, there is just the chance of their catching the one before. Have you any messages for Rickson?"

"None, dear," answered my mother. "But you must stay for a moment and look at my flowers. Are they not sweet and pretty?"

"Very sweet and very pretty," replied my father. But I thought he looked at her more than at the flowers when he said so; and she laughed, although, after all, there was nothing to laugh at.

"Willie and I have been gathering them," she said; "and now we are going to put them in Bessie's room."

"I know who remembers everything that can give pleasure to others," observed my father, whose hand was on my shoulder by this time. "Willie, I hope you will grow up like your mamma."

Not quite seeing the force of this observation, I replied that, being a boy, I thought I had better grow up like him. And both my parents laughed; but my mother said she quite agreed with me, it would be far better.

Then we carried the vase up, and placed it on the table in the window of the east bed-room; and my mother flitted about, putting little finishing touches here and there to complete the arrangements for the comfort of her visitors, whilst I received a commission to inspect portfolios, envelope-cases, and ink-bottles, and to see that all were freshly replenished.

These matters being finally disposed of, I persuaded my mother to ascend to the more remote part of the house, where a room next to my own had, at my earnest request, been prepared for my cousin, and in the decoration of which I felt peculiar interest. There was a twin bedstead to my own, and various other pieces of furniture corresponding; moreover, in an impulse of generosity I had transferred certain of my own possessions into Aleck's apartment, with a noble determination to be extremely liberal.

My mother noticed these at once, but I was a little disappointed that she did not commend my liberality.

"You see, mamma," I explained, "there's my own green boat with the union-jack, and the bat I liked best before papa gave me my last new one, and the dissected map of the queens of England."

"Yes, I see, Willie," replied my mother; proceeding in the meantime to certain readjustments urgently called for, by the critical position of the bat standing on the drawers against the wall, and the boat nearly falling from the mantelpiece.

"There, my child," she said; "the bat will do better in the comer, and the ship upon the drawers. And now the puzzle: why, Willie, this is the very one of which I heard you say there were three pieces missing; and then Mrs. Barbauld you think childish for yourself!"

My countenance fell, for I had been indulging in the cheap generosity of giving away second-bests, and I could see my mother did not admire such liberality. Indeed, after a moment's consideration, I was ashamed of it myself, and hastened with alacrity to hide Mrs. Barbauld, and the Queens of England, and one or two other trifles, in the obscurity of my own room; whilst my mother decided upon the best position for a couple of prettily-framed pictures which she had had brought up, and fastened an illuminated text, similar to one in my own room, opposite the bed —"*The things which are seen are temporal; the things which are unseen are eternal*"—and placed a little statuette of a guardian angel, with the scroll underneath, "*He shall give His angels charge over thee,*" over the bed-head.

"What a good thought, mamma," I said, when she had finished her arrangements; "that looks

exactly like mine."

"Just what I want it to look, Willie. You and Aleck are to be as like brothers to each other as may be. You have never had brother or sister of your own, Willie—not that you can remember [there *had* been one infant sister, whose death, when about a month old, had been my parents' greatest sorrow]—but now that your cousin is likely to stay a long time with us, I hope that you and he will be as much as possible like brothers to each other."

Then my mother, who was sitting at the foot of the bed, drew me towards her, and quietly talked to me about some of the new duties as well as temptations which would come with new pleasures, bidding me remember that I was to try never to think first of myself, but to be willing to consider others before myself. We had been reading the 13th of First Corinthians that morning together, and her observations seemed to me as if drawn straight from that source; indeed, before long she reminded me of it, bidding me remember it supplied the standard we ought to aim at, and telling me that strength would be always given, *if I sought it*, to help me to be what I wanted to be; it was only those who did not heartily strive who got beaten in the conflict.

It is not to be supposed that this was all uttered in a set speech; I am giving the substance only of a few minutes' quiet talk which we had up there in the bed-room together that morning before luncheon, and which I confess to having felt at the time rather superfluous, my delight in the anticipation of my cousin's arrival convincing me that there would be no fear of my finding anything but happiness in my intercourse with him.

My mother, on the contrary, as I afterwards had reason to know, was by no means without anxiety. She knew that hitherto I had been completely shielded from every possible trial. The darling of herself and my father, and, as the only child, a favourite amongst the attached members of our household, my wants had been all anticipated, and every pleasure suited to my age had been planned for me so ingeniously, that I had never had the chance of showing myself selfish or ill-tempered. She feared that when for the first time I found myself not *first* considered in all arrangements, I might fail in those particular points of conduct in which she was most anxious I should triumph.

My mother's gentle admonitions, to which I at the time paid little heed, were interrupted by the luncheon gong.

"When will the wonderful preparations at the gate be ready?" asked my father whilst we were at table.

"Oh, there's nothing left to do but to fasten up the flowers. Old George says it won't take an hour," I replied.

"Then if I come down at three o'clock the show will be ready?"

"Quite ready," I said. "And mamma will come too?"

"Of course mamma's coming too; unless, indeed, you mean to charge so high a price for the exhibition," said my father comically, "that I cannot afford it. But even then," he added, "mamma shall see it; I'll give it up for her."

I was off from the luncheon-table as soon as possible, but found nurse lying in wait to capture me and enforce upon my mind the first duty of returning by four o'clock, to be dressed properly before the arrival of our visitors, whose impression of me, she conceived, would be most unfavourable were they to find me in what she was pleased to call "this trumpery," referring to a little sailor's suit of white and blue in which I was very generally attired, and which nurse chose to disapprove. She wound up her admonition by a sort of lament over my light-mindedness as to my best clothes; a spirit which, she remarked, was apt to cling to people to their graves—sometimes afterwards; which I scarcely thought possible.

Frisk and I darted down the Zig-zag at our usual pace, so soon as I was released from nurse's kind offices, and joined old George, who was on the look-out for us.

Very pleased we were with the result of our exertions when the really pretty triumphal arch was completed; the letters of the word *Welcome* in conspicuously gay flowers forming a pretty contrast to the leafy background, and eliciting what we felt to be a well-merited admiration from my parents and a select committee of servants, who came severally to inspect our handiwork in the course of the afternoon.

"It's fit for Her Majesty," said my father in his playful way, "and far too fine for a little stranger boy! In fact, it seems scarcely proper that a humble individual like myself should pass under it!"

"You're not a humble individual, papa!" I exclaimed vehemently.

"Oh, dear! oh, dear!" sighed my father, "that it should come to such a pass as this; my only son tells me I am wanting in humility—not a humble person!"

"An *individual*!" I said, feeling that made a great difference. "But now, papa, you're only in fun; you know I didn't mean that."

"One thing I do mean very distinctly, Willie, which is, that I must not stay chattering here with you any longer, or my letters will never be ready before post-time. You may stay a little longer with George if you like."

I stayed accordingly, determining to be home by the Zig-zag at the appointed hour.

But my parents had scarcely had the time necessary for walking up to the house, when the sharp sound of horses' trot suddenly aroused my attention, and in another moment our carriage, with the travellers inside, was rounding the curve of the road, and had drawn up before the gate.

My confusion and shyness at thus being surprised were indescribable; and a latent desire to take to immediate flight and get home the short way might probably have prevailed, had not my uncle's quick eye caught sight of me as I drew back under the shelter of old George.

"Why, surely there must be Willie!" he exclaimed; and in another moment Groves had hoisted my unwilling self on to the step of the carriage, and was introducing me to my relations, regardless of my shy desire to stand upon the ground, and make geological researches with my eyes under the wheels.

"Yes, sir, this is Master Willie; he's been uncommon taken up with the other young master coming, and it's his thought having a bit of something [To think of old George designating our beautiful arch as a bit of something!] put up at the gate to bid him welcome."

"There's for you, Aleck," said my uncle to a fair-haired boy sitting in the furthest corner of the carriage opposite to my aunt, whom I just mustered courage to look at. "You'll have to make your best bow and a very grand speech, to return thanks for such an honour."

"Master didn't expect you so soon, sir," proceeded George; "he thought you'd be coming by the next train; that's how it is that Master Willie was down here."

"Then I think the best thing we can do with Master Willie is to carry him up to the house with us," said my uncle. And accordingly I was lifted over from my step into the midst of the party in the carriage, and seated down between my uncle and aunt.

The coachman was compelled to rein in the horses a minute longer, whilst they all looked at and admired the arch, and then we bowled off rapidly up the avenue. I sometimes think we remember our life in pictures: certainly the very frontispiece of my acquaintance with my cousin Aleck always is, and will be, a distinct mind's eye picture of that party in the carriage, with myself in their midst.

Uncle Gordon sitting in the right hand corner with his arm round me, keeping me very close to himself, so that I might not crowd my aunt, who was leaning back on the other side of me, as though weary with the long journey. Opposite my uncle my aunt's maid, with a green bonnet decorated with a bow of red velvet of angular construction in the centre of the front, to which the parting of her hair seemed to lead up like a broad white road; she was grasping, as though her life depended upon her keeping them safely, a sort of family fagot of umbrellas in one hand, whilst with the other she kept a leather-covered dressing-case steady on her lap. In the fourth corner was my cousin, in full Highland kilt, such as I had hitherto seen only in toy-books of the costumes of all nations or other pictures, and which inspired me with a wonderful amount of curiosity. Lastly, myself in blue and white sailor's dress, looking, no doubt, as if I had been captured from a man-of-war; conscious of tumbled hair, and doubtful hands, and retribution in store for me in the shape of a talking-to from nurse, who had still unlimited jurisdiction over my wardrobe, for having been surprised in a state she would designate as "not fit to be seen."

Aleck and I found our eyes wandering to each other momentarily as we drove along. When they met, we took them off again, and pretended to look out at opposite sides of the carriage; but this happened so often, that at last we both laughed, and—the ice broke. I was quite on chatty terms before we reached the house.

"There are papa and mamma!" I exclaimed, as we came in sight of the entrance. They had heard the carriage, and were at the door to welcome their guests.

"See, I have brought you two boys instead of one," said my uncle, lifting me out first, and then proceeding to help out my aunt, as if she were a delicate piece of china, and "With care" labelled outside her.

When the greetings were over, my mother declared a rest on the sofa in her room and a cup of tea indispensable for my aunt's refreshment. My uncle took my father's arm and disappeared into the study; and we two boys were left to take care of each other until dinner-time.

I proposed going round the garden, and Frisk being of the party, proceeded to show off his accomplishments. This led to an animated description of my cousin's dog, Cæsar, and a comparison of the ways and habits of Cæsar the Big with those of Frisk the Little, on the strength of which we became very intimate.

Afterwards we returned to the house, and having shown Aleck his room, I took him into mine, where we were found seated on the floor surrounded by "my things," which I had been exhibiting in detail to my cousin, when nurse came, a little before six o'clock, to see that we were ready for dinner.

"Aleck, tell me one thing," I had just said to my cousin; "are they really your knees or leather?"

Aleck stared, "Leather! why, of course not; what made you think such an odd question?"

"I didn't think they *could* be leather after the first minute," I replied, doubtfully; "but I couldn't

know—"

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# CHAPTER III.

## A WHOLE HOLIDAY.

To what boy or girl does not the promise of a whole holiday convey a sort of Fortunatus' purse of anticipated enjoyment! I used to wonder—I remember wondering that very day after Aleck's arrival, when I had the most enjoyable whole holiday I ever spent—why grown-up people who always had them should seem so indifferent to their privileges, writing it down upon the secret tablets of my resolve, that when *I* grew up things should be very different with me.

My cousin and I sat side by side at the breakfast-table in a vehement impulse of boyish affection, so completely taken up with each other that I for one never remember noticing any one else during the progress of the meal, except when once I caught a wistful look from my aunt, and heard her saying, in a rather sorrowful low voice, to my mother,—

"I am very thankful to see our boys take to each other; it is quite a load off my mind that Aleck should be with you instead of being left at school."

"Won't Aleck come too?" I asked my mother, when she summoned me to our usual Bible-reading after breakfast.

"Not whilst his own mamma is here," was the answer; and I was obliged to rest content. But the moment I had put away my Bible, I flew off in search of him, eagerly explaining that we were to do what we liked for the whole of the morning, and sketching out a plan for our amusement such as I thought would be pleasant to him:—

"First, we must go over the whole house—you've only seen a little bit of it yet—and the kitchen-garden and the stables, and then down the Zig-zag to old George's, and we'll get him to go out with us in the boat. It's smooth enough to sail the 'Fair Alice'—that's a little yacht of mine that old George gave me."

Aleck's face brightened. "May you go out in a boat when you like?" he asked, eagerly. "Oh, how *de*-light-ful!"

How we careered over the house that morning, visiting every nook and corner of it, from the "leads" on the roof; accessible only by a ladder and trap-door, to the most hidden repositories in the housekeeper's domain! The servants good naturedly remarked I had gone crazy. Presently I bade Aleck shut his eyes, and submit to my guidance blindfold, whilst I led him to the only room he had not been in. We passed through several passages, and then I went forward, tapped at a door, and finding I might come in, fetched Aleck, still with eyes shut.

"There now, you may look," I exclaimed, watching in a satisfied manner the astonishment with which he opened his eyes to find himself in the study, and his confusion on seeing my father seated at the library table near the window, surrounded by books and papers.

"Oh, uncle," he exclaimed, "I did not know I was in your room!"

"And are very much startled at finding yourself there," said my father, finishing his sentence for him. "What shall we do with the culprit, Willie? Prosecute him according to the utmost rigour of the law, and sentence him to a year's imprisonment at Braycombe, with hard labour, under Mr. Glengelly and old George!"

"I think that would be a very good punishment," I answered, "only I should like it to be more than a year."

"See what a cruel fellow your cousin is," said my father, getting up from his chair, and proceeding to take Aleck round the room, showing him various curiosities with which I was familiar; then he sat down again, and keeping Aleck at his side, told him that so long as he remained at Braycombe he was to feel as much at home, and as welcome to the study as I was, and that he was to try and trust him as he could his own father, until we all had the joy of welcoming his parents home again.

"Famous chats we get here sometimes, eh, Willie?" he concluded, appealing to me.

"*Rather!*" I answered emphatically, seating myself on the arm of his chair, and looking over his shoulder. "Papa, shall you have time to play with us this afternoon. It's a whole holiday. I want you to very much."

"I fear not, Willie. I must be away all the morning. Peter the Great will be at the door to carry me off in another minute, and I must keep the afternoon for your uncle and aunt. To-morrow afternoon I will give you an hour, only I stipulate you must have mercy upon your old father, and not expect him to climb trees like a squirrel, or run like a hare."

"You know you're not an *old* father, papa," I said; "and, Aleck, papa can run quite fast—faster than anybody else I ever saw, and he climbs better than anybody else. He's been up the tree I

showed you in the avenue."

"Whatever papa's qualifications may be," my father observed, "the end of the matter just at present is, that Rickson is coming round with the horses, and I cannot keep his imperial majesty waiting."

"What does uncle do?" inquired my cousin after we had been to the door and had seen my father mount and ride away on Peter the Great.

"Papa! oh, he does quantities of things," I replied, somewhat vaguely.

"What kind of things?"

I proceeded to enumerate them promiscuously:—

"Why, he's a magistrate, and tries cases at Elmworth, and sends people to prison; and he goes to a hospital twice every week at Elmworth, and he goes to see poor people—we often have some from the hospital down here; and he always has quantities of letters; and he reads to mamma; and, do you know, he once wrote a book—"

I paused, not so much because I had exhausted the list of my father's employments, as because I had named that achievement which of all others filled me with the deepest awe and reverence. I could remember how, when I was four years old, my mother had lifted me up to see a volume on the counter of the great bookseller's shop at Elmworth, and had let me spell through the name "Grant" on the title-page. I felt as if I had risen in life, and looked upon books in general with a feeling of personal friendship, as from one behind the scenes, from that day; whilst, personally, I was much elated by the thought of what a very wonderful and extraordinary man my father was. I was rather glad when Aleck told me that he did not think his papa had ever written a book;—it made me feel a little bit superior to him.

After going to the stables to see my pony, we proceeded to the Zig-zag, chattering fast the whole way. I was full of plans and projects, and anxious at once to interest my cousin in every one of them.

"You see," I explained, "there are quantities of things that we haven't been able to do, because there's been only George and me; and he's always had it to say that there were only us two, and that he was old and I young, but he can't say that now."

"He doesn't seem so very old," remarked Aleck.

"I don't think he is," I answered, "but he's taught me to call him old George since I have been a baby; everybody else calls him Groves or Mr. Groves. Now there's one thing I want very much to begin, and that is digging a hole right through the earth to come out at the other side, where, you know, we should find ourselves standing on our heads! George has always kept putting off beginning. But haven't you heard of many people beginning to do something great when they were boys?"

"Yes," answered Aleck, musingly; "I have a book about wonderful boys, and one of them cut out a lion in butter, and another drew a picture upon a stump of a tree; but I don't think we should be able to dig so very far down—we should have to stop at last."

This unprejudiced opinion of my cousin's, adverse as it was to my favourite scheme, was rather disappointing, but we were now engaged in the excitement of descending the Zig-zag, so I had not leisure to think much about it.

"Isn't it a jolly way down?" I exclaimed. "Papa says it's two hundred feet to that piece of rock down below."

"It's not steeper than our hills at home," said Aleck; "only we have not the sea near us—oh, how I wish we had!"

Aleck was quite as good a scrambler as I was, so we were not long in reaching the lodge, where old George seemed to be on the watch for us, and welcomed us both with his wonted heartiness.

"Master told me you'd be coming down, young gentlemen, as he rode by, and that you were to go out as much as you liked in the boat; and so I've been telling my good wife she must keep the look-out for the gate. Ralph's coming along presently, and will be down at the Cove most as soon as we shall."

George wanted Aleck to go into the lodge and see certain objects of interest, which, to use his own words, he "set *great store by*." But I was too eager to allow of this, and insisted upon our setting out at once for the Cove. "I want to show him the greatest treasure I have of all my treasures," I exclaimed.

"Is that the 'Fair Alice' you were telling me of?" asked Aleck.

"Yes; you'll see her presently," I replied; "and you won't wonder that I like her better than all my other things."

I led the way at once by a footpath from the lodge across the sloping green meadow, then through a little tangled copse, and finally a short rocky descent to what was at Braycombe always styled *the* Cove. Not but that there were many coves on our beautiful indented coast, but this one

was the most accessible on our grounds. The boat-house and the bathing-box were both here; and here, too, as being within easy reach, I had from earliest years climbed and scrambled and explored, until every stone was almost as familiar as the letters of my alphabet; and I could tell at what state of the tide certain rocks would be uncovered, and knew at a glance whether it would be safe to cross from one part to another on stepping-stones, or whether, to reach a given spot, we must go round by the side of the hill. How I loved, and do love, every foot of the ground, every stone, every rock, every silvery ripple of that the most charming of all possible play-grounds!

Thither, then, I led the way, Aleck following me closely, and George more slowly behind.

"There now," I cried, drawing up breathlessly as we gained our destination, "see, that's my boat-house." It was an exact miniature of the real boat-house, and Aleck stood transfixed with admiration looking at it; for of all things calculated for the amusement of children, nothing, I think, succeeds so well as real miniatures—imitations in proportion—of things which belong to the grown-up world. But the true kernel of the nut—the jewel of the case—was the elegant little model yacht, which I presently drew forth from her moorings within.

"Now that's the 'Fair Alice,'" I continued; "isn't she lovely?"

"Awfully jolly," Aleck replied, after gazing for a moment in speechless admiration. "I never saw anything half so nice before! Oh, if only we were small enough to get into it! Just look how beautifully the deck is made—I can see all the little timbers; and the mast, it's nearly as high as I am; and those little pulleys—oh, how perfect they are!"

"You must see her with all her sails set, a-scudding before the breeze, Master Gordon," said George, overtaking us. "I reckon there's not a craft of her size that would beat her for speed."

"Can you do the sails?" my cousin asked me, regardless of nautical phraseology.

"Master Willie! he knows as much as a sailor born about reefing and unreefing the sails," said George, answering for me.

