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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE STRANGE LITTLE GIRL: A STORY FOR CHILDREN ***



The Strange Little Girl



A Story for
Children

By V. M.



Illustrations by N. Roth



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IN THE GARDEN OF DELIGHT

The Strange Little Girl

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I

ONCE upon a time there was a beautiful palace where the king's children lived as happily as they alone can live. They never wanted anything and they never knew that there could be others who were not as happy as they. Sometimes, it is true, they would hear a story which would make them almost think that perhaps there was a



world beyond, which they did not know, outside the palace of the king and its gardens, but something would seem to say that after all it was only a fairy story, and they would forget that it meant anything that might really be true.

One of the little princesses seemed to think more of these stories of a world beyond the palace garden than the others, and she would sometimes find herself