"Then please do let us sail her at once. I do long to see her on the water," begged Aleck.

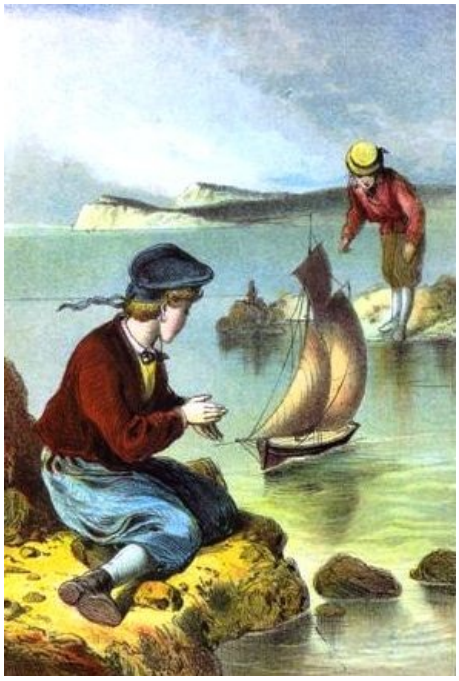
And accordingly we two sat down, overlooked by George, who, from a delicate desire to show off my capacity to manage the sails alone, abstained from offering any help; and, drawing the boat up between us on the beach, set the sails, and then proceeded to launch her upon the clear deep water of the Cove.

"This way now," I said to my cousin, when we saw that the breeze was filling the sails, and the "Fair Alice" was making her way out towards the mouth of the Cove. "Come and see my harbour bar;" and springing quickly from rock to rock, and running where there was sand, I guided my cousin to the entrance of the Cove, which was very narrow in proportion to the width and extent of the inlet. On each side of it there was a low stake strongly fastened into the rock, and from stake to stake a rope was stretched: it was long enough to lie along the bottom of the ground, and so offer no impediment to the boats; but when I was sailing my vessel in the Cove, and the tide was in, it was always stretched more tightly, so as to prevent the possibility of my little ship escaping from me into the wide sea.

"See," I said, "I have only to slip this ring over the stake, and then I can feel quite sure the 'Fair Alice' is safe. She can't get past my harbour bar."

In the meantime the little yacht had kept her course nearly to the entrance of the Cove, but a sudden shifting of the wind landed her on the opposite side, and I had to make my way all round to get her off again. Aleck remained on his side of the Cove, and we amused ourselves for some time in contriving to get the little boat to sail backwards and forwards, tacking gradually down to the boat-house.

My cousin was so absorbed in the enjoyment of sailing the "Fair Alice," that he was less eager about getting into our own boat for a sail than at first. But by-and-by, when we were dancing over the waves outside the Cove, he became quite wild with delight, and enjoyed himself, I verily believe, as much as is possible for a free, happy, eager boy; and that is saying a great deal. Of course I caught the infection from him, finding a fresh delight in my ordinary amusements through having a companion to share them; and, truly, a merrier boat's crew than we made on that whole holiday morning could not have been found.



**SAILING THE "FAIR ALICE."**

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Aleck's love for the sea was an absorbing passion; and it quite amused me to hear all the questions he kept putting to old George—as, for instance, how old he was when he went to sea; how long before he went up the mast; how they reefed the top-sails in his vessel, and which of the ship's company did it in a gale; together with many other inquiries, showing a degree of technical knowledge that perfectly overwhelmed me, and which, he explained to us, was extracted from "The Cadet's Manual," and a big book on "The Art of Navigation" which they had at home.

I almost wished my cousin did not know quite so much; it made me feel as though the ten months were a longer and more important period than I had admitted to myself. But it was a relief, when the oars were called into action on our way in, to find that he could not row, whereas I had handled an oar almost as soon as I gave up a rattle; and, as I showed off my best feathering, I felt we were equal again.

"How is it you can't row, sir, when you know so much about it?" asked Groves.

"Why, there are only streams and the river at my home in Scotland," explained Aleck. "We're up amongst the hills, you know. I have often fished, but I've scarcely ever been in a boat before, except when we've been travelling; and then it was going out to the steamer, and I mightn't do anything but sit still. It was famous, though, in the steamer," continued Aleck, kindling with the recollection of his journey. "I went down, and saw how the engine worked; and helped the man at the wheel; and learned about the compass—at least, I knew the points before, but it was different seeing how to steer by it. Only I liked the stoker the best. I had just gone down again with him to the engine-room, to see the engine stopped, and pulled off my jacket because it was so hot; and then the steam was let off, and made such a noise! Just when there was all the noise of the steam, I heard somebody shouting my name, and calling so loudly to me that I ran up to the deck at once. I had quite forgotten about not having my jacket on, and I believe my face had got blacked—it was, I know, when we got on shore. Everybody laughed at me; only mamma was poorly and frightened—she thought I had tumbled overboard. I suppose I oughtn't to have gone down just then, for that was the place where we were to go on shore," Aleck added, somewhat thoughtfully, remembering how very white was the face to which his own blackened one had been pressed.

By this time we were re-entering the Cove.

"You'll only be just in time for your dinner, young gentlemen," said George, as we drew in towards the landing-place; "I reckon it won't come a minute before you're ready for it."

"You'll teach me to row, will you not, as soon as possible?" said my cousin, as we parted. "I should like to begin at once, please."

"So soon as you like, sir. Master Willie, you mustn't be long in bringing down your cousin."

Thus saying, Groves took his way to the lodge, and Aleck and I clambered quickly up the Zig-zag, reaching home in time to appear, with smooth hair, and rosy cheeks, and keen appetites, at the luncheon-table.

Aleck was in wild spirits, and confided to me that he didn't think he had ever enjoyed himself so much before.

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# CHAPTER IV.

## THE RIDE TO STAVEMOOR.

A month after Aleck's arrival at Braycombe, it seemed so perfectly natural to have him with us—he had fitted so completely into the position of companion, play-fellow, school-fellow, brother—that I could scarcely fancy how it felt before he came.

My uncle and aunt had left us after a fortnight's visit, and were now on the Continent. The parting was hard work—harder, I fancy, to them than to him, for boys soon get over trouble, whereas it was plain to see in my aunt's wistful eyes that it was a sore trial to her to leave her child behind. I believe that she did not anticipate, in as sanguine a spirit as did her husband, the happy meeting again that was talked of for the spring, after a winter in Madeira.

It was a subject of great thankfulness, to both my uncle and aunt, that Aleck and I had formed such a friendship for each other. They had scarcely driven from the door, and Aleck's eyes were still wet with tears, when he told me that he did not think he could be so happy anywhere away from his papa and mamma as at Braycombe, with me for his companion; and I answered by assuring him I should never be happy again if he were to go away from me.

We soon settled down into our school-room occupations together. Mr. Glengelly, who used to come three times in the week, now came daily, staying for the whole morning, and leaving us always lessons to prepare for the next day. Aleck and I spent almost the whole of our play-time down at the Cove; his passionate enjoyment of everything connected with the sea continuing in full force, whilst two or three times every week we had walks, rides, or drives with one or both of my parents.

Aleck could ride beautifully, having been accustomed to it at his own home, and I was delighted to lend him my pony from time to time—more ready at first, if the truth is to be told, than afterwards. He also learned to row, though not so quickly nor so easily as I should have expected; and feathering remained an impossible mystery to him, being, as he said, more than could be expected from his clumsy fingers.

In this one point—that of being unskilful in the use of his hands—Aleck was below the mark; in lessons he was far my superior, being, as I soon found, more than his year ahead of me. But, oddly enough, as it seemed to me, it was always in matters requiring skilled fingers that he was anxious to excel. He was never tired of playing at sailing the "Fair Alice," but would daily, before we launched her, examine afresh all the different parts of the little vessel, and sigh over the neatness of their workmanship, and ask himself and myself whether it were possible he should ever be able to make a ship like it. Various abortive attempts were to be seen in our play-room—pieces of wood cut, and shaped, and thrown away in disgust; but as yet he made no progress towards anything like skill in carpentry. The old play-boat of mine which I had given, to him afforded very little pleasure: it was not like a real vessel. Having seen the "Fair Alice," anything that fell short of it gave him no satisfaction. It added greatly to the pleasure which I had always felt in this possession, to see how ardently my cousin admired it, and how much he thought of the title of *captain*, which, as owner, had been playfully adjudged to me.

I scarcely know when it was that the feeling first began to steal over me that I was not always quite so glad as I had been at first that my cousin was living with us. It was an unworthy feeling, and I felt ashamed to confess it to myself; but there it was, and I discovered it at last.

Perhaps it was because of his quickness at lessons; perhaps because, from time to time in his turn, enjoyments which could not be shared by both were permitted to him—I had only the half, where before I should have had the whole; perhaps it was all this together, combined with the secret evils I had not hitherto found out in my own heart and disposition; but the result was, that I had now and then such miserable moments of being angry, and provoked, and unhappy, not because my cousin had done anything unkind, but simply because he had, in some unintentional manner, interfered with my pleasure, that I was ready to wish I had never had a cousin, or that he had never come to Braycombe.

It is not to be supposed that this was my settled, constant state of mind. Far from it. In general, we two boys were as frisky, and merry, and happy with each other, as boys could be; but these dark feelings came and went, and came and went, until I began to be less surprised at them than when I first found them out. For some time my mother had no idea of their existence. To all outward appearance we were just as we had been in the early days of our friendship; and if I did not so often enlarge upon the happiness of having Aleck to live with me, I know now that she only put it down to the novelty of the companionship wearing off. I remember quite distinctly the first time that she noticed some little indication of the secret mischief that was going on. It was the time of afternoon preparation of lessons for the following morning, and I was sitting with my books before me at the school-room table, writing a Latin exercise; or perhaps it would be more correct to say, *not* writing my Latin exercise, for my pen had stopped half-way to the ink-bottle, and my chin was resting on my left hand and my elbow on the table, and I was indulging uninterruptedly in my own reflections, when the door opened, and my mother entered the room.

"Where's Aleck?" was her first inquiry, as she looked round and saw that I was alone.

"He's been gone five minutes," I replied, without raising my eyes, and in a tone which I meant to

convey—and, I am aware, did convey—that I was in no pleasant mood.

"How's that?" rejoined my mother, taking no notice of my manner. "Aleck was told not to leave the school-room until his lessons were finished. He knows my rule, and is not generally disobedient. I must go and see about him. Where is he?"

"In his room, I suppose"—still in my former sulky manner; and, without further words, my mother left the room, and went in search of my cousin. I presently heard her voice calling to him at the foot of the stair-case leading to our rooms, and Aleck's voice more distantly replying to her. As, however, he did not immediately appear, I heard afterwards that she had gone up-stairs, and found him pulling down his sleeves and shaking off pieces of wood, and generally endeavouring to render his appearance respectable; which was made the more difficult as, in the course of his operations, he had dipped his elbow in the glue-pot, and was considerably embarrassed by the fringe of shavings which he was unable to detach.

"I'm coming as fast as I can, auntie," he said, pulling at the shavings, and giving himself a rub with a duster in hopes that would make him right.

"But, Aleck, how is it you're not in the school-room?" said my mother. "I have just seen Willie there alone. You know the rule about not leaving until lessons are finished. I fear that you have been tempted away too soon by your ship-building tastes."

"Did not Willie tell you I had finished my lessons?" said Aleck, quickly. "Oh, auntie, I would not have left before."

"Really finished, Aleck? Take care to be quite honest with yourself, for indeed you've had but short time."

"Really and truly, auntie. I tried to be very quick to-day, because I do so want to get on with this last ship I've begun. It seems coming more like than the others. See, the stern is very like a real one."

My mother carefully inspected the unshapely block upon which my cousin was at work, gave him a word or two of advice upon the subject, and came down-stairs again to me; having decided in her own mind, as she afterwards told me, to be present the next morning when Mr. Glengelly came, and notice whether Aleck's work had been thoroughly prepared.

"How soon shall you have finished, my child?" she said, laying her hand softly on my shoulder, and bending down to inspect my writing. "Let me see what there is to be done."

"This exercise, and the verb to be learned, and my sum"—very grumpily.

"And how much have you done already?"

"Part of the exercise—not quite half; and I'm doing the verb now; and the sum is finished, all but the proving."

My lip was quivering as I completed the list of what I had achieved, and I was as nearly bursting into tears as possible.

My mother's loving, pleasant way staved off the sulky fit, however.

"These lessons begun, and not one of them finished off!" she exclaimed. "Let us see how long they will take you. First the exercise, we will allow a quarter of an hour for that; five minutes will prove your sum; and the verb, an old one you say and very nearly perfect, two minutes for that: less than twenty-five minutes, Willie, and you will be so perfectly prepared that you will be longing for ten o'clock to-morrow, and Mr. Glengelly to come, all the rest of the evening."

I could not help laughing at the notion of my pining for Mr. Glengelly's arrival, and a laugh is an excellent stepping-stone out of the sulks. My mother put her watch on the table, and stayed in the room, helping me by quiet sympathizing superintendence, and I set to work with such earnestness that I had completed my tasks in twenty minutes, and was off to the play-room without a trace of my wrong temper, as eager to join my cousin in the carpentry as if nothing had gone wrong between us, and only rejoicing that my lessons were over at last, without troubling myself to remember that the trial of Aleck's being so much quicker than myself at his studies was sure to recur again and again, and that, unless my dislike to his superiority could be conquered and stamped out, I should soon find every-day trouble in my every-day work.

And in truth the conquering and stamping out of such feelings as these is no easy task. It is unquestionably a real trial to find that work which takes you an hour's hard labour can be accomplished by your companion in not much more than half the time; that even though the lessons are apportioned so as to give him the heavier burden, he can always dispose of the heavier more readily than you can of the lighter. In my own case, Aleck was often very good-natured, and would linger in *his* work to give me a help in *mine*; or purposely keep pace with me, so that we might go out to play together. But this was not always the way; when he was very eagerly engaged in any play-time occupation, he would bend all his energies to getting his tasks finished off quickly, and then hurry away, without appearing in the least troubled that I could not accompany him. Upon which occasions I thought him selfish and unfeeling, and was inclined not a little to regret that he had ever come to Braycombe.

The worst of it was, that though I knew I was wrong, I could not muster courage to speak to

either of my parents about it; no, not even in that moment of deepest confidence when my mother looked in to wish me good-night before I went to sleep, and sat, as she was wont to do, upon my bed talking to me about the various things which had happened during the day.

Many a time, on such occasions, I thought of telling her my troubles, but was afraid lest she should think me very naughty; so I tried at last to persuade myself there was not much to tell after all.

Half an hour spent with us in the school-room the next morning convinced my mother that Aleck's work had been well done. I fancy that she watched me a little closely for a few days, but I happened to be specially prosperous in my lessons, and nothing occurred to disturb my serenity, so that she dismissed after a time the anxiety which had begun to arise in her mind concerning me.

As for Aleck, he had no notion of the real state of things. I am sure he must have thought me selfish and cross very often, but almost as often he would win me into good temper again; and his own temperament was naturally so bright and sunshiny, that trouble never seemed to remain long with him.

It was about a fortnight later that I was sitting, after breakfast, in my father's study doing my arithmetic. Our school-room adjoined the study, and it was not an unfrequent arrangement, that whilst Aleck did his construing with Mr. Glengelly, I should take in my slate to my father's room and do my sums. I fancy he liked to have me with him; for whenever he was at home he would look up with quite a pleased expression when, after knocking at the door, I appeared with my slate and made the usual inquiry whether I should disturb him if I came in just then; and would tell me that I never disturbed him, and bid me show him my sum before I returned to the school-room, when he had always some pleasant remark to make upon it.

I then was sitting on my favourite seat in the window working at compound division, when my mother came into the room.

"I've been thinking," she said to my father, "that it's a pity both the boys should not go with you to Stavemoor: if you could manage without Rickson, or let him ride one of the carriage horses, I think you might trust Aleck on the gray."

I listened to every word, my pencil going slowly and more slowly, whilst I put down three times nine, twenty-seven—two, carry seven; and was hopelessly wrong afterwards in consequence. This ride to Stavemoor was a special pleasure in prospect. Both Aleck and I had wanted to go; but the pony being mine, I had taken it as a matter of course that I should be the one chosen, and my cousin had not thought of questioning my rights. But now to hear my mother quietly proposing, not only that Aleck should go, but that he should ride the gray—it was a sore trial to my feelings: that gray had for months been the object of my ambition, but I had not been thought a good enough rider to be trusted, and now that my cousin should be thus promoted was hard to bear.

The colour mounted to my face when I heard the proposition, and then my father's answer:—

"I am not sure about it; and yet the boy is at home in the saddle, and has a firm seat. I'll speak to Rickson. Aleck's been looking pale of late, and I think more rides than he can get when there's only the pony between the two boys, would do him good."

"Papa," I said, with quivering lip and reproachful voice, "you've never let *me* ride the gray. It's always Aleck now—he gets everything, it doesn't seem to matter about me."

My father gave one quick glance of surprise and consternation at my mother, and then turned to me:—

"Willie! my own little Willie!" he said, pausing as if for an explanation, and putting out his hand in a manner that meant I was to come to his side, which I did rather slowly.

"I've so often asked you to let me ride the gray, papa, and you've never allowed it, and now you're going to let Aleck. I don't want to go to Stavemoor—Aleck may have the pony; I wish I had said so at first; I don't want to ride the pony, and have him on the gray." And thereupon, almost frightened by the evident distress my sentiments had occasioned, I burst into a passionate fit of crying, which permitted only a few more broken words to the effect that I wished Aleck had never come to Braycombe; I hated his being there; and that my parents were very unkind to care for him more than they did for me.

My father held me there at his side whilst I sobbed and cried as if some tremendous calamity had overtaken me. I knew without looking up, which I was ashamed to do, that his eyes were resting upon me with an expression of sad surprise; and the silence became perfectly unbearable. He spoke at last:—

"My poor little Willie," he said, "what sad feelings you have allowed to creep into your heart! how unhappy they will make you! You have said very wrong words, my child, and I cannot tell you how much pain you have caused to me and your mamma. I hope that you will be very sorry by-and-by; but you know, Willie, being sorry will not undo your fault, nor take away the envious feelings which you have allowed to spring up within you; and unless such feelings as these are conquered you will be an unhappy little boy, and grow up to be an unhappy man. Willie," he added, after another pause only interrupted by my struggling sobs at longer intervals than at first, "you know, my child, whose strength you will need to help you in the battle: you are but a weak little boy,

and cannot help yourself; you must pray for the help of God's Holy Spirit, or else you will never conquer these wrong feelings."

I hung my head, and remained silent.

"I trust Aleck knows nothing of all this," resumed my father. "We have promised to care for him as though he belonged to us. I will not allow him to feel that he is disliked by the boy who promised to love him."

"No, papa," I put in, for my temper had well-nigh expended itself; "I do like him still—rather—only not always. I like him very much sometimes: I think now I'm very glad he came—only I don't like his having things that I mayn't have."

"That, Willie," answered my father, "must be left to me to decide. I shall miss my little boy very much this afternoon; but I cannot allow you to come to Stavemoor with me to-day, after all that has passed."

There was just this ray of comfort in the announcement, that at least Aleck would not on this particular occasion gain the object of my ambition.

"Is Aleck to ride my pony, then?" I inquired, half ashamed of myself for asking.

The quick, decided manner, in which my father withdrew the arm he held around me, and answered,—

"Certainly not, unless I find Rickson thinks the gray would be unsafe," made me feel more unhappy than ever; and it was with a sorrowful heart that I obeyed a summons to the school-room brought in at that moment by my cousin, and showed up my incorrect and unfinished sum to Mr. Glengelly.

I suppose that he saw something had gone wrong with me, by my appearance; he was certainly more merciful than usual over my shortcomings in arithmetic, and the lesson-time went by so pleasantly that I was quite in good humour by the time it ended, and went out in restored spirits for the half hour's exercise which preceded our dinner, determining that, the first moment I could see my father, I would tell him I was sorry, revoke what I had said about Aleck, and ride my pony to Stavemoor.

In furtherance of these views, I ran round by the stables, and finding that only Peter the Great and the gray had been ordered, told Rickson in confidence that I had said to my father in the morning I would rather not ride; but, having changed my mind since then, he was to be sure and be ready to send round the pony as well.

Aleck, in the meantime, heard of the treat in store for him, and was greatly elated, chattering briskly during dinner about the expedition, without any idea that I was likely to be left behind.

My father was not a great luncheon eater, and when very busy, would often only have a glass of wine and a biscuit sent into the study, instead of joining us at table. Finding this was to be the case on the present occasion, I asked leave to carry in the tray, and was permitted to do so after I had finished my own dinner.

My father was at his writing, and looked up when he saw me, making a place amongst his papers at the same time for the tray.

"Papa," I said, when I had put it down, "I'm sorry for what I said this morning. I don't mind Aleck's riding the gray; and please I should like to ride my own pony. I saw Rickson before dinner, and told him I had changed my mind, and that very likely the pony would be wanted."

My father answered, in a quiet, grave voice: "You might have spared yourself the trouble, Willie, of speaking to Rickson, for, though I'm sorry to leave you behind, I cannot allow you the pleasure of the ride to Stavemoor this afternoon."

"But, papa," I pleaded, "you always forgive me when I say I am sorry."

"And I do not say now that I will not *forgive* the wrong things you said this morning," he answered; "but I cannot let your conduct pass without punishment. You must remember, my child," he added, drawing me towards him, "that *forgiving* and *not punishing* are very different things. Do you remember when God forgave David his sin, yet He punished him by the death of his son. And it would be contrary to His commands if Christian parents were to allow their children's faults to be *unpunished*, although it is a Christian duty to exercise a *forgiving spirit*."

The practical result of this statement was what I thought of most; it was clear to my mind that the ride to Stavemoor had to be given up, and my brow grew cloudy.

"Then, papa," I said, poutingly, "I mayn't go with you this afternoon?"

"Certainly not, Willie," very decidedly; "you will spend one hour, from the time we start, in your own room; and I trust that you will remember during that time—*if you are* really sorry—that mine is not the only forgiveness you have to seek."

"Aleck's, papa?"

"No, not Aleck's; I hope he will never have an idea of all the wrong feelings you have entertained towards him."

"You mean God's forgiveness," I said, more seriously; for that was a name never to be pronounced without deep reverence.

"Yes, Willie; don't forget, my child, that the youngest as well as the oldest of us has need to seek the Fountain opened for all uncleanness. No repentance will wash us clean. You must ask, through the Lord Jesus, not only that your sins may be forgiven, but that you may also have strength to do better for the future. You may go now. Remember what I said about the hour in your own room."

I departed accordingly, passing Aleck in the passage all ready and equipped for his ride. Brushing past him, without giving an answer to his inquiry whether I was going to get ready, I ran quickly up-stairs to my own room, shut the door, and burst into tears.

By-and-by I heard the horses coming round; then I wiped my eyes, and kneeling upon a chair at the window, where I could not be seen, watched all the proceedings.

Rickson, faithful to my interests, had, I perceived, brought up the pony ready saddled. I almost hoped that Aleck would have had it after all. But no; I saw him in another moment mounted upon the gray, which, apparently conscious of a lighter weight than usual, began shaking its head, and showing off its mettle. Rickson held it firmly. "So-ho! so-ho!" I heard him saying. "Ease her a bit, Master Gordon; ease her mouth; there—there—so-ho!"

Aleck held the reins firmly, and his ringing voice came up cheerily through the air.

"I'm not a bit afraid, thank you, Uncle Grant."

My father in the meantime mounted Peter the Great; and before starting I saw the stable-boy give him a leading rein, which he put into his pocket, for future use I mentally decided, in case Aleck should have difficulty in managing the gray. But no such difficulty occurred within the range of my observation. When Rickson removed his hand from the bridle she bounded off rather friskily; but in another moment Aleck had reined her in, and was displaying such ready ease in the management of his steed, that it was clear my father's confidence in his horsemanship was justified.

As I turned round from the window I heard my mother's soft footstep in the passage, and in another moment she had entered my room. She had her walking things on, and a little basket in her hand, well known to me as invariably containing jellies, puddings, or packets of tea for some of the many invalids to whom my mother was as an angel of mercy. She stopped only for two or three minutes, to tell me how thankful she was to know I had felt sorry for my behaviour in the morning, and how grieved to have to leave me at home when she would have liked me to have been out riding with my father, or walking with her; and then, after some further words of monition, she left me to my solitary hour's watch, and I could see her taking her way down the drive, and turning off through the wood, until the last flutter of her blue ribbons was lost in the distance. Then I bethought me of seeing how much longer I had to spend in my own room, and, looking at the clock-tower over the stables, found it was scarcely more than three o'clock. I could not feel free until a quarter to four, and the time began to feel very long and wearisome.

In general, I was a boy of manifold resources, and every moment of my leisure time seemed too short for the many purposes to which I would willingly have applied it. But on this particular afternoon I seemed to weary of everything. Even my last new book of fairy stories failed to interest me. I felt as if, instead of fancying myself the hero of the tale, I was perpetually being compared, by my own conscience, to the unamiable characters—Cinderella's sisters, for instance, or the elder of the two princes who lived in a country long ago and nowhere in particular; elder brothers being in fairy tales, as all true connoisseurs are aware, jealous, cruel, and sure to come to a bad end; whilst the younger brothers are persecuted, forgiving, and finally triumphant, marrying disenchanted princesses, and living happy ever after. I threw aside my fairy book, and sought for some other means of amusement in a repository of odds and ends, established in a corner of the room by the housemaid, whose efforts to observe order in disorder were most praiseworthy. There I was glad to discover a piece of willow-bough stripped of its twigs, and in course of preparation for the manufacture of a bow. Immediately I set myself to adjusting a piece of string to it, and completing its construction. This occupation was far more engrossing than the reading had proved; and almost sooner than I had expected, the three-quarters chime of the clock proclaimed my liberation. I seized my garden hat, ran down-stairs, and sped out upon the lawn, determined to feel very merry, and to enjoy trying my newly-made bow as much as possible. It was annoying that Frisk had gone with the horses—it made me feel more lonely not to have him to play with; but still, my hour's imprisonment being over, I thought I could find plenty of amusement. So I began firing away certain home-made arrows, to which my mother's loving fingers had carefully fastened feathers; putting up a flower-pot on a stand as a mark, and trying to hit it. But the arrows did not go very far after all, and I leant down upon the bow and tightened the string, and then tightened it again, until there was a sudden snap, and a collapse—it had broken in two pieces! I threw the bow aside in disgust, and went off into the shrubbery, and then down the carriage drive, hoping to meet my mother; but she happened to be detained that afternoon at one of the cottages where she was visiting, and missed her usual time for returning. Feeling very dreary and disconsolate, I finally wandered back again into the house, and hung about in the different rooms in a listless, dissatisfied mood, until, at about half past five, I could hear the rapid tread of horses' feet, and in another moment my father and Aleck cantered up to the door. Frisk was flourishing about in his usual style, and found me out in a moment, jumping up upon my shoulders, and licking my hands, and expressing in perfectly comprehensible

language his regret that I had not been of the party, and his pleasure in seeing me again.

Aleck was in a high state of spirits, triumphant at having proved himself sufficient of a horseman to manage the gray, and delighted with all the incidents of the expedition. He did not know the reason of my having stayed at home; but told me how sorry he was I had not been with them, and tumultuously recounted the various pleasures he had enjoyed.

"See, I've got lots of shells," he said, "and several beautiful madrepores. You must have some of them. They'd had a wedding, too, and we had to eat some of the bride-cake, and drink their health, and—"

But Aleck's enumeration did not proceed further, for I think my father perceived how keenly I was feeling the contrast between his joyous excitement and my own very dreary heaviness of heart, and called to me to come to the study with him, and put away his riding whip. So I gladly turned away from my cousin, and followed my father to his room.

To some children, the study, library, or whatever other room is consecrated to the use of the head of the family, is a sort of dreadful and solemn place, generally closed to them, but opening from time to time as a court of justice, to which they are brought when their misdemeanours have exceeded usual bounds, and are considered to require severer measures than are within the province of the lesser authorities. Very alarming, in consequence, is the summons when it comes.

With me, however, the case was happily very different; the study was associated with countless hours of happy intercourse with a father whose very countenance was beaming with love. Times of reproof and punishment there had been also, but the returning happiness of forgiveness, the loving words of advice, the kind and constant sympathy, I never failed to find from him, made me look upon an invitation to his room as the best thing that could happen to me, whether I was happy or in trouble.

"My poor little Willie," he said, sitting down almost immediately, and drawing me towards himself; "have you been very sorrowful?"

I hid my face on his shoulder, and sobbed out that I was quite miserable.

"Have you thought what it is that has made your day so sad, Willie?" he asked, kindly.

"Yes, papa," I answered between my sobs; "I wasn't allowed to go to Stavemoor, and I was so unhappy in my own room all alone, and—and—I broke my bow just after I had finished making it —"

"But the beginning of all this unhappiness, Willie—quite the beginning?"

"Aleck's having the gray, papa," I said. "I think that was quite the beginning."

"So do I think so, my child," rejoined my father; "or rather, the wrong feelings to which this gave rise. And now consider, Willie, how wrong and ungrateful you have been, to let this grow up into such a trouble. Just think of all to-day's mercies: your home, your loving papa and mamma, all the comforts that so many little boys are without; and then, besides all these, a pleasant excursion planned to give you special pleasure on your half holiday. And, in the midst of all these blessings, instead of being thankful and happy, you are suddenly overwhelmed, as though by a great misfortune; not because any of your enjoyments are to be diminished, but because another is to have a pleasure which you think greater."

My father paused for a moment, and I could not help feeling that, according to his way of putting it, I certainly had been both naughty and foolish: still, it occurred to me that being happy was not in itself possible at all times; and that, similarly, if I were unhappy, I was unhappy, not by choice, but because it was not in my power to feel otherwise. I thought this, not indeed in words, or in any semblance of coherent argument, but in a sort of confused perplexity, which was only partly represented by my reply to my father:—

"Papa, I couldn't help feeling unhappy when I heard you talking about Aleck's going. I couldn't make myself feel happy."

"Ah, Willie, you've come to the root of the matter now," he answered;—"'*couldn't make myself* feel happy!' That is just it, Willie; a wrong feeling of envy came into your heart—you know it was a wrong feeling that feeling of dislike that another should be happy, so I need not waste time in proving it to you; and you could not chase the enemy from your own heart, so, without ever remembering that there is One who promises to help all who cry to Him for help, and who is stronger than the strong man armed, you give in at once to the enemy; and as you couldn't help yourself, came out of the battle conquered and vanquished."

I hung my head down, feeling I had been a coward. "I'm so sorry, papa," I whispered.

"I thought you would be ere long, my child," he said. "I hope you used the time in your room partly as I intended."

I knew I hadn't, and felt still more ashamed of myself, but said nothing; I was never required to mention whether I had followed my parents' advice on such occasions, they were so fearful of making me a hypocrite.

"Our heavenly Father will have forgiven you all your fault, if you have sought forgiveness through Jesus Christ; and now your earthly father is quite ready to forgive also, as you seem really sorry."

My father gave me a kiss, and I threw my arms around his neck, and felt the loneliness and sadness of the day all over. My mother came in a few moments later, and joined us in the study, and with her loving, gentle words, completed my happiness in being forgiven and received back again into my usual position.

She did not forget all that had passed, however. I found that out at our Bible readings; for almost the very next day she took for her subject with us boys, the sin of envy and its consequences, and the best means of conquering it. I can remember to this hour the different illustrations—Cain, and Saul, and the blood-thirsty Pharisees on the one side; and Moses, and David, and Jonathan, and Paul, on the other; and the verses we found out in Proverbs and in the Epistles: they perhaps did me some good at the time, but my heart was not really touched. I had not found out, in my own little personal experience, what my father meant by the *Fountain opened for all uncleanness*, and there were bitter but necessary lessons still in store for me.

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# CHAPTER V.

## SHIP-BUILDING.

My story would grow too long were I to tell of all the employments, amusements, and adventures, which made the months fly rapidly by with us boys that summer and autumn long ago at Braycombe.

My cousin's companionship made me more than usually diligent in my studies, and more than usually eager in my amusements; whilst the watchful care of my parents seemed to screen me from many of the minor trials and temptations which might otherwise have rendered me less happy than I had been in former days.

I can remember now with admiration, how carefully they measured out even-handed justice to my cousin and myself. They never seemed to forget that they had promised Aleck should be as my brother, therefore every arrangement took us equally into account. And although the meanness of envy was held by them to be not only sinful, but contemptible, they were quite alive to the keen sense of justice which is born with most children, and would never violate it by the exercise of a partiality too common amongst those who have the charge of the young, either with the object of giving me as their child some special pleasure, or Aleck as our visitor some special indulgence.

It was not long after the Stavemoor expedition that I was allowed to try my horsemanship by mounting the gray. Rickson was on the alert; but had it not been for his interposition, my equestrian pursuits would have come to a very disastrous ending. I was convinced against my will of the wisdom of my father's decision, that I should for the present be content with my pony; relying, for consolation, on his promise that, before very long, I should learn to manage the more spirited animal. In the meantime I no longer felt it a trouble that my cousin's superior skill in this respect should be recognized.

Aleck seemed to care less about the riding than I did. His passion for the sea—for boats, sea-weeds, stones, caves, and cliffs, everything directly and indirectly belonging to the sea—grew and strengthened upon him. His special ambition was to succeed in constructing a rival to the "Fair Alice;" but although honourable scars on his fingers bore witness to the industry with which he plied his tools, his attempts at ship-building had hitherto proved signal failures. I was more successful in my carpentry than he was, and it was quite a pleasure to me to give him all the help I could. Between us we at last produced something more resembling a ship than all former attempts, and we rushed eagerly down to the Cove one bright September afternoon, impatient for the launch.

Aleck and I had the Cove all to ourselves: old George had not been with us so much as usual for weeks past; there were, indeed, few days we did not see him, but he did not stay with us all through our play-time; he would come and go, and come and go, until we boys would take to teasing him with questions as to what it could be that kept him so much occupied. I had my own private suspicions, and communicated them to Aleck; but old George would throw no light upon the subject.

I had good reason for remembering that the 20th of September, now drawing near, was my parents' wedding-day, my mother's birth-day, and almost the greatest festival in the year to us at Braycombe. Old George, who lay in wait for opportunities of giving me presents, always looked upon this anniversary as one that would admit of no questioning, and more than once the offering to me—by which he meant to show his love to my parents—had been the result of many a long hour's secret work. The "Fair Alice" had been my present on the preceding year, and I had dim suspicions—built upon a certain hasty glance into a little room called the work-shop at the back of the lodge—that something else was even now in course of construction, which I half suspected to be a schooner-yacht with two masts, such as I had more than once expressed a wish to possess. But George was impenetrable, and kept the work-shop closely bolted, so I had to nurse my curiosity until the 20th. It was the day before this great occasion that Aleck and I ran down to launch our boat, as before-mentioned.

Alas! we had scarcely pushed it out upon the water, when, with a roll and lurch, it turned over upon its side, and floated like a wreck, in a helpless and melancholy manner. We drew it up on shore again and set to work; I cheerily and hopefully, feeling perfectly aware that everything that was at all good in the workmanship was mine; Aleck mournfully, knowing that all the faults in its construction were his.

"I wonder at Groves not coming," he said, presently; "I can't help thinking he could tell me how to make it float straight."

"I'll just go and make him come," I replied; "he's been so little with us the last few days, I'm sure he might find time."

Aleck agreed, and I set off to the lodge, leaving him to puzzle on by himself over the manifold difficulties of ship-building. To bring old George to the rescue, however, did not turn out the easy task that I had anticipated. He was in the work-shop, the door safely bolted, and not even the smallest aperture anywhere, through which I might discover the nature of his employment. My persuasions were all carried on at a disadvantage, and the conversation resolved itself into:—

"Please, George, *do* come and help us; it's very important. Aleck wants you particularly down at the Cove." This from my side of the door.

Then from his side:—"I'm afraid, Master Willie, I can't possibly find the time; I'm very busy."

From my side:—"But Aleck's boat won't sail, and we've tried everything to make it, and unless you come we can't do anything more."

From his side:—"I'll come to-morrow, Master Willie, and then see if we don't get Master Aleck's ship to sail as merrily as the 'Fair Alice' herself."

"Even *you* will not be able to do so much as that," I rejoined; whereupon a low chuckle of merriment and satisfaction was clearly audible on the other side. I continued:—"It's very well to laugh, but if you could see Aleck's boat all lying on one side, looking not so nice even as the tub-boat in the 'Swiss Family Robinson,' you wouldn't think it so easily made all right."

No answer; but click, click inside.

"At least, do tell me what you're working at," I said, growing impatient, and battering at the door; "do tell me—there's a dear old George."

"Work that can't be hindered by playing with two young gentlemen all the afternoon. There, sir, now I've told you;" and another chuckle followed, and click, click went on as before.

I had no excuse for lingering longer. George was like a besieged garrison within a secure fortress; there was no chance of enticing him out beyond the shelter of his walls. So I could only return discomfited to the Cove.

"There's no use trying," I said to Aleck. "All that old George will promise is to come out to-morrow, and make your boat sail as well as the 'Fair Alice' herself: those are his words."

"He's not very likely to be able to do that," responded Aleck, dolefully surveying our workmanship. "I've been trying to trim it with a stone stuck securely on and tarred over; but look, even that has come off again, and it will do nothing but turn over in that wretched way. If I had been trying to construct a wreck now, I'm sure I couldn't have made anything more like."

"And that's something, after all," I said, encouragingly. "It's not every one that could have made a wreck."

But my cousin took little comfort from the suggestion; he stood looking and pondering, until, at last, after some minutes' pause, he drew a long breath and exclaimed, as if from depths of internal conviction, "I'll tell you what; I must pull it all to pieces, and put it together quite afresh —from the beginning."

"A strong-minded decision, and spoken out most heroically, Mr. Shipbuilder!" said a voice from behind, and we started at finding my father had come upon us so quietly that we had not perceived him. "You two boys are just like a pair of doctors consulting over a bad case; only you've come to what is happily rather an unusual conclusion, namely, that the best plan is to kill the patient!"

"I think the patient's dead already," answered Aleck, tragically.

"And you're only going to dissect him—is that it?" asked my father merrily, inspecting the boat, and listening with interest to the various measures which had already been tried and had failed. "Well," he added, "if my opinion as a consulting physician is to be taken, I should recommend Groves as the best surgeon; his advice to be followed in every particular, and all operations he may suggest to be duly performed."

"We've asked him," we both exclaimed, "and he said he was too busy to come."

"But," I added, "he promises that to-morrow he will make Aleck's boat sail as well as mine."

"His must be uncommonly clever fingers if they are equal to that task," said my father doubtingly; "but, as I said before, Surgeon Groves is the man for your bad case. And now I should like to know which of you means to stay at home to-morrow morning and learn the lessons which ought

to be prepared this afternoon, and which will not be ready unless we are betaking ourselves home very soon? You, Willie?"

"No, papa," I said, "nor Aleck either; we mean to have a very delightful, long, whole holiday, and to do no lessons at all, not the very smallest little bit of one." And so saying, we picked up the boat and various other belongings, and, one on each side of my father, took the way of the Zig-zag up towards home.

"We haven't quite settled all we are going to do to-morrow, papa," I proceeded; "but if we may, we want to have the boat in the morning, and sail the 'Fair Alice,' and go out to some place for madrepores; and George is going to see about Aleck's boat too. And then, in the afternoon, we would play cricket with you, dear papa."

"I am much obliged to you, Willie," answered my father, playfully bowing to me, "and feel greatly honoured at your kind arrangement for my amusement. Perhaps you have planned for your mamma also; is she to field-out when I take my innings? or possibly she will bowl!"

"Auntie couldn't soon put you out if she were to bowl," said Aleck, laughing; "it would not do to trust Auntie with the ball."

"Then, perhaps, the wicket?" suggested my father.

"Now, papa, you know," I interposed, "you will be all alone with dear mamma in the morning—you always are—but you always do play with me in the afternoon; and now that Aleck is here to play also, it will be so jolly. Please, dear papa, do say you will."

"Shall I say, like the poor people, *I'll consider of it?*" answered my father. "But allow me to state to you both that I am at present considering another thing, which is, that so long as I have you two boys clinging one at each side of me, I am reduced to the necessity of climbing this steep hill with a matter of twelve stone in tow, and that at my time of life I ought rather to be looking upon you young people as crutches to assist my failing steps."

"Do use me as a crutch, papa!" I exclaimed.

"Please, uncle, let me be another crutch," chimed in Aleck, and we insinuated ourselves into what we thought a convenient position under his elbows. Whereupon, suddenly bringing his weight down upon us, and contriving a dexterous movement towards the bank, my father landed us both on our backs amidst the grass and the ferns, and was off at such a pace that we were some time in catching him up again, out of breath as we were with the fall, and the laughing, and the running up the hill.

"Isn't papa great fun?" I asked my cousin, as we were in pursuit.

"Glorious!" was his only response; but I thought it quite sufficient.

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# CHAPTER VI.

## THE SCHOONER-YACHT.

There are some unfortunate children who seem fated to have their holidays and special occasions drowned in rain. I, on the contrary, belonged to the favoured class, accustomed always to expect, and almost always to enjoy, sunshine bright and glorious, whensoever birth-days, high days, and whole holidays made me specially prize and value it.

So it was by no means with surprise that I opened my eyes the next morning to find the sun's golden rays streaming in at my window, and to observe, on jumping up and looking out, that there was not a cloud to be seen, save, indeed, the shadowy gray morning mist that was fast dispersing over the sea. I pattered hastily into Aleck's room before proceeding to the business of the toilet, to awaken him, and to urge upon him the desirability of getting up as soon as possible, and coming down with me into the garden to gather a nosegay for my mother, an institution of three years' standing, and which I would not upon any account have dispensed with. Aleck murmured such a very sleepy assent to my views, that I was constrained to resort to extreme measures, lest he should "go off" again, and accordingly took to the gentle persuasion of water sprinkled on his face, the counterpane delicately withdrawn from his bed, and similar little attentions, which I felt to have been completely successful, when a pillow, wielded with the vigour of self-defence, gave notice that hostilities were about to be returned, and I withdrew to my own room.

It was not long before we were both out in the garden busily engaged in a careful inspection of the flower-beds, preparatory to the flower-gathering. Any flowers I liked, I might gather on this particular morning, but as the nosegay must not be too large, choice was difficult. Aleck made plenty of fun, but in reality gave little help.

"What's the use of my advising you," he said, not without reason; "you never take my advice when you get it?" And, in truth, I had uniformly taken the opposite line to the one he suggested, choosing a scarlet geranium where he offered a light-coloured verbena, and a rose when he had

suggested mignonnette.

"You see," I explained, "mamma won't care for it unless I arrange it all myself. Then Nurse has a lace paper ready which I shall put round it to make it look better. If you like you can hold the flowers," I added, kindly.

But this did not meet my cousin's views.

"I think I'll make a nosegay for uncle," he said, presently; "I suppose I may—eh, Willie?"

I felt sure there could be no objection, and signified my opinion from the very centre of a geranium bed, in which I was making active researches, that would have turned the gardener's hair gray with consternation had he not been safely off the premises at the time, comfortably engaged in discussing his breakfast. And Aleck set to work, and soon gathered a nosegay that almost, if not quite, equalled my own.

Which of our young readers who knows the delight of being let loose on some fine morning in a garden, with full permission to pluck flowers at their own sweet will, knows when to stop? We certainly did not, and should have produced bouquets, at all events, quite unrivalled for size, had it not been for the sounding of the first gong, and the appearance on the lawn of Nurse herself, still so called, although I was no longer her subject, in virtue of her unlimited right of jurisdiction over our clothes.

"A fine sight you're making of yourselves, young gentlemen," she said, beginning with general statements, and then descending into details. "I should like to know what you call that style of hair-dressing which means that every hair stands straight out in any direction but the right one, and no two of them the same. And, Master Willie, if you think you can go down into the dining-room with your tunic in its present condition, not to mention your boots, or Master Gordon's jacket, you're greatly mistaken. And then to look at your collars! No wonder that the bills are as they are, with respect to French polish and blue for clear starching; I know that boys, be they young gentlemen or others, cannot be expected to act like creatures endowed with reason, but still it passes me to understand their ways with respect to clothes well fitted too, and made in the most approved fashion."

"I think *we* should be black and blue if nurse were not really very good-natured, though she talks like that," I whispered to Aleck; feeling too much the cause she had for strictures upon my personal appearance at the time, to take that opportunity of defending the general character of boyhood. So we surrendered at discretion, and went up-stairs to make ourselves tidy, receiving before the second gong visits of inspection from nurse, who had in the meantime tied up our nosegays for us, and placed the lace paper round the one I had gathered for my mother.

Very important I felt myself as I went down-stairs, for two little packets, folded in white paper, had been entrusted to my care by my parents respectively, containing, as I well knew, their presents for each other, which were to be delivered by me before breakfast.

Directly after prayers the presentation took place. First, the little parcel addressed to my mother, with the message, which I delivered demurely enough, that a gentleman who would not give his name, had left it for Mrs. Grant yesterday, and—but here I broke down, and my appeal, "Oh, papa, I've forgotten what more it was I was to say," produced a peal of laughter, and put an end to our little pretence of mystery.

"Your packet is much the smallest, papa," I said; and watched to see what would come out of the white paper. My father's face lit up with pleasure as he opened a small case and discovered a beautifully executed miniature of my mother.

"Willie," he said, "I think the lady who left this for me yesterday must have been very like mamma."

"Yes, papa, she was *very* like indeed," I answered; and then we proceeded to inspect the contents of my mother's parcel, and admired, as much as it is in boys to admire jewelry, a beautiful bracelet, with which she seemed quite as much pleased as my father was with his present, and which had attached to it a locket in the form of a heart, containing, as we presently discovered, my hair twined with his.

Then Aleck and I had to present our nosegays, which were, of course, greatly praised.

"An unusual honour for me!" said my father merrily, when he received his. "Willie generally cuts me off with a sprig for my button-hole."

"Aleck gathered it for you quite out of his own head, papa."

"Indeed!" said my father; "that is really the most wonderful thing I ever heard! Gathered the nosegay out of his own head! Well, I have been told of flowers growing in many strange places before, but never in so strange a place as a person's head. Aleck, my dear boy, you will be the wonder of the age, so prepare to be made a show of! a flower-garden in your head! We must let the gardener know! We ought to place you under his cultivation instead of Mr. Glengelly's!"

What a merry breakfast-table we had that morning. My father declared that he felt just like a boy, so happy in having his holiday; and Aleck and I thought him more amusing and pleasant than any boy, no one ever seemed to make us laugh as he did.

"Of course, however," he suggested, "as it is going to be a whole holiday, and no work, there need be no eating either."

But that was by no means our view of the matter; we declared ourselves more hungry than usual, and made such inroads on the honey that my father asked at last whether he had not better send out for the hive.

After breakfast we had our Bible reading with my mother; that was a treat and not a lesson—we never missed it even on whole holidays—and then my father joined us and took part in consulting over the plans for the day.

"We shall dispose of these young gentlemen at once," he said, "for I find Groves is expecting them at the Cove, so soon as they can go; and they may have the whole morning to employ as they like, in the boats, or on the rocks—anything short of being in the water, which I do *not* recommend. And for ourselves, Rickson is going to bring round the pony carriage at twelve, when Mrs. Grant will be driven out by her humble servant, the coachman, supposing always that she sees no just cause or impediment." And my father playfully touched his forehead, as if waiting for orders.

It was clear to read in my mother's eyes that she saw no difficulty in the way of the drive with my father; and we boys were not less ready to avail ourselves of the permission to go out at once and for the whole morning.

We flew off to the play-room, loaded our pockets with a miscellaneous store of nails, string, and implements of one kind or another, such as we were wont to use in our various undertakings, and, carrying the melancholy hulk which Aleck had not had time to pull to pieces, we set off at express speed to the Cove, with Frisk barking at our heels.

There was not much talking during the first part of the scramble, but Aleck contrived to get the contents of one of his pockets scattered by a hasty jump, and we had to stop and pick up the things, which was the signal for our chatter to begin as usual.

"I wonder what surprise old George has for us?" I observed confidentially to my cousin.

"Whatever it is, I think he must have been a long time at it," replied Aleck; "he's been shut up in the work-shop so often of late."

"Yes," I said; "and since that one peep I told you of, I've never had a chance of looking in."

"Perhaps more ships," my cousin suggested, his thoughts running in that line.

"Ever since I can remember he's always made me something," I said; "once it was a pop-gun, and the next time it was a cart, and then, last time, the 'Fair Alice.'"

Aleck listened quietly to the catalogue of my presents, only remarking that, if they got better each time, he wondered what they'd come to be at last; thus suggesting such a pleasant subject for speculation that I did not immediately find any occasion for further talk, but ruminated as we pursued our way for a few moments in silence.

"It must be very nice," my cousin resumed presently, "having another day for presents besides Christmas-days and birth-days. I wonder where papa and mamma will be my next birth-day."

"Whatever it is that George has made for me," I said, "you shall play with it too, Aleck. I like you to play with my things."

"You're very good about the 'Fair Alice,' I'm sure," answered my cousin. "I wish I had anything to lend you that would give you half as much pleasure. I'm afraid this—referring to the boat he was carrying—will not come to much, in spite of George's promises."

It certainly did not look encouraging, but by this time we were gaining the shingle, the fresh sea-breeze blowing in our faces seemed to quicken our steps, and the rest of our way was a race between us and Frisk until we reached the lodge.

We found old George on the watch for us, his kind cheery face all in a pleasant glow of welcome. He was ready to start directly for the Cove, he told us, when the first salutations were over. But I did not feel quite so eager, as might have been expected, having a private desire to explore the work-shop, of which I perceived the door to be open.

"May I go in now?" I asked, moving towards it.

"Ay, ay, sir," answered my old friend with a merry twinkle in his eye, which developed into a broad smile by the time we returned from our fruitless inspection of bare benches and tools; and he took to singing,—

> "When she came there, the cupboard was bare."

"That Master Willie is a quotation from a celebrated poet. I reckon you're ready enough now to come on to the Cove."

We sallied forth accordingly, I convinced that there was some secret in store for me still; Aleck full of thoughts about his ship, which he was exhibiting to George as he went along, narrating its many mis-adventures, and incorrigible tendency to sail bottom upwards, and gaining from the old man nothing but a series of chuckles, together with assurances which seemed to afford to George

himself infinite amusement, that "Master Gordon's boat should sail in the Cove as trim and tight as the 'Fair Alice' herself."

It was a glorious morning. The sunshine was dancing and sparkling upon the water with a thousand gleaming flashes; the little waves came lapping playfully upon the sand and shingle to our feet, and made sweet music in the recesses of the rocks. We used to call these warm September days our Indian summer, and were wont to fancy that they were never so bright and beautiful anywhere as at Braycombe.

Groves took a quick comprehensive look towards the offing, and round again towards the rocks, and finally off towards the west, and then, as if satisfied with the result of his observations, said to us: "It would be a beautiful day for the White-Rock Cove, young gentlemen; the wind's shifted a bit since early morning, and Ralph will be round in half an hour to give us a hand with the oars; if Mrs. Grant wouldn't mind your being a bit late for luncheon, as you're to dine in the evening, we could do it nicely."

Now if anything had been wanted to add to the zest of our enjoyment, this suggestion of Groves's was just the thing. No expedition in the whole range of possibilities gave us so much pleasure as this one. First, it could only be accomplished in certain states of wind and tide; secondly, it occupied a longer time than could be usually available except on very propitious half holidays; and, finally, its attractions were of the most varied character. For what caverns were there in the whole neighbourhood that could compete with those at the White-Rock Cove?—with their deep clear pools, in which the pink seaweed and gorgeous anemones seemed to find a more congenial home than in any other place; with mysterious dark recesses and wonderful natural arches, and miniature gulf streams, that offered irresistible attractions to the spirit of enterprise, in the way of crossings on slippery stepping-stones; and with a soft white beach, spread out at the foot of the rocks, abounding with such a wonderful variety of shells, that our researches rarely ended without the discovery of some fresh specimen for our collections. Nor must we omit to mention the only white rock of any size which was to be found in our red sandstone district, which gave its name to the Cove, and as to which there were numerous traditions current in the neighbourhood.

To the near side of the Cove there was, indeed, a short way through the woods, but unless we had a boat we could not reach the caverns, or find our way to the most attractive spots for shell gathering.

Groves's suggestion was met, as might be expected, with rapturous applause, and by the time that we reached our own Cove, it was decided that one of us boys should go up to the house to obtain the necessary permission, whilst, in the meantime, the boat should be got ready for the sail.

The door of our boat-house was lying open as we came up, and something of unusual appearance was dimly visible inside.

"The secret!" I exclaimed, running eagerly forward and drawing to light a beautiful large kite with a wondrous flying eagle depicted on it, and a tail of marvellous length, together with an apparently inexhaustible length of string. "Oh, George, this is what you've been making—how beautiful it is!"

"But maybe you don't guess for whom it's intended, sir; I don't deny the making of it," said the old man.

"I think I do though," I answered, looking up at his kind, cheery face; "I think you've made it for me, George."

"Well, you're about right there, sir, and it's been a real pleasure to me the making of it, being, as it were, somewhat of a sailor's craft, it having to be driven of the wind, even though it might be said to be more for land than water."

I heard Aleck say that it belonged rather to the air than to earth or water in his opinion. Then we took to a close inspection of the eagle, which we both agreed to be splendid, and became eager for an immediate trial of its flying powers.

But here, to our surprise, old George did not at once agree. He wanted to see, he told us, whether he could not make Master Gordon's boat sail as well as mine. We could have a sailing match, and try which would go the best, if only we would get out the "Fair Alice;" and so saying he led the way to my own little boat-house, whilst we followed in speechless wonder at the absurdity of the proposition.

"As if he could set my boat to rights in a few minutes!" said Aleck to me incredulously.

"Here, Master Gordon," continued George, making pretended difficulties at the lock; "you had better open the door yourself, sir."

Aleck stooped down to do so. "Why, George!" he exclaimed, "it's as easy as possible; what *did* you make such a fuss about? But—oh—what a beauty! Willie—Willie—look!" and so saying, he drew forth a beautifully made little vessel, about the same size as my "Fair Alice," but even, as I thought, more perfectly finished, and with two masts.

"A schooner-yacht," my cousin continued, triumphantly. "Oh, Willie, I like it a great deal better than even the 'Fair Alice.' Is it yours, George?" he inquired.

"No, sir," answered Groves, quickly; "guess again."

"I don't know any one else, unless it's Willie."

"Near it, but not right; try again, sir; somebody else that's not very far off."

My cousin coloured with a wild flush of delight; but though he stooped down to finger the new yacht in a sort of tender way, as if he loved it, he hesitated to make another guess, and I broke in impatiently,—

"Aleck, why are you so nonsensical as to pretend you don't see it's for you?"

"That's it indeed, Master Gordon; you'll understand what I meant about the sailing match now;" and the old sailor's face lit up afresh with kind enjoyment, as he marked the absorbing pleasure which his present was giving.

Another moment, and Aleck was almost hugging the old man: "Oh, how very, very, very kind of you to make it for me; I like it better a great deal than anything I have ever seen, better than the 'Fair Alice' even, and I did think that nicer than anything else. May I have it out on the water to-day; and couldn't we sail them both together as you said."

There was no time for answering him, as he ran on immediately into a minute individual examination of all the details of the little vessel, calling for attention and admiration in every case: "Look at the bowsprit, and then the rudder; see how delicately it moves; the royal is beautiful, and there are three flags; do look, Willie, mine will be the admiral's vessel, and I can signal to you."

I looked, but said very little, though Aleck was too much absorbed with his own enjoyment to notice this, and kept appealing to me for sympathetic interest during the whole operation of unreefing the sails and launching the yacht for a trial sail in the Cove.

Nothing certainly could look more graceful and pretty than did the little vessel, as it bent to the breeze, and steadily kept its course out towards the mouth of the Cove. Aleck clapped his hands exultingly, and ran forward to slip the rope across, as the tide was already pretty high, and still rising. Then slowly brought the treasure back again, and surveyed it at his leisure in one of the little creeks, where the shelter of the rocks prevented it from speeding off again on its journey. Frisk, too, took a great interest in the new acquisition, seeming to recognize in it an addition to his circle of friends. And George rubbed his hands, and chuckled with satisfaction, as he repeated again that Master Gordon's boat should sail on the Cove as tight and trim as the "Fair Alice" herself.

And I—yes, I must confess it, found the old miserable feelings were all back again, and vainly tried to shake off the dead weight which had settled upon me from the moment that I had clearly understood that Aleck, and not I, was to possess the new vessel.

Perhaps George detected something of what was passing in my mind, for, when the question arose which of us boys should go up to the house to ask permission for the expedition to the White-Rock Cove, he decided at once that it should be Aleck, saying that he and I would have time for trying the kite meanwhile; and, looking back at it now, I fancy I can understand his wanting to take off my thoughts from Aleck's present, and make me think about my own.

So Aleck started off by the Zig-zag, and George and I would have set to flying the kite immediately, had not he discovered that one of the sails of our own boat had been taken up to the lodge, and that he must go and look for it first.

"I'll be back in less than a quarter of an hour, sir," he said, however, as he left; "and you can have the kite and be on the meadow ready."

I had taken up the kite in my hand, but I threw it aside again the moment George turned his back upon me, and sitting down upon the stones near the water's edge, with Frisk's fore-paws stretched across my lap, looked gloomily at the water and at Aleck's new boat. Evil feelings grew stronger and stronger within me as I looked. Though fascinated so that I could not take my eyes off it, I hated the very sight of the pretty little schooner, and wished heartily that George had never made it. And I thought about Aleck, how happy he was this morning, and how miserable I was; and I thought it unfair of him to be happier in my own home than I was; and then I wondered why George should care for him so much as to take all that trouble for him, forgetting how I had begged old George to love my cousin who was to be like my brother, and forgetting, too, that Aleck's pleasant ways had won upon the old man during the past few months, so that he had gained quite an established place in his affections.

These and countless other, but similar thoughts, chased each other through my head in a far shorter time than they take to relate, whilst dreamily I kept watching the little vessel, and mechanically taking note of its different points. The sails at first were flapping listlessly, the rocks, as I mentioned before, affording shelter from the breeze. But presently the breeze shifted a little, and this change, together with that produced by the tide, now just at its full height, moved the schooner somewhat further from the rocks; then gradually the sails filled once again, and after stopping a minute at one point, and a minute at another, as, drifted by the motion of the waves, it finally escaped from the little creek and stood steadily out into the open channel of the Cove. I sprung to my feet and followed in pursuit, running or jumping from rock to rock towards the mouth of the Cove. But the little vessel got under the lee of a projecting rock, and was

stopped in its course for a while, so I sat down once more, not caring to find my way round to the other side and release it, according to my usual fashion, but finding a moody satisfaction in staring straight before me, and paying no attention to Frisk, who was flourishing about with barks, and waggings of his tail and prickings of his ears, as if he thought he ought to be sent in pursuit of the new boat, and considered me deficient in public spirit for not stirring in the matter. Then, as I steadily refused to notice him, he took to playing with the end of the rope on which the rings were fastened, which slipped on to the iron stake, as before-mentioned, and constituted our "harbour-bar;" seeming as pleased as a kitten with a ball of worsted, when he found that he could push the ring up and move it with his paws. In fact, the stake was so very short, and the ring so light, that I could see five minutes more of such play, and probably the rope would be unfastened, and the channel clear to the open sea.

Another moment and I noticed that the little vessel was clearing out from its shelter under the rock, the wind coming down into the Cove in gusts and draughts, so that it seemed to blow every way in succession, and was now standing straight towards the mouth of the harbour.

There was a quick, sharp conflict between the strong whisper of temptation and the protesting voice of conscience, when I marked the position of the boat, and saw also, that in another moment Frisk's antics would have unfastened the barrier between it and the wide waters beyond. A quick, sharp conflict, and I came off defeated.

Hastily turning my back upon the harbour-bar, I ran to the head of the Cove without disturbing Frisk, who was so taken up with his newly found amusement, that he did not miss me; took up the kite and sped off to the meadow, which lay between the Cove and the lodge, where I was joined by the dog, two or three minutes after, panting and breathless at my having stolen a march upon him.

George, too, came a minute later from the other side into the meadow, which, although out of sight of the Cove, owing to the rise of the ground, was as good a place to wait in as any, since Aleck would have to pass through it on his way from the house.

Ralph appeared also, and through our united efforts, and to our united satisfaction, my new kite was soon soaring higher than any kite ever seen before by any member of our little party; great was my excitement in holding the string and letting it out, or taking it in as I ran from one part to another, Frisk the while dashing about wildly, and barking as though at some strange bird of which he entertained suspicions.

Old George looked as pleased as if he had been a boy of six, rather than a man of sixty, and Ralph rushed recklessly here and there and everywhere, with his head thrown back and his eyes rivetted upon the soaring kite, until, like Genius in the fable, he was suddenly prostrate through stumbling over an unnoticed stump.

"See what comes of not looking where you're going," moralized George, as he picked him up and gave him a general shaking by way of seeing that nothing had come loose in his tumble; a sentiment from which it is possible the youngster might have derived more profit, had not his elderly relative experienced a similar mishap almost immediately afterwards.

I was the only heavy-hearted one of the trio; and even I forgot my cares and anxieties in the glorious excitement of holding in the kite, which tugged and tugged at the string as if it would carry me up to the skies, rather than give in.

"I wonder what's kept Master Aleck such a time?" said old George, after we had spent nearly three-quarters of an hour kite-flying.

The load at my heart came back again in a moment as I answered hurriedly, that I did not mind Aleck's being detained, for the pleasure of flying the kite was as good as anything. And George, who inferred that the cloud he had noticed before over me had passed away, rejoiced accordingly.

It was more than an hour from the time of his leaving, when Aleck reappeared, holding one side of a small hamper, whilst one of the men-servants held the other.

"Lots of good things for luncheon," he said, by way of explanation, as they deposited their burden on the grass. And then he proceeded to unfold how some one had been calling on his uncle and aunt, and he could not speak to them at first; and then how his uncle had told him the drive would have to be later, and more distant than they had intended; and, finally, that the game of cricket being given up, we might have our luncheon and picnic at the White-Rock Cove, returning any reasonable time in the afternoon.

"Won't it be splendid?" Aleck continued, gleefully, whilst I drew in line, and my kite slowly descended; "we shall have time for the sailing match, and madrepore hunt, and the caverns—everything!"

I assented with as much of pleasure in my tone as was at command, thinking after all how very pleasant it would be if—there came the *if*—and I scarcely dared admit to myself, how sorry I began to feel at the thought that my man[oe]uvre had probably succeeded, or how sorely the disappointment to George and my cousin would mar our happiness! If only I could know that what I had wished to happen an hour ago had not happened, then how wonderfully light my heart would feel. A sickening feeling of anxiety, such as I had not dreamt of in my little happy life before, came over me, and nervously I hurried on the winding up of my string.

"What a noble kite it is," said my cousin, "I wish I could go up upon one!"

"'If wishes were horses'—you know the old saying, Master Gordon," responded Groves. "I think you'd be sorry enough after getting up five hundred feet into the air, to feel that a puff of wind might tumble you over, and make the coming down a trifle quicker, and less agreeable, than the going up."

"It was the going up, and not the coming down that I meant," rejoined Aleck, "though I have heard papa say that coming down from a great height does not hurt."

"Ugh!" I ejaculated, "you wouldn't have me believe that. Just a little while before you came to us I had a bad fall off the table. I can tell you it hurt!"

"I've fallen, too, off a tree," answered my cousin, not to be outdone, for boys are wont to brag of their honourable scars, "and it hurt a great deal, but I mean falling from higher still. One of the sailors I talked to on board ship had fallen from a mast, and he told me that he went over and over; the first time he went over seemed quite a long time, and between that and the second time he seemed to remember almost everything he had ever cared about much in all his life, but after the second going over he never knew anything until he found himself lying in the cabin, and the doctor setting his arm, which had been broken in the fall, though he never felt it."

"I'll be bound he felt it enough when the doctor got to work upon him," remarked George.

"Yes; but he didn't feel it when it broke," returned Aleck, who wished to establish his point.

By this time the stately kite was lying on the grass. I lifted it up, and we started in procession for the Cove, Aleck acting train-bearer to the long tail, and winding it up as he went along; and Groves and Ralph carrying the hamper.

Another moment, and we were in sight of the Cove. My heart was beating violently, and I felt the crimson flush mount suddenly to my face, and then leave it again; but no one else noticed it, and as yet I could not see to the harbour-bar, so as to know whether the ship were safe or not. The little creek in which it had been left was, however, full in view, and Aleck instantly observed that his new treasure was not there.

But there was an entire absence of uneasiness in his tone, as he quietly remarked,—

"I suppose you put it into the boat-house lest it should be blown about whilst we were away;" and without waiting for an answer he placed the rolled-up tail of the kite in my hand, and ran forwards to look into the boat-house for it.

It was in vain, however, that he searched first my miniature boat-house, and then every nook and corner of the real one.

"It's not there," he said. "I thought you must have put it away."

"I never said so," I answered; and then a bright thought coming to me, as to what would be an impregnable position to take up in all future inquiry, I boldly added, "I never touched it after you went away."

"Where can it be, then?" said Aleck; and yet, though it was clearly a hopeless task, we once again looked carefully for the missing treasure in both boat-houses. There was the "Fair Alice," my own beautiful little vessel, that had seemed the most perfect thing of its kind, until the arrival of the new one; but the other was nowhere to be found.

"Tell you what, Master Gordon," said old George, "the wind's been uncommon shifting and fanciful this morning, and we left her with sails set; depend upon it, sir, that she's been drifting out with the tide a bit, and the wind so off shore, as it is now, she'd be up towards the mouth of the Cove. We ought to have thought of the wind and the change of the tide; it will be well if she's not out to sea."

"Oh, no fear of that!" exclaimed Aleck, joyfully, "because I myself put the harbour-bar across this morning when I sailed her first;" and so saying, he bounded off along the rocks towards the mouth of the Cove, the rest of us following almost as fast.

One hasty glance and I knew that what I had expected had taken place; the ring which tightened the rope across, so as to constitute a barrier, was now under water—the rope, it must be understood, being arranged to lie along the bottom when not specially adjusted—the channel out to sea was perfectly unimpeded, and there was no trace of the little vessel which, an hour and a half before, had been sailing so merrily upon the water.

"O George!" exclaimed Aleck, "see the rope is down; it must have gone out to sea; it *can't* be gone!"

But Aleck's face of sad conviction belied his words.

"It can't be gone!" he repeated; and yet the tears of disappointment were forcing themselves into his eyes, though he battled up bravely against his trouble, and tried to believe still that there was some mistake.

Then we betook ourselves to searching in every nook and corner of the Cove, exploring impossible places amongst the rocks, and once again returning to look through the boat-house; I,

hypocritically, as active as others, lest there should be any suspicion raised.

"Master Willie," said Groves at last, as if a bright thought had struck him, "I know what it must be, sir. You're up to a prank sometimes—in fact, rather often—and you've hidden away the yacht, for there's been no one else in the Cove but you; though where you can have put it I'm puzzled to say, seeing there's not a place fit to hide a walnut-shell I haven't looked in, not to say a schooner yacht drawing half a foot of water."

All faces looked relieved by the idea—the three other faces I mean. But as its tendency was to fasten a certain measure of responsibility upon myself, I thought it better to become indignant.

"I don't know why you say I must have done it," I answered hastily. "I never touched the boat; what should I touch it for, it wasn't mine; you didn't make it for me. I told Aleck I hadn't touched it."

"Master Willie, Master Willie," expostulated Groves, "don't be angry; I only thought you might have been up to a bit of fun, and I was mistaken."

"Then, George—O George!" exclaimed my cousin, grasping him by the arm, "she *must* have gone out to sea;" and he tried hard to gulp down his feelings; "you know the harbour-bar is down."

"And I should like to know how it came to be down," said George, severely. A new idea evidently passed all in a moment through my cousin's mind. With a fiery flashing in his eyes that I had never seen in him before, he turned suddenly upon me.

"You naughty, wicked boy," he said.

"You didn't touch the boat you say; but you didn't like my having it; you didn't like its being mine, because it was better than yours, and had two masts; and so you let down the bar, and—and she's got out to sea and is lost!" And so saying he burst into a passionate fit of tears.

It is difficult to say which of us was the most surprised by this unlooked-for accusation of Aleck's. I had never seen my cousin in such a temper before, but was far too conscious of the wrong part I had acted to be able at once to answer with a protest of innocence. So that in the very short space of time which was occupied by George telling Aleck the case was not hopeless, and the vessel might be found yet, and that he'd be sorry for the wrong words he had said to me, a rapid controversy passed silently between me and my conscience somewhat in this wise:—

*Conscience.*—"You know that what he said is true about your not liking his having the schooner, and you know you wanted it to get lost." *Answer.*—"But I can say with perfect truth that I did not touch it *or the rope*."

*Conscience.*—"You know if you had called off Frisk the schooner would not have been lost." *Answer.*—"But I never *saw* Frisk unloose the ring; and I can say, with truth, that until just now I did not *know* that it was not safe."

*Conscience.*—"That will be a lie all the same. You have often been told that what makes a lie is the intention to deceive, and not the words only." *Answer.*—"What's the use of telling now that I really am very sorry it has happened. It's not any good confessing to Aleck that I might have prevented it. After all, it was Frisk who did it, and I did not even see Frisk do it. And Aleck's in such a towering passion; I could never face him and have him know the whole."

*Conscience*, more feebly.—"That's bad reasoning; you ought simply to find out what is right, and do it." *Answer.*—"And now that I come to think of it, it's a great shame that Aleck should fly out so at me, and I won't stand it." And at this point the voice of conscience became perfectly silenced, and, turning defiantly to my cousin, I exclaimed,—

"I don't know what you mean, Aleck, by accusing me of it; I never touched the rope, and I never touched the boat; I'm quite certain that I did not, and it's a lie of yours to say that I did."

"O Master Willie, Master Aleck," gasped old George, in consternation. "Young gentlemen, these words are not fit to come from such as you; what would your parents say?"

But our brows lowered angrily, and we made no response; whilst George continued, abandoning in his dismay the usual form of address, and speaking as from age to youth, "My boys, children, have you not been taught of Him 'who, when He was reviled, reviled not again; when He suffered, He threatened not.' Christian boys should try to be like their Master, and such words as passed between you should never be heard amongst them. You've forgotten yourselves, young gentlemen, and you'll be very sorry soon for what you have said to each other. Master Aleck, you're wrong, sir, to say that Master Willie did it when he denies it. I've known Master Willie since he was born, and he speaks the truth. He's told me with the greatest of honestness when he's done things which was wrong, and no one else knowed of; as, for instance, when he ate the cherries and swallowed the stones, and when he got the cat's tail all over pitch—I can remember a score of things he's told me of, quite frank and open, and I'm sure he's spoken the truth now."

I felt somewhat self-condemned whilst George thus enumerated the instances of my candour in simple unconsciousness of the fact that confessions of scrapes were generally received by him with such indulgence that it required the smallest possible amount of moral courage to make them.

"Shake hands, young gentlemen," he added, after another pause, "and be friends, and let us all

do what we can to find the schooner—she's cost me many an hour's work."

And at this moment, for the first time, it flashed upon me painfully how great the disappointment was to George as well as to Aleck, and I was sorry, more sorry than I had hitherto felt.

The pair of small chubby hands that met in the old sailor's rugged palm were unused to so ceremonious a meeting, and their owners were somewhat solemnized at being treated like grown-up gentlemen. But a fierce look of suspicion still lingered in Aleck's face, and I doubt not a glow of anger and excitement in mine, which showed that Groves's peacemaking had not been thoroughly effectual—we *felt* still as we had *spoken* before.

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# CHAPTER VII.

## THE MISSING SHIP.

In the meantime Ralph had been busy getting all the things ready for our sail; so we took our places in the boat, and stood out to sea. The wind being steadily off shore, our progress was rapid; we bounded lightly over the water, and had soon placed some distance between us and the Cove.

George sat at the helm, keeping a keen look out in every direction; whilst Aleck, Ralph, and I, strained our eyes in fruitless efforts to discover the tiny white sail we were longing to see.

The glorious sunshine dancing and sparkling on the water seemed to mock the gloomy heavy-heartedness that was darkening the hours of our long anticipated holiday. Aleck and I were almost entirely silent. When we spoke, it was to Ralph, or George, as convenient third parties; not a word would we say to each other.

Old George did his best, with clumsy kindness, to make lively remarks from time to time; but the responsive laugh was wanting; and, after experiencing two or three signal failures, he struck his colours and yielded to the spell that had fallen upon us.

The whole Braycombe coast for many miles is deeply indented with creeks and coves, and diversified with outstanding rocks and promontories, about the most picturesque and the most dangerous part of our southern shores. Old George decided that probably the object of our search had been driven in by the fitful wind amongst some of the near rocks and creeks, and might, perhaps, be recovered by a careful search. So, warily steered by our experienced sailor, we set ourselves to the work, having scanned, to the best of our ability, the open sea beyond with a pocket telescope.

What with the tackings frequently necessary, and the taking down sail in one place, and then putting it up in another, the time passed on rapidly; and we were quite surprised, as we finished the exploration of one of the little inlets, to hear Groves remark that it was "nigh upon two o'clock, and that we'd all be the better of a little food." For the first time in our lives we had forgotten to be hungry.

It was decided that we should spread the luncheon on a broad flat stone, near which our boat was now curtseying listlessly on the water, and take our repast ashore. George and Ralph lifted out the hamper, and spread the cloth, and arranged the various good things we found inside.

"And don't let us forget," said old George, reverently, lifting his hat, "the thanks we owe to our Father, which art in heaven, for His bounties provided for us."

The train of thought thus started seemed to go on in his mind, after we had set to the serious business of luncheon. "You see, young gentlemen," he presently continued, "we're to remember that all the good things He sends us come from the same hand that sends us our disappointments too; and though we don't always see it, it's true that the troubles and trials are amongst the *good* things. Many a time I've kept a-thinking of that verse which says, 'He that spared not His only-begotten Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not, with Him, also freely give us all things'—the *all things* there meaning, you see, the troubles and losses as much as the gains, and successes, and pleasures. And I think it's the same with children as with grown people; *their* trials, which are small to grown-up people, are great to *them*, and they don't come by chance. And, when we are able to feel this way, young gentlemen, it's easier to bear up when the wind seems dead against you, and to say, when things go wrong, and there's a deal of beating about, and a shipping of heavy seas, as you're taught to say in the Lord's prayer, 'Thy will be done.'"

I forget what was said after George finished this homely, but practical and excellent children's sermon; but I can remember that Aleck's face looked somewhat lighter; the words seemed to have touched some inner chord, and to have met *his* troubles more than they did *mine*. *My* load, on the contrary, lay all the more heavily on my conscience; as I realized that I was entirely shut out from such consolations as George tried to offer, so that I became *more* rather than *less* gloomy.

The old man resumed the thread of conversation soon again.

"It seems strange now," he said, "to think how we're grieving over this bit of a toy ship, and then

to think of how one's felt seeing, as I did once, a good ship with her crew, men and boys, clinging to the rigging, and going down before your eyes, and you not able to help them, though they kept a-screeching out and a-calling to you all the while."

"Couldn't you do anything?" we both exclaimed, our interest now fully awakened; "did you try to help them?"

"Oh yes, sir," George answered, and I could see the tears standing in his eyes; "God be praised, we didn't see 'em go down without doing what we could for them; and I'm glad to think of it, though my life didn't seem worth the having for many a long day afterward."

"Oh, why?" asked Aleck, eagerly; and I, in spite of our being upon terms of not speaking, caught myself whispering to him, "Don't you know?—Ralph's father was drowned."

But George went on, with his eyes fixed on the water, as if the great sea which had swallowed up his dead were a book, and he were reading from it.

"His father"—and with a turn of the head he indicated Ralph—"was with me; he was but four-and-twenty, and as handsome as handsome; a young fellow such as there was not many to be seen like him; and he was a good son—a good son to his mother and to me—and a child of God, too, Heaven be praised! 'Father,' says he, 'we must try to save them;' and, with the sound of those poor creatures' cries ringing in my ears, I dared not say no, though the odds were fearful against us, and I was careful over *him*, though I'd not have minded for myself. Well, sir, two others joined us, and we succeeded in getting off; but just before we reached the sinking vessel, a heavy sea struck us, and in a moment we were all struggling in the water. I thought I heard Ralph—*he* was Ralph too—I thought I heard him just say, 'God have mercy on my poor Betsey!'—she as you know, Master Willie—and then I knew nothing until I woke up in a room where some kind people were rubbing me with hot flannels, and offering me hot stuff to drink. So soon as I could speak, 'Where's Ralph?' I says, looking round for him; and then I saw in their faces how it was; and they came round me, treating me quite tenderly like a child, though they were rough sailors. And one of 'em, a God-fearing man, who had spoken a bit to us many a time when we'd no parson, was put forward by them, and he comes and whispers to me, 'You'll see him again, George, when the sea shall give up its dead. You'll meet before the throne of God and of the Lamb.' Well, sir, I was but a poor frail mortal, and my senses left me again, and I was long of coming round. But ever since then, as I look at the wide water, I seem to hear a voice saying, the sea shall give up its dead, and we'll meet some day before the throne of God and of the Lamb. Yes; I'm not afraid of the open Book for him, poor boy, for long afore that day I knew he'd taken his sailing orders under the Great Captain. 'Father,' he's said to me, 'I know Jesus Christ has *died* for me; I must *live* for him.' And when the poor body was washed ashore, there was his little Testament in his pocket, all dripping with the sea water. I dried it, and found it could still be read, and even some of his marks; there's not another thing I prize so much."

Old George took the little unsightly-looking volume from his pocket, and gave it reverently to us to look at, and Aleck and I bent over it together, and deciphered on the title-page, in crooked lines of round handwriting, the name, *Ralph Groves—his book*; and underneath was a verse of a hymn, evidently remembered and not copied, which must have been one of those sung amongst the Methodists on that part of the coast where, as George told me, Ralph used to attend their meetings.

"Lord Jesus, be my constant Guide,
Then when the word is given,
Bid death's dark stream its waves divide,
And land me safe in heaven."

"You see, young gentlemen," resumed George, when we had given him back the little book, "things which seem hard to bear—ay, and *are* hard to bear now—are but little things after all, and will be as nothing in that day when all wrong words and tempers will seem great things, far greater than we sometimes think."

Aleck and I had listened with full hearts to Groves's touching account of his son's death, and it was in a subdued quiet manner that we rose up from our meal and settled ourselves again in the boat. There was evidently an inward struggle going on in my cousin's mind, and I almost feared that he was going to ask my pardon, which I should have disliked, knowing myself to be so much the most in the wrong. It was quite a relief to find that in this I was mistaken; he only remained, as before, very silent; and I, too, was silent, and found myself, with eyes fixed on the water, thinking of George's son, and of the opened Book, and wondering concerning the things written therein, and whether all that had happened this day would be found there; whilst old George's words seemed to repeat themselves over in my mind, and I kept saying to myself, "The loss of the ship will be a very little thing then, whilst all wrong words and tempers will seem greater than we think."

We had not resumed our search very long, when Aleck declared that he saw something white in the distance which he thought was the little vessel. We all eagerly turned our eyes in the direction indicated, and although no one felt very sure that we had at last discovered the object of our search, there was sufficient uncertainty to make us eager in pursuit. We had to tack frequently, but at last reached the little white thing which inspired our hopes, and, alas! discovered that it was only a whitened branch of a tree washed out from shore, on which the wet leaves glistened and shone in the afternoon sun. It was a fresh disappointment to us all, and the

time our chase had occupied prevented the possibility of any further research. Even as it was, we were quite late in reaching the Cove, and found that my father had been on the watch for us with his telescope, and had been greatly perplexed by the erratic character of our movements.

Of course he was instantly told the tragical history of our day. Aleck, whose sorrow had been renewed by our fruitless search, did not hesitate to lay emphasis upon the fact that I had been left alone at the Cove; and I was quite startled by the quick abrupt manner in which my father turned round to me and said,—

"Willie, did you meddle with the ship or the rope whilst Aleck was away?"

But, thankful that the inquiry took this form, I was able to answer unhesitatingly,—

"No, papa, I did not touch the boat once, or the rope either, this morning, and it's very, very wrong of Aleck to say that I did."

Whilst Aleck, the dark angry look flashing once again from his eyes, exclaimed,—

"I know he hated my having the yacht; I'm sure he wanted me to lose it."

Mr. Gordon, although as much shocked at this outburst as George had been, was not disposed to treat the matter quite as he had done.

That both of us were guilty of wrong temper there could be no doubt, but he saw also that there was still something to be cleared up; and instead of quenching the subject by telling us we had both behaved badly, and deserved to be unhappy, as is the self-indulgent custom of many grown-up people in the matter of children's quarrels, he forbade any further recrimination, and after dinner was over, calmly and quietly inquired into every particular of our story, with as much care as if he had been on his magistrate's bench in court, and this were a case of great importance; first questioning Aleck, and then myself.

As my examination drew to a close, however, Aleck once again burst in with the determined assertion that I knew more than I had said.

My mother, who was present, was indignant at his persistency, saying that in all my life I had never told a lie, and it was unpardonable thus to speak of me; whilst my father simply said, "Since you are not able to conduct yourself with propriety, Aleck, you must go to bed." And my cousin left the room accordingly, whilst I was subjected to the moral torture of a further cross-examination; from which, however, strong in the distinct assertion that I had not touched either rope or boat, I came off clear.

One step, indeed, my father gained, in the course of his inquiry, towards the truth. In answer to one of his questions, I used the pronoun *we*.

"Who's *we*?" asked my father, quickly.

"Frisk and I, papa."

"Then you had Frisk with you, and I suppose as playful as usual?"

"Yes, papa."

"Did Frisk get at the ship or the rope, do you think?"

"I never saw him touch the ship; I don't think he could touch it; but then I went to the meadow to fly the kite."

"Did Frisk get near the rope?"

"Yes, papa, just before I came away; but I didn't see him slip off the ring, though now I think he must have done so."

"You think so because you saw him going near the rope?"

"Yes, papa; but I can't tell you any more. I went to fly my kite, and Frisk came up quite panting soon after, having run hard because I had happened to leave him behind."

"It was the dog did it," said my father quite decidedly, turning to my mother. "Willie, you should have been more careful; you might have known it was not safe to leave Frisk in the Cove; but I quite believe your word, and that you had no hand in the matter."

Then the subject was dismissed: I played a game of chess with my mother, and finally went up to bed at the usual time, to receive, before going to sleep, the never-omitted visit, which was the peaceful closing to so many peaceful days.

My mother stayed but for a moment on this evening, going on almost at once to my cousin's room.

I heard all about that visit afterwards, so that I am able to tell what passed almost as well as if I had been present.

My mother found Aleck lying wearily and restlessly in bed, with tearful eyes and hot flushed face, that told of sleep being by no means near. She sat down beside him and said, "It was a sad disappointment for you, Aleck, to lose your pretty new boat; and I daresay you feel it hard not to

have your own dear mamma to tell all about it."

Aleck tried to answer, but failed, bursting into tears instead, and my mother talked on in her gentle loving way until the sobs grew less frequent, and my cousin became at last quite calm. She told him that I had always spoken the truth—she little knew—and that she could not doubt my word, and that my father had become quite convinced it was the mischievous work of the dog that had brought about all this trouble; and then she made him feel how wrong it was to have accused me, instead of believing my word; so that, before she left the room, he had told her he was very very sorry for what he had said, and he hoped she and his uncle would forgive him, and that he meant to ask my forgiveness also. I know that my mother told him of a higher forgiveness that must be obtained before he could feel at peace with his conscience, and spoke to him somewhat in the same manner that George had, about trials great or small being kindly and lovingly permitted by a heavenly Father.

I was almost asleep when my door opened, and the pattering of shoeless feet announced a visitor. Aleck was groping in the dark, and, guided by my voice, reached the bottom of my bed, discovered the mound raised by my feet, felt his way along the ridge of my person, and having arrived at my head, flung his arms around my neck, and kissing me warmly—in my eye by mistake—said he could not sleep until he had told me how sorry he was for having behaved so badly, and suspected me, and called me bad names. He was quite sure now that Frisk had done the mischief, and he hoped I would forgive him, adding that there was still just a chance of finding the vessel, and that he meant to be up very early, and out by six o'clock the next morning, to have a good look down in the White-Rock Cove. "I daresay I shall find it after all, Willie, and if not—why, I must finish the old thing we've been working at so long. But I once found a knife of mine after I had lost it a week in a hay-field; so you see I'm lucky." He kissed me again and went back to his bed, whilst I lay tossing and wakeful, full of shame and self-reproach, and yet more than ever built up in my determination that I would not, and could not, confess the whole truth; it would be too great a shame and humiliation after having so fully committed myself, and when my parents had expressed such perfect confidence in my truthfulness.

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# CHAPTER VIII.

## ANOTHER SEARCH.

Half-past eight o'clock in the morning. The gong had sounded, and we had all assembled in the library for prayers. All but Aleck, who, for the first time since he had been with us at Braycombe, was not in his usual place.

My father missed him, and turned to ask me where he was.

"I expect he has gone out, papa," I replied; "he meant to go down to the shore to look for his boat."

"If you please, sir," said Bennet the footman, "I saw Master Gordon quite early this morning, maybe about six o'clock; he telled me he was going down to look after the ship."

Family prayer was concluded and breakfast began, and still Aleck did not appear. As he had no watch, it was not surprising that he should mistake the time to a certain extent; but we all wondered he should be so very late, and at last my father began to feel uneasy. "He must have been a long way off not to have heard the eight o'clock bell," he said; "yet he's a careful boy; it seems unlikely he should come to any harm."

"Run out on the lawn, Willie," suggested my mother, "and take a good look round; perhaps he may be in sight."

But although I put a liberal interpretation upon the direction, and not only ran out upon the lawn, but also down the drive for a little way, and up the overhanging bank, from which we could got a sight far off towards the White-Rock Cove, I could see nothing of my cousin, and returned breathless to the dining-room without the tidings that my parents expected.

The post had come in whilst I was out, and my father was engaged in the perusal of a letter from Uncle Gordon, reading little bits of it aloud to my mother as he went on. "Just starting for the Pyrenees ... need send no letters for a fortnight ... address Poste Restante, Marseilles, after this; the constant change of air has done wonders," &c. &c. When the letter was finished, I saw there was one enclosed for Aleck, which according to custom I laid upon his plate, repeating, at the same time, that I had looked in every direction, but could see nothing of my cousin.

"He must have gone down to the lodge, and perhaps Groves kept him, finding it was late, and gave him something to take," said my mother. Whereupon my father rung the bell, and desired Bennet to go down at once to the lodge and inquire whether Master Gordon had been there, whilst in the mean time I finished my breakfast, and was sent to the school-room to get my lessons ready for Mr. Glengelly.

It was not long before my father came to me. "Willie," he said, "I can't understand what has kept Aleck, and I fear he may have hurt himself, and not be able to make his way home; so I am going

out at once to look for him, and you must help me."

There was something rather dignified in being thus spoken to by my father, and, had it not been for the secret load, of which I dared not tell him, but which already began to weigh with additional heaviness on my heart, I should have felt somewhat elated at finding myself of importance.

My father continued in a quick, decided manner: "Leave your lessons, and run off at once to the lodge. If you find Ralph anywhere about, so much the better, he can go with you; in any case you and George could manage to get the little boat round to the White-Rock Cove, keeping in shore as nearly as George thinks safe, and keep a sharp look-out all the way along for your cousin.—Stay; on second thoughts Rickson shall run down to the Cove too, in case Ralph is not to be found; you will want another hand."

I did not need twice telling, but was off in an instant, and, breathless with excitement, reached the lodge a few minutes after.

My story was soon told, and George lost no time in getting out the smallest of our boats, and with Ralph, who happened, as George said, to be fortunately "handy" on the occasion, we started upon our search. I could not help thinking of the morning before, and its search, but the excitement now kept up my spirits; it was something so new to be thus suddenly dismissed from lessons, and trusted to help in what was evidently considered a matter of some anxiety; *why* they should be so anxious I did not trouble myself to reflect, having little idea but that Aleck had wandered further than he intended, and perhaps experienced some difficulty on his way home.

We glided along quickly and pleasantly enough, past the first inlet, and the second, from our own Cove, scrutinizing all the banks, and rocks, and shady nooks, so familiar through many a wild exploring of ours; to reach the third we were obliged to stand out a considerable distance to sea, as the promontory bounding the White-Rock Cove on this side stretched far beyond the other rocky buttresses, making one of the most prominent land-marks in that part of the south coast. It was underneath its shelter that we had lunched the day before, and as we passed by the broad, flat stone in the little creek, the conversation we had had there repeated itself again and again in my mind.

It was about half-past eleven o'clock when we had cleared this point, and George gave the order to haul down sail.

"It's best to take to the oars now, Master Willie; we'd be a long while at it if we tacked—Now, Ralph, pull steady—You'll be about right if you keep her head straight for the White-Rock, Master Willie"—I was at the helm—"ease her, ease her a bit; more to port, sir, more to port—now steady again—now ship oars—the tide's running in pretty fast, and will carry us in." George's commands, thus given at intervals as we doubled the promontory and made for the Cove, alone broke silence, until, having shipped oars, there was nothing particular for him to do, and then all at once his tongue seemed unloosed. "Poor boy," he said, "it would be a sad day to us all if aught has happened amiss to him, and his parents too off in foreign parts. How cut up he was about his bit ship yesterday, but it matters little if he is safe to-day. I mind now he told me just afore we parted yesterday, that he thought it was quite possible our little ship might have driven ashore here. But I hope he hasn't been rash in trying to climb where it's dangerous even for an active boy like him."

"He told me last night," I said, "that he meant to look all along the shore as far as this. Papa said we were to come here just in case—"

We were getting close into shore now, and Ralph, standing up in front of me, held his oar to push us off from the rocks until we reached our usual place for landing. George sat facing me, so that Ralph was the only one who was able to see well ahead at the moment. There was something in his manner which startled me, as he bent down all at once and simply said, "Grandfather!" George turned round in a moment, and his short ejaculation and smothered "Oh!" confirmed me in a terrible fear they had made some discovery, and almost at the same instant, leaning forward, I could see my cousin lying prostrate on the beach just by the White Rock, at the bottom of a steep part of the cliff, and scarcely a foot from the water's edge.

I felt my knees shaking, as I tried to rise and could not; tried to speak, and the words died on my lips; then, for a moment, buried my face in my hands, and gasped out presently, "He's dead." I thought for a moment that I should die too, the sense of utter, hopeless, unbearable misery seemed so terrible.

## THE DISCOVERY.

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George only answered, "Please the Lord, Master Willie, it may not be so bad as that;" and hastily drawing in the boat to the rocks, he leapt ashore, and made his way, in less time than it takes to relate, to where my cousin was lying. Ralph and I got ashore also, but my knees trembled so that I could not stand, but sunk down upon the rock. Ralph flung the rope to me. "Keep her from drifting, master," he said, "and I'll run and help grandfather."

It was a moment of terrible suspense. Groves knelt at Aleck's side, bent his cheek down to his lips, then listened for the beating of his heart—he might have heard mine at that minute—and then turning towards me he exclaimed, "He's still alive!"

I had courage to move now, and fastening the rope, I came and stood by Groves, as he knelt on the beach beside Aleck. I could scarcely believe it was not death when I looked at the colourless face and closed eyes, and needed all Groves' reassurance to convince me that he had not been mistaken when he said my cousin was still alive.

"Thank God, Master Willie, we came when we did!" he added reverently, and pointing to the waves as they washed up to our feet; "ten minutes more, and the tide will be up over this place where he's lying. We must move him at once—but he's deadly cold. Off with your jacket, Ralph and put it over him, and—oh! see here!" he pointed to the arm which hung down heavily as he gently raised the unconscious form,—"the arm's broken."

The question now was how we were to get him home. By land it would not be more than an hour's climb; but then a *climb* it must be, and this was almost impossible under the circumstances; whilst, on the other hand, with the wind no longer in our favour, it would be a good two hours getting back by water, and there was the anxiety of not being able to let my father know.

Whilst George was anxiously deliberating with himself—for neither of us boys were in a state to offer any suggestions—we looked up, and saw my father rapidly descending the hill-side.

In another moment he stood in the midst of our little group, and had heard how it was with my cousin. "I feared so," he said, "when I saw you all standing together. Thank God, the child is still alive!"

There was no longer any questioning of what was best to be done. My father was always able to decide things in a moment. "It would be too great a risk to carry him without any stretcher. We must take him round in the boat. How's the wind, George?"

"Not favourable, sir; we must trust more to the oars."

"Then you and Ralph must row. Willie, I think I can trust you, but remember a great deal may depend upon your carrying your message correctly. Run home as quickly as you can by the lower wood, it's quite safe that way; tell mamma that Aleck is hurt, and that Rickson must go off for Dr. Wilson in the dog-cart at once; if Dr. Wilson cannot be found, he must bring Mr. Bryant; and James must bring down the carriage to wait for us at the lodge. Don't frighten your mamma; tell her as quietly and gently as you can. If you meet Mr. Glengelly, tell him first, and he will break it to mamma. Do you quite understand?"

"Yes, papa," I replied, thankful to have something given me to do, and yet feeling as if I were in the midst of a terrible waking dream. After my father had taken the precaution of once again

repeating his directions, I sped off up the steep hill-side, by way of the lower wood, towards home, whilst he gently lifted up my cousin and carried him to the boat.

I shall never forget that walk home—*walk* I call it, though, wherever running was possible, I *ran*. The feeling of misery and terror that was upon me, seemed to be mocked by the gay twittering of the birds, and the dancing of the sunbeams through the leaves, and the familiar appearance of the laden blackberry bushes, and copses famous for rich returns in the nutting season. Everything in nature looking so undisturbed and unaffected by what was filling me with grief, appeared to add to my wretchedness. All the way along, I had the vision of my cousin's pale face before my eyes. True, he was not dead; but, child that I was, I had sufficient sense to know that often death followed an accident which was not immediately fatal, and *if* he died it would be almost as though I had murdered him. I can remember trying hard to fancy it was a dreadful dream, and that I should wake up, as I had done on the preceding night, to find that my fears were all unreal; and as every step, bringing me nearer home, made this increasingly impossible to imagine, I changed the subject of my speculations, and took to remembering all the dreadful things I had ever read in history or story-books, of people dying of broken hearts, or living on and never smiling again, and fancying it was going to be the same with me; and I grew quite frightened, and trembled so much that I scarcely knew how to climb up the steep bits of the path.

I was still about a quarter of a mile from the house when I met Mr. Glengelly, who was also on the search for Aleck. It was a wonderful relief to have some one to speak to after the long silence of the past hour, and to be cheered up by his assurance that a broken arm was no very formidable accident after all, and that a little severe pain, and a few weeks invalidism, sounded very alarming, but would in reality pass quickly by.

"Then you think, perhaps Aleck won't die," I faltered, struggling to get breath, for the haste in which I had come had made speaking difficult.

"Die!" echoed my tutor cheerily; "why, Willie, people don't die of a broken arm! I broke my arm when I was a little boy of twelve, and you see I'm alive still." I smiled faintly; it was so much better than anything I had expected to hear. "It's true," added the tutor, "that there may be more than the broken arm, but we must hope for the best. In the meantime, Willie, you have had enough running, you are quite out of breath, and had better come the rest of the way quietly; I will go on and carry out your father's directions."

When I reached home every one seemed in a bustle, and too busy to take any notice of me. My mother indeed spared time to tell me I had been a good brave boy to come home so fast with the message, and that I had better go and sit quietly to rest in the school-room; but she hurried away immediately to finish her preparations, and I found she was getting the spare room next to her own ready for Aleck, instead of the little room next to mine.

I had a lingering hope that Mr. Glengelly might appear in the school-room, but he had gone down with Bennet to the lodge to see if he could be of use when the boat came in, so that I was quite alone, and could only watch from the half-open door the doings of the servants as they passed to and fro, all seeming in a flutter, and as if it lay upon them as a duty to move about, and run hither and thither, without any particular object that I could discover.

After about an hour, the sound of wheels on the drive announced the approach of the carriage. I sprang to my post of observation, and saw Aleck, still deathly pale, and unconscious, carried carefully in by my father and Mr. Glengelly, and my mother on the first landing of the stairs, looking terribly anxious but perfectly composed, beckoning them up, as she said to my father,—

"Everything is ready, dear, in the room next to ours."

Then they all went up-stairs, and I saw nothing more until, a few moments later, Mr. Glengelly looked in and told me I was to go to dinner by myself, as he was going to drive to Elmworth at once, and my parents could not come down-stairs.

It seemed strange and forlorn to go into our large dining-room, and sit at the table all by myself, whilst James stood behind me and changed my plate, and handed me the dishes all in their proper order, as if I had been grown up. I was hungry, or rather, perhaps, stood in need of food, after the morning's exertions, but I felt quite surprised at my own utter indifference as to *what* I had to eat, when I had the opportunity of an entirely free selection. I took my one help of tart, and a single peach, without the shadow of a desire such as is common to children, and which I should in happier times unquestionably have shared, to improve the occasion by a little extra allowance.

I had scarcely finished when my mother came in for two or three minutes.

"Mamma," I said, running eagerly to her, "do tell me, will Aleck die?"

"My darling," she answered, "we cannot say how much he is hurt until the doctor comes;" and she stooped down to kiss away the tears that came to my eyes when I noticed the sad, quiet voice with which she spoke, so unlike Mr. Glengelly's cheerful, re-assuring manner. "You must pray to God, my child, that if it be His will he may recover, and try to cheer up, because there is still hope the injury may not prove very serious; we must hope for the best. I am going to bring papa up a glass of wine and a biscuit; will you carry up the plate for me?"

Just as we were going up-stairs, she added, to comfort me,—

"Willie, my child, how thankful I feel that you had nothing to do with the loss of the ship."

At which, observation—from her point of view, consolatory; from mine, like a dagger-thrust—I became so convulsed with sobs, that my mother slipped into the room where Aleck was, laid down the plate and the wine-glass, and returning again, took me down to the school-room, and simply devoted herself for some minutes to soothing me back into composure. She rose to go, but I clung to her dress; "Mamma, mamma," I entreated, "don't leave me, please don't leave me."

"I *must* leave you, Willie," she answered, "and you must try to bear up bravely for my sake, and for Aleck's. You will do what you can to help in this sad time of trouble, and not add to my distress by giving way like this. You are over-tired, I think, and had better take a book, and stay here for the present, and lie down on the sofa and rest. Afterwards, if you like, you can go in the garden."

I preferred remaining in the school-room; I could see the hall-door, and up the first flight of stairs, and could hear the opening and shutting of doors up-stairs, and occasional remarks from passers through the hall, so that I felt less lonely than I knew I should feel in the garden. Frisk came and sat with his fore-paws on my lap—he seemed aware that something had gone wrong—and wagged his tail, not merrily, but slowly and mournfully, as if to express, after his fashion, how truly he sympathized in our distress.

At last, once again there was the sound of wheels; it was the dog-cart this time, and Frisk threw back his head, pricked up his ears, and, with a quick bark, darted off to sanction the arrival of the doctor with his presence.

My father, too, was at the hall-door in an instant.

"I am thankful to see you," he said, as the doctor sprung from the dog-cart; "you have heard the circumstances?"

"I have," answered Dr. Wilson, following my father quickly up-stairs. "Is he still unconscious?"

The answer was lost to me; but all at once, as I thought of Dr. Wilson, and how much depended upon his visit, the recollection of my mother's words came back to me, "We must pray God, Willie, if it be His will Aleck may get better;" and with a sudden impulse I jumped up, shut the door, and kneeling down, with my head pressed upon my hands, I prayed with a sort of intensity I had never known before: "O Lord, make Aleck well, do make Aleck well, don't let him die,"—repeating the words over and over again, and getting up with some dim sense of comfort in my mind, as I thought that God had the power as much now as when in our human nature He walked upon this world, to heal all that were ill; and had He not said, "Ask, and you shall receive?"

Why was it that the verse which I had repeated that morning to my mother, after breakfast, came back so often to my mind? "*If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me.*" Generally my mother explained my daily text, but this morning, owing to the anxiety about Aleck's disappearance, there had not been the usual time, and she had simply heard the verse, and sent me off, as before-mentioned, to the school-room. Now I took to explaining it for myself. What business had I to pray with that iniquity hidden in my heart, of which no one knew but God? How could I get forgiven? what was I to do?

Conscience took courage and put in the suggestion, "Confess boldly to your parents the sin that is lying so heavily upon you." But then the thought that, if Aleck never got better, they would think me his murderer, took possession of me, and I took pains to convince myself, against my own reason, that after all, I had not actually been guilty of falsehood, since the real manner in which the ship had been lost was actually guessed by my father; that it would do no good if I were to give them the pain of knowing that I had allowed it to happen, having it in my power to prevent it; that, after all, it would be enough to confess to God and get forgiven.

But the reasoning, though for a time it silenced the promptings of conscience, did not give me peace of mind; and a sense that I could not pray—that, at least, my prayers would do no good—took from me the only comfort that was worth thinking of.

I was so taken up with these reflections, that I never heard steps upon the stairs, and started with an exclamation almost of fright when the door opened rather quickly, and my father and Dr. Wilson came in.

"Why, Willie, there's nothing to be frightened at," exclaimed my father. "Here's Dr. Wilson come to cheer us up about Aleck, who is to get quite well by-and-by, we hope."

"Yes, yes, little man," said Dr. Wilson, kindly chucking me under the chin, after a fashion which I have noticed prevails amongst grown-up tall people who are amiably disposed towards children; "we shall soon hope to bring him round again. With all your monkey-like ways of climbing about the rocks, my only wonder is I've not had you for a patient long ago!"

Something seemed to strike him in the face he was holding up by the chin, and releasing me from a quick glance of inspection, he asked presently whether I had seen Aleck, and listened to the account I had to give of how Ralph had first noticed him lying at the foot of the rock.

Then he and my father stepped out by the window, and walked up and down on the lawn; and I heard Dr. Wilson say to my father, "Any one can see the boy has had a shock; take care he does not get frightened."

From the fragments of conversation which reached me,—sitting as I did in the open window, whilst they passed by, walking up and down on the lawn outside,—I gathered that they were discussing the possibility of communication with Uncle and Aunt Gordon; and as they came in again through the school-room, my father said, "You are sure that the crisis will be over by that time?"

"Quite sure. There is nothing for it now but perfect quiet, the administration of the medicines and cordials I have prescribed, when possible, and close watch of all the symptoms. I can assure you I am not without hope. You may look for me again by ten o'clock."

And so saying, Dr. Wilson drove rapidly off, and my father went back again to Aleck's room. I think it must have been his planning, that nurse soon afterwards came down to the school-room and bestowed her company upon me for quite a long time, entertaining me at first, or meaning to entertain me, by a wearisome narration about a little boy who lived nowhere in particular a long time ago; but she wakened up all my interest when at last, unable to keep off the subject as she had intended, she gave me a detailed account of my cousin having been put into the bed in the spare room; and how he had lain so still, she could scarcely believe her senses he was not dead; and how, when Dr. Wilson set his arm, the pain of the operation seemed to waken him up for a moment from the stupor, but he had gone back again almost immediately. "The doctor said," she added, "that it was the injury to the head that was of the greatest consequence—the arm was nothing to signify, a mere simple fracture; as if a broken arm were a mere nothing. I should like to know whether, *if his own* were broken, he would call it a simple fracture, and say it didn't signify!" And nurse looked righteously indignant, and as if she would be rather glad than otherwise for Dr. Wilson to meet with an accident, and learn, by personal experience, the true measure of insignificance or importance attaching to a broken limb. Remembering, however, at this point, the inconvenience which might result to ourselves from such a catastrophe, she retreated from the position, and took to speculating what the doctor's views were likely to be with reference to his night accommodation; whether he would go "between sheets," or merely lie down on the sofa, and what motives might be likely to influence him towards either decision; reasoning it all out to me as if I had been grown-up.

In fact, one of the peculiar sensations which are stamped upon every recollection of that long sad day, was that of being treated as though I were a "person," and not a child, by almost every member of the community; a sensation bringing with it a dim sense of glory—that might have been—but which my guilty position kept me back from enjoying.

Both my parents came down to a sort of dinner-tea, which we had together at about seven o'clock, and my mother stayed a little while with me afterwards, and then sent me off, rather earlier than usual, to bed, upon the plea of my being weary with the long, anxious day.

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# CHAPTER IX.

## SORROWFUL DAYS.

To bed; but not to my usual peaceful sleep; for all the night through one terrible dream seemed to succeed the other, until, in the act of landing at the White-Rock Cove, and calling for help, I woke at last to find myself standing somewhere in the dark, I could not at first make out where, though it turned out to be in Aleck's room, to which I had made my way in my sleep.

I began to cry with fright, and my father came running up to see what was the matter. He was quite dressed, and brought a candle with him, and looked so natural and real that he chased away all spectral frights. After he had put me back to bed, and sat with me a little, I fell into a quieter sleep than I had had before; and slept on, indeed, quite late, for nobody called me the next morning, and I did not come down until prayers were over, and breakfast just about to commence.

Only my father and Dr. Wilson were in the room. My father looked very anxious; but Dr. Wilson spoke to me cheerily enough.

"So this is the young gentleman," he said, drawing me towards him, "that is not content to walk by day, but must needs walk by night also!" and he looked straight at me, as if he could read me through and through; whilst I, knowing the dreadful story hidden in my heart, felt quite alarmed lest he might read *that* there; and I could feel the beatings of my heart, as if a steam-engine were at work, as I tried not to meet the glance of those keen, piercing eyes.

He released me after a moment, and presently afterwards said to my father,—

"Close your lesson-books for a while; the boat and the saddle will be the best lesson-books, or you may have more trouble than you think of."

I felt sure what he said had something to do with me, and wondered what he meant,—finding the explanation in Mr. Glengelly's strange indisposition to give me anything but a drawing-lesson that morning, and taking me off for a long ride before dinner, contrary to all established customs.

Aleck grew no better all through the day, and the next night he was worse.

On Saturday morning, two other doctors came to consult with Dr. Wilson; and I could read in the grave faces around me that the worst was apprehended. But I saw scarcely anything of my father or mother, or even nurse, so that all tidings from the sick-room came through remote channels—servants who had taken something up to the room, or Mr. Glengelly, who had seen one of the doctors for a moment, and whom I suspected of keeping back the full gravity of the verdict.

If I could only have seen my father or mother alone quietly, without their being in a hurry, I thought I should have told them everything; but no opportunity presented itself, and another weary day wore by without any unburdening of my conscience, or relief to my gloomy anticipations.

Sunday morning! Such a happy day generally! for my parents contrived to make it really, and not nominally, the best of all the seven; but now, how dreary was the awakening to a Sunday which I expected to be only the melancholy repetition of the preceding days, if not far sadder!

The weather had turned chilly, and the servants, to make things look a little brighter, made this the excuse for a fire in the dining-room, by which I crouched down on the rug, after breakfast, with a Sunday story-book in my hand, wondering whether I should go to church, or what would happen in a state of things so different from what was usual; and why it was I was told I need not prepare my repetition lesson from the Bible, according to custom. By-and-by my father came in and told me to get ready to go with him to church; he thought he might safely leave Aleck for a little while, and would like to have me walk with him.

We had not far to go, for the church stood but a quarter of a mile from our house, and there was a direct pathway to it through the woods. I thought perhaps I should muster courage to open my heart to my father as we went along. But first we met one person and then another, anxious to know the last report from the sick-room, so that we had no time alone, and I had to reserve my confession until we should come home after church. Aleck was to be prayed for in church, my father told me; and he added that I was to think of Uncle and Aunt Gordon too, in the Litany, for it would be a sore trouble to them to have been away from their only child in such a time as this. And then he spoke to me of childish fears about death, and said that, for those who were safe in Jesus, death was a friend, and not an enemy; and that I must pray that, if it pleased God Aleck should never get well, he might go to the beautiful home prepared for all the children of God: and the firm grasp of my father's hand, and his clear, unhesitating voice, conveyed to my timorous, troubled heart, a sort of belief in a calm, sheltered haven, that might succeed in time to the outside tossings on stormy waters, and I felt comforted, though I scarcely knew how.

Mr. Morton, our clergyman, was away for a month's holidays, and it was a stranger who performed the service. When I heard the prayers of the congregation requested for "Alexander Ringwall Gordon, who was dangerously ill," it seemed almost more than I could bear, the long formal enunciation of his name sounding so terribly like a death-warrant.

If ever I tried to *pray* the Church prayers, and not merely say them, it was that morning; and it seemed to me quite wonderful how much of them agreed with my own feelings, how many things there were in the service that were exactly what I wanted. Hitherto the singing had appeared the only attractive portion of divine worship; but now that, for the first time in my life, I knew what it was to have a really sin-burdened conscience, the sweetest music seemed as nothing in comparison with the assurance that a broken and contrite spirit would not be despised of God, or to the comfort of ranking myself unreservedly amongst the miserable sinners in the Litany—concerning whom I had hitherto only wondered, Were they so miserable after all?—and pleading alike with voice and heart for God's mercy, of which I felt myself to stand so sorely in need.

The Commandments were being read when the little door leading into our large family-pew was opened, and Rickson softly came in and whispered to my father, who in his turn leant over and whispered to me. A message had come from the house, he said, and he must go back at once; he knew I could be trusted to stay by myself and walk home afterwards. He and Rickson quietly slipped out, and I was left sole tenant of the large square pew, with its high partition, and ponderous chairs, and fire-place, and table, just like a small room, as is the custom in old-fashioned churches.

Very lonely indeed I felt, as I stood up by myself, and tried to join in the hymn, and wished that I were not so small or the pew not so lofty; it seemed so strange to be joining in singing with people of whom no single individual could be seen—it had never struck me before, with my own dear parents always at my side. Presently the clerk appeared opening the door of the pulpit—that at all events I could see—to the strange clergyman, who seemed to me to look with a searching glance of inquiry straight down into my solitary domain, as if he meant to call me to account for being there all alone.

Having nobody to look at as an example, I sat myself timidly upon a corner of one of the chairs after the hymn was over, and then, suddenly remembering I had made a mistake, knelt down with the colour mounting to the very roots of my hair, and a terrible sense of the congregation all looking at me and taking notes of my behaviour.

We smile at our childish embarrassments as we look back upon them, but they are very serious and real troubles whilst they last.

When I rose from my knees, I was far too shy to place myself comfortably, but sat, as before, upon a little corner of a chair, and hoped the congregation wouldn't take any notice, whilst mentally I prepared myself for unrestrained meditation on the all-engrossing subject of my

thoughts, in place of the many speculations with which I was wont to beguile sermon-time in general.

For here I must pause to observe that Mr. Morton's sermons were usually entirely beyond my childish understanding, and attention to them on my part was practically in vain; so that after learning the text by heart, which I was always expected to repeat perfectly afterwards, I used to spend a great part of the time remaining to me in a minute survey of all objects falling within the limited range of my observation, including especially the monumental tablets, of which there were many on the church walls; those on the right being for the most part to the memory of the Grants of Braycombe; those on the left to the successive rectors of Braycombe parish, who had lived and died after what seemed to me boundless periods of ministry amongst their attached flock.

Two of these tablets in particular had supplied much food for consideration in my early days.—I used to look back upon early days even at ten years old with a sort of affectionate patronage.—These tablets exactly corresponded with each other in size and position, and were both beyond the range of complete legibility, only words in capitals coming out distinctly. But these very words in capitals were the cause of my anxious meditations. For on the one hand I read the name of the "Rev. Joseph Brocklehurst, Rector," with, a line or two further down, "Mary, wife of the *above*;" whilst on the other, which was to the memory of my grandfather, my own name at full length, "William Preston Grant," was underneath the only other word I could distinguish, and that word was "*Below*." Many a Sunday did I ruminate upon the unpleasant contrast which, to my mind, was suggested by the two prepositions between the present condition of the Rev. Joseph Brocklehurst and that of my grandfather; and it was not without some hesitation that I revealed my perplexity to my father at last, by the abrupt inquiry, one day on our way home from church, whether my grandfather had been a *very* wicked man. Greatly surprised were both my parents at this unlooked-for question, and I believe not a little amused at the train of reasoning which had led me to it; but they took an early opportunity of taking me into the church, not on a Sunday, and permitting me to go near to the tablets, pointing out the connecting words which were not legible, and which supplied a full explanation of all that I wanted to know, and showing me that the *below* referred to the position of the family vault under the church, and the *above* to the relative position of the Rev. J. Brocklehurst's name to that of his wife.

Often after that explanation I thought, as I looked at the tablets, of the words my father said to me at the time: "Willie, there are many things in God's dealings with his children that are hard to understand *here*; by-and-by, when we see things nearer, in the light of eternity, we shall find out that our difficulty has just been because here we see in part—as you did the inscriptions—but *then* we shall see face to face, and know even as we are known."

There was another monumental tablet about which I thought a great deal, which preached to me a silent sermon as often as I looked at it. Under the name and date of birth and death of the person it commemorated were the words, "*Prepare to meet thy God.*" I spent a long time looking for them in my Bible, and thought a great deal about the verse when I had found it; wondering whether the young midshipman, son of one of the rectors, upon whose monument it had been engraved, had thought about them too, or whether it was a sort of warning because he had *not* prepared. It was upon this latter train of thought, with reflections concerning Aleck and myself woven into it—*I* clearly not prepared, and wondering whether Aleck was prepared—that I found myself starting as I settled shyly upon my little corner of the chair, and looked timidly for my Bible in order to find the text.

What was my surprise when Psalm lxvi. 18 was given out, and the well-known words, so often repeated to myself, were repeated slowly and impressively by the stranger clergyman from the pulpit—"If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me."

It seemed to me so wonderful and so strange that he should have fixed upon the very passage that I had thought of so often within the previous two days, that at first I almost fancied I was dreaming. But I felt still more surprised when, after anxiously attending to what was said for a few minutes, I found the sermon was as easy to understand as my mother's conversation after a Bible reading: all inattention was gone, and for the first time in my life I was listening with interest deep and anxious, whilst the clergyman, in simple language, explained the text so clearly that not one in the church need have gone away uninstructed.

*The* great question that I wanted to hear answered was, Whether, in my circumstances, with an unconfessed sin lying heavily on my heart, it was of any use for me to pray to God for Aleck?—what was the exact meaning of *regarding iniquity* in my heart?

The very first words of the sermon landed us in the midst of the question. "Unforgiven sin," said the clergyman, "is a barrier between our souls and our God." And presently afterwards he referred us to Isaiah lix. 2: "Your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you that he will not hear;" and to a long passage in the 1st chapter of Isaiah, finishing with the words, "When ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood." Then he spoke to the congregation of the many Sundays during which they had come together to worship, whilst in the case of many of them their lives were unsanctified, their religion for one day in seven only, not for the whole week;—they loved their sins and would not give them up on any account, hoping to square their account with God by an outward attendance on Divine worship. It was all put in very simple language; and we were told to look back into one week of our lives to find out whether we were *fighting against* sin as an enemy, or *cherishing* sin as a friend: and if living in sin, as servants of Satan, we had the solemn truth to lay home to our

consciences that our prayers never reached heaven; the promise, true for the children of God, that he would hear and answer prayer, was not true for those who were the servants or slaves of sin.

Then there was an appeal to those who felt conscious of sin and wished for forgiveness, and I felt I belonged to that class, and listened with increasing eagerness. Was it for them to say, "I must then reform my ways and make myself better before I can go to Christ for pardon?" Oh, no! The prayer of the publican, "God be merciful to me a sinner," was heard and answered. Christ's invitation was addressed to the weary and *heavy laden*, "Come unto *Me*." He died to take our punishment instead of us; and those who, instead of cherishing sin, felt it a burden too heavy for them to bear, were to bring it and lay it down at the foot of the cross, and find rest to their souls.

There followed a few words about sins *forgiven* being sins *forsaken*. Any person who had been in the habit of dishonest dealing would adopt habits of rectitude, and would make restitution when possible. Those who had uttered falsehoods would no longer persist in untruthfulness, but would speak the whole truth, even if to their own cost. And all this would be because Christ *had* forgiven them, and not in order to *obtain forgiveness*. I do not remember the rest of the sermon, but just at the end there was a beautiful piece about the happiness of finding the great barrier gone:—Just as when a little child, conscious of some wrong action, feels ashamed to meet the eyes of its loving parents, and is conscious of a separation that casts a dark shadow over all the usual home happiness, at last, with repenting heart and quivering voice, whispers in the loving ears of father or mother the secret trouble that lies heavily upon the sin-burdened conscience, and in the tender embrace of forgiveness finds pardon and peace: so with the sinner who has found peace at the foot of the cross; the barrier of separation is no more; the way into the holiest is made manifest by the blood of the Atonement; and the promise is written in letters of gold, "*If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will and it shall be done unto you.*"

Before I left the church, and took my solitary walk home through the wood, I had made up my mind to confess all to my parents at the very earliest opportunity; and with this determination there was already a sense of relief.

But the opportunity did not occur so soon as I had expected; for I found a solitary dinner awaiting me, and the whole of that long afternoon, except for the servants, who brought a message once or twice from the sick-room to the effect that my parents dared not leave even for a minute, I was quite alone, either sitting on the hearth-rug by the fire, or standing at the door listening for any footstep on the passage up-stairs, or even the opening or shutting of doors.

At last, at about five o'clock, I heard my father coming softly down-stairs, and sprang to meet him. "Papa, papa, tell me, is Aleck better?"

"I fear not, my child," answered my father gently. "I think, Willie, that God is going to take him to Himself. But he is conscious just now, and wants to see you. He has asked that he may wish you good-bye. You must be very quiet indeed, and speak very gently."

I felt the tears coming hot and fast, and there was a terrible choking in my throat; but it was impossible to hold out one moment longer, and, struggling through my sobs, I gasped out, "Oh, papa, I have killed him!—it's all my fault!—oh! what shall I do?" and I clung, terror-stricken, to the hand which he had placed on my shoulder.

My father sat down, and tried to soothe me, putting his arm around me, and saying kind, comforting words, evidently at a loss to understand the purport of my broken utterances, whilst I tried, and tried in vain, to control my sobs, and regain sufficient composure to explain.

At last he said firmly,—

"This agitation would do Aleck grievous harm; I must not take you to him until you are quite calm, Willie, and yet the moments are precious: keep what you have to say until another time, and try to stop crying; I shall have to go up-stairs without you, unless you can be ready soon."

Then he gave me a glass of water, and still telling me not to speak, waited until I had mastered my emotion and was tolerably calm, then led me by the hand up to Aleck's room.

"Wish me good-bye," I said over and over to myself. Such a long good-bye, how could I bear it!

There was no one else in the room at the moment but my mother, who sat at the foot of the bed with something in her hand for Aleck. It was not until I had advanced nearly to the bed that, with tear-blinded eyes, I could distinguish my cousin's face. It was so deadly pale that I started at the sight; but though pale and wan he was perfectly conscious, and as I drew near he whispered softly,—

"I'm so glad you've come, Willie—I wanted to see you, and wish you good-bye." There was a pause, and then more faintly he continued,—"I want to be quite sure you've forgiven me, Willie;—Jesus has; I've asked him."

I bent forward and kissed the white face that lay so quiet and still, struggling to keep down my sobs, though I felt as if my heart would break, and longing to be able to say but one word, that Aleck might know it was I who asked his forgiveness, but longing in vain.

"You forgive me quite, Willie," murmured Aleck again.

**WILLIE AT ALECK'S BED SIDE.**

But at the first attempt to speak, I broke down utterly, with such a burst of pent-up grief, that to control it was impossible, and I was hurried quickly out of the room, lest my emotion should be injurious to Aleck; my mother herself almost carrying me down-stairs, and sorely divided between the desire to stay and comfort me, and at the same time to remain at her post up-stairs with my cousin.

For a few minutes, however, she remained with her arm around me, and my head resting on her shoulder; and when, by degrees, I grew a little more calm, though it cost a fearful effort, I contrived to sob out my confession, and let her know how wicked I had been, and also how miserable. I could see it was a terrible shock to her when she grasped my meaning, and she did not attempt to disguise the pain it cost her. For the first time in my life I saw my mother shed tears. But the knowledge of my guilt seemed to add to her pity for me.

"My poor little Willie," she said; "you have indeed had a terrible load upon your heart; your punishment has come more quickly upon you and more heavily than sometimes happens: but remember there is One whose blood cleanses from all sin—the heavenly Father's ear is open to you, Willie, through Jesus, and you must get forgiveness where those who really seek it are never turned away."

"I wanted to tell Aleck, mamma, too; but I couldn't."

"There is no need to trouble Aleck about that now," said my mother sorrowfully: "the ship seems a little thing to him now, Willie; his thoughts are on the great things of eternity. It might agitate him, and it would not make him happier to know about it; but if you like I will tell him that you love him dearly, and are very sorry for everything you have ever done that may not have been kind."

Even this message, vague as it was, seemed better than none, and I thankfully endorsed it.

"But oh, mamma," I added, "do tell me that you think it just possible he may get well again. I think it will kill me if he does not."

"He is in God's hands, Willie," answered my mother, "and with God all things are possible; but I fear there is little hope of his getting any better. Dr. Wilson does not say there is *no* hope, but the other doctors quite gave him up. I do not hide it from you, my child, because it is easier to know the worst than to be in doubt and suspense; and God will help you—help us all—to bear it."

There were tears in my mother's eyes and a tremble in her voice as she said this, and as it rushed upon me all at once how greatly it must add to her trouble to know that I was the cause of it, my own grief seemed rekindled. She gently unclasped my hands, which were tightly locked around her.

"I must leave you now, my poor child," she said; "I cannot stay a minute longer away from Aleck;" and stooping down, she kissed me in spite of my wickedness, and went away up-stairs; whilst I, throwing myself upon the sofa, buried my head in my hands, and wept until, from sheer exhaustion, I seemed to grow quiet at last, whilst the day-light faded away, and the faint flickering of the fire-light produced mysterious shadows on the ceiling, and made the things in

the room assume to my fevered imagination weird and fanciful shapes.

But there was a species of dim comfort in watching the fire; and a comfort, too, in spite of my misery, in the recollection that I had confessed my sin—that it was no longer a dread secret in my own sole keeping, but was shared by the strong, tender hearts, of my parents: and it seemed to come soothingly to my mind that now the barrier of sin might be taken away, and my heart rose once again in earnest prayer to God for forgiveness. Then I began to think about the great things of eternity my mother had spoken of; and of the meeting-time for those who were parted on earth, of Aleck, and of Old George, and his son—Ralph's father; and of what Groves said about the open book; and then came the recollection of the sea-stained little Testament, and the quaint verse at its beginning, and the young sailor's profession of faith, "Father, He died for me, I must live for Him." My mind travelled from one thought to another, whilst ever and anon a struggling sob for breath seemed like the subsiding of a tempest. Shaping themselves into more or less definite plans, came thoughts, too, of the future before me in this world:—I should never be quite happy any more, I thought; but I would try to keep on, like Ralph's father, living for Christ in some way, and grow up to be very good—perhaps I should be a missionary—I was not quite sure on the whole what sphere of life would be the most trying or praiseworthy—and then at last Aleck and I would meet in heaven. This I believe to have been the last point of conscious reflection, for more and more vague and desultory became my thoughts afterwards. Nature would have her revenge for all the restlessness and anxiety of the past few days. I fell into a profound sleep.

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# CHAPTER X.

## SUNDAY EVENING.

Where I was, why I was where I was, and what time of the day or night it might happen to be—were questions which presented themselves to my mind in hazy succession, as, roused from my slumbers by the hum of voices, I woke slowly to the consciousness that, though I had been asleep, I was not in bed. It was only by a very gradual process of recollection that the past came back upon me almost like a fresh story, and I was at least a minute rubbing my eyes, and collecting my thoughts, before I took in all the familiar objects in the room, from the sofa on which I found myself reposing, to the fire-place at which, with their backs turned to me, my father and Dr. Wilson were in close conversation. My father's voice was low and serious, and at the moment when, having finished the process of awakening, I was going to speak, his words came slowly and distinctly to my ears, and sank down into my heart:—

"The thought of his parents' grief on hearing of the death—such a death, too!—of their only child, has been almost more than I could bear."

Aleck was dead!—there was no hope left! I thought; and with a piteous exclamation of grief, I turned round and hid my face in my hands, leaning up against the sofa.

In another moment my father was at my side. I felt his arm encircling me as he drew me towards him, and bending down, whispered softly,—

"It is no time for grief now, Willie; I was speaking of what *might* have been; let us give God thanks, for the danger is over—Aleck is spared to us."

I slowly drew back my hands from my face. The relief was so great I could scarcely believe in it; and I must have appeared—as I certainly felt—utterly bewildered, whilst I tried to find words, and only at last succeeded in repeating my father's mechanically:

"The danger is over—Aleck is spared to us."

"To be sure he is," said Dr. Wilson, in his cheeriest tones. He had got up from his chair, and was standing with his back to the fire looking at us. "Yes, he'll be quite well again by-and-by; and all the more prudent, we'll hope, for the trouble he's been putting us in during these last few days. He's had a lesson that ought to last for some time to come; but boys never learn their lessons, do what one will to make them."

There was a moment's pause after this discouraging general statement with reference to boys; and then the doctor added, as if thinking to himself, in quite a different tone:

"Poor boy! poor boy! it's been a very near thing. By the help of God, we've brought him through. May it be a life worth the saving—a life given back to God!"

"Amen!" ejaculated my father, earnestly; and then, at his suggestion, we knelt together, and, in a few heartfelt words, he offered thanks to the heavenly Father for his goodness to us, and turned kind Dr. Wilson's aspiration into a prayer, that the life given back to my cousin might be by him given back to God.

I knew, as I knelt there by my father's side, for the first time in my life, the feeling of a deep and speechless thankfulness, for which all words would be too poor.

It was very late—past ten o'clock—but I was not allowed to go up to bed at once. Supper was ready, my father said, and I should come into the dining-room, and have it with him and Dr.

Wilson. Accordingly, in spite of all remonstrances of nurse, who put in her appearance, and thought fit to reflect upon the utter impropriety of such late hours, I went to supper; and felt, moreover, greatly refreshed and strengthened by it, sitting there close by my father's side, and rejoicing every moment of the time in the feeling as of a great deliverance.

So it came to pass that my second night did not begin until eleven o'clock.

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# CHAPTER XI.

## THE WHITE-ROCK COVE AGAIN.

Aleck was a long time getting well. He had to be nursed and taken care of all through that winter, only gradually making little steps towards recovery.

It was quite a festival when he was first carried down-stairs; and then again when he was taken out in the carriage for a drive, lying at full length upon a sort of couch which we erected for him, and to which he declared, in my anxiety to make him comfortable, I had contributed all the sofa cushions in the house.

The subject of the lost ship was forbidden for a long while; and I grew to thinking of it as a sort of formidable undertaking, though one upon which I was firmly bent—the confession to Aleck himself of my guilt in the matter.

But when at last I was permitted to approach the subject, I could only feel surprised that I had been for so long afraid of it. Aleck received my confession so quietly, instead of getting angry, and spoke so kindly and gently, that I could scarcely believe it was the same Aleck whose look of fiery indignation on that eventful morning of the 20th of September had so startled me.

In one way, indeed, he was *not* the same; for the accident, and illness consequent on it, seemed in some peculiar manner to have rendered him far more lovable and thoughtful than he had been formerly; a trifle graver, perhaps—at least I thought so, until, when he grew quite strong again, his merry laugh would ring out as cheerily as ever—and more serious in his way of looking at things, but not less happy. That I was sure of; for all through the long weeks of confinement there was not a brighter place in the house than the place at the side of his couch—he was so uniformly cheerful, and seemed so thoroughly to enjoy every little plan that we were able to form for his amusement.

I told him I was quite surprised that he received my confession so gently; it would have been so natural if he had got angry. I remember his answer very well:—

"Why, you see, Willie, it seems quite a little thing to me now. I don't think I can exactly put what I mean into words; but you know when I thought I was dying, and eternity seemed quite near, everything else seemed so little—only, the wrong words I had used to you seemed much worse than I had thought they could. Old George's words came back to me so often, about the loss of the ship being a very little thing; whilst wrong words and angry feelings would appear more terrible than we ever fancied possible. I was dreadfully frightened until I felt quite sure I was forgiven. You can't think how glad I was when I got your message."

"I wanted to tell you," I said, "when I came into your room that time; but I couldn't speak, though I nearly choked in trying to stop crying."

"Well since then," resumed Aleck, "the feeling doesn't seem to have gone off. I don't mean I don't care for things, because you know I like everything very much—our games, and the books, and madrepores; but I feel as if before my accident God and heaven and the Bible were all being put by, and got ready, for the time when one was old and grown up, and I've felt so different since then. It was when I felt so frightened at the thought of what a naughty boy I was, and of all the bad things I had done, and began to tell Jesus about it—in my heart, you know, for I couldn't speak—and remembered he was so good and kind he never turned any one away, and so felt sure he had heard me, that I began to think so differently."

At this point of Aleck's narration I broke in impetuously with—

"Oh, Aleck! for *you* to be feeling like that—you, who had only felt angry—what would you have done if you had been me?" And then I proceeded, with feelings of unconcealed horror, to tell him of my misery during the few days succeeding the loss of the boat; the terrible walk home that morning; the lonely terrors of the nights; and my feelings at church with that verse always sounding in my ears, "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me."

Before I had finished my story Aleck had got hold of one of my hands, and was stroking it as if he had been a girl. "You see," I said, "I was feeling rather like you, only I couldn't know I was forgiven, with that dreadful sin that no one knew of."

"We had both done wrong," Aleck replied; "it doesn't much signify which of us was worst. Willie, do you know I want us always to do something together that we haven't done before."

"What is it?" I inquired.

"I should like us to read a little bit of the Bible together every day, quite for our own selves; not like a lesson, you know, nor even having auntie to explain it to us, but just for our own selves, like when I have one of papa's or mamma's letters to read. I think it would help us to remember the really great things better, like auntie's text in my room."

I need scarcely say that the habit—afterwards continued, whenever practicable, through our school-life—was at once begun. In fact, Aleck's merest wish was a law to me; for all through the winter months every opportunity of rendering him any service was hailed with delight. I could never forget that his weakness and suffering were the result of my wicked behaviour, and could only comfort myself by doing all that in me lay to make his confinement as little wearisome as possible. Knowing his active, restless nature, I could fully appreciate what the trial must be, even with every alleviation, and often wondered he was able to bear it so cheerfully.

But when I ventured to express to my cousin these speculations of mine, he would laugh them off merrily.

"Why, Willie, how can I help being thankful and happy? Not to speak of uncle and aunt, who seem to be doing something for me every hour of the day; nor of old George, who toils up every morning to see me, though he used to tell me that it made his old bones ache—a fact he will never allow now; nor of Frisk, who sits upon my feet for hours, on purpose to keep them warm; I should like to know how I could help being cheerful, with your own dear old self giving up the greater part of your play-time to chess, or carpentry, or madrepores, and spending every penny of your pocket-money—No; it's of no use your stopping me to deny it. I've counted up, and you've spent every penny of your pocket-money—just as I was saying—in buying books, or tools, or things for me; waiting upon me, too, as if I were a prince and you my slave. Why, I'm perfectly afraid of admiring anything you have, lest I should find it done up in a parcel, and sent to me, like the illustrated copy of 'Robinson Crusoe' the other day!"

In this sort of grateful spirit, making much of all my little trifling acts of kindness, Aleck scarcely allowed us to feel that he was under-going any deprivation during the months that he lay on the sofa.

Once only I remember noticing a little cloud, that vanished again almost as soon as it appeared. One morning, after lessons were over, I came running into the study with my Latin exercise.

"Papa, Mr. Glengelly was so pleased with my exercise, he has sent me in to show it to you."

My father looked over it, reading little bits aloud, and finding with surprise that, difficult though it was, there were no mistakes. From my father's table I flew to the sofa on which Aleck was lying, with Frisk at his feet as usual, the open copy-book in my hand. But in an instant I could see there was some trouble in my cousin's face.

"Aleck, dear Aleck," I whispered anxiously, "what is it? Have I done anything?"

"No—nothing at all," replied my cousin with a great effort, and hastily brushing away his tears. "Let me have a look at it too. I'm ashamed of myself, Willie. I believe I was making myself unhappy at thinking that I shall just have gone back as much as you've gone forward. I didn't know I cared so much for being first in my lessons."

After that I avoided ever talking of my lessons when Aleck was in the room; but he noticed this, and insisted on introducing the subject, speaking often to Mr. Glengelly about my progress, and looking over my exercises from time to time, whilst he would playfully remark that "we should be about equal when he was allowed to begin lessons again, and better companions than ever before."

Sometimes he wondered at my getting on so much faster than formerly, not knowing the spirit of resolve and determination that had grown out of all the sad time of trouble, when I had found out for the first time what a poor sinful child I was, and had learned to seek and find for myself the sure Refuge and Strength—not for times of trouble only, but for the whole of life's journey.

From the circumstance of my play-time being in great part spent with my cousin, at least such part of it as was not taken up in rides or drives with my parents, it came to pass that my visits to the Cove were far less frequent than they had been at any previous time. But though old George growled and grumbled at seeing so little of me, he always encouraged me not to desert my cousin.

Now and then, however, I found my way down the Zig-zag to the lodge, and it was upon one of these occasions that I unburdened my mind to my old friend of a desire, which grew and strengthened upon me, in some way to provide for Aleck a boat which should be quite equal to the one he had lost. I knew it was worth a great deal more than I should be able to save in pocket-money, and a vague idea of the possibility of bartering some of my possessions had been dismissed as impracticable.

To part with the "Fair Alice" without old George's sanction would not be right, but if he would make no objection, it seemed to me that this would be on the whole the easiest mode of reparation, and I took him into consultation on the subject accordingly.

"I know it's your present to me, George," I said, feeling sadly alive to the delicacy of the request; "but if you'll give me leave, I think it's the only thing I have that would do to give Aleck. I can't think of any other way. I know it took you a tremendous time to make, and I care for it more than

for anything. But I would rather give it to Aleck."

Old George chuckled rather provokingly, and seemed to be taken up with some abstruse calculation. "Well, I won't be against it, Master Aleck," he said, "unless—no—I'm not sure—" (the old man seemed to grow quite composed in his uncertainty), "I think—I may show you." And so saying he led the way into the work-shop.

I started with surprise—another little schooner-yacht was in course of construction, precisely similar to the one that had been lost.

"O George, how kind!"

"No; it's not a bit kind," responded George, "for I'm being paid for it. I meant to have done it without, but your papa, sir, has insisted upon it being his order, and I've been obliged to cave in."

It was to be a secret from Aleck, however.

How hard it was to keep that secret, when, every time there was a talk of Aleck's being able to get down to the Cove, I was on the point of letting out what he was to see there!

I did contrive to keep it, however; and when at last February was ushered in with a burst of warm weather that tempted all the little buds to unfold themselves with a perfectly reckless disregard of the cold that was sure to follow, and primroses and violets to start into blossom as though they could not lay the bright carpet for spring's advance too soon, Dr. Wilson decreed that nothing would do his little patient more good than a couple of hours of the freshest sea breezes, caught and partaken of on the spot, a mile off from shore;—which meant that Aleck had leave to go to the Cove once more, and out upon the sea for a sail.

Of course I had a whole holiday for the occasion; and I had satisfaction in observing that I was not the only one unable to settle down into quiet occupation. The carriage was nearly ready to drive my parents and Aleck down to the lodge, when I started off by way of the Zig-zag, to the Cove.

There was the new yacht, already decked from bow to stern with the tiny flags which I had been collecting for weeks past. All the sails were set, but a little anchor—also my addition to the furniture of the new vessel—kept her safely moored; and as she curtsied upon the water, every sail and flag reflected as in a mirror, I thought I had never seen anything so pretty.

Perhaps Aleck thought so too, for when he arrived a few minutes after, leaning on my father's arm, he seemed as if he could not speak, and had to sit down quite quietly in the boat whilst he drew the yacht close up to the side, and looked at it all over. Then he turned to my father, and said something about not being able to thank—and at this point broke down in a manner that was so singularly infectious, that no one was found able to break the silence at first.

My father said presently, however, "You must carry him off to sea, George; and I shall call you to account if those pale cheeks don't gather roses from the crests of the waves."

Then we drew up the anchor of the little yacht, and pushed off from the shore. A basket of provisions had been placed in the boat, and before we had been very long out at sea, George insisted upon its being unpacked, threatening Aleck that he should be reported as insubordinate unless he consumed precisely the quantity of wine and the whole amount of cold chicken dealt out to him.

"Willie," whispered my cousin to me, after dutifully doing his best at the luncheon, "I want very much indeed to go to the White-Rock Cove—do you think George will let us?"

Certainly I did *not* think so, but Aleck wished it, and that was quite enough to make me join earnestly in his entreaties that we should turn the boat's head round in the direction he wished.

Groves consented at last, but not without many misgivings, the White-Rock Cove being, he said, about the last place he'd have thought of taking us to; and sentiments to the same effect were respectfully echoed by Ralph, who, in my private belief, had held the place in superstitious horror ever since the 20th of September.

All of us, however, yielded as a matter of course when it was found Aleck had set his mind upon it; and the wind being favourable, we were not very long in rounding Braycombe headland.

Once in the Cove, my cousin asked me to land with him, requesting George and Ralph to leave us ashore a little while.

"It must have been almost exactly here, I think," said Aleck, leading the way to the spot which I remembered only too vividly, and glancing round to assure himself that our companions were out of sight. "Willie, I want us to thank God here, on the very spot—there's no one to see us—let us kneel down."

We knelt together at the foot of the White Rock; Aleck, who was still very weak, leaning against me for support. They were only a few childish words he said, but they came from a full heart; and I never remember in later life any liturgical service in church or cathedral that stirred my feelings more deeply than that simple thanksgiving. Nor even now, after the lapse of many a long year, can I visit that little retired nook in the dear Braycombe coast, and hear the plash of the ripple, and the flap of the sea-gulls' wings, and the echoing murmurs of the sea in the caverns, without being carried back by a rush of tender recollection to that day when all Nature's sweet

voices seemed to be uniting in one hymn of praise, taking up and beautifying and repeating the utterance of two little thankful hearts—

"We praise Thee, O God."

THE END

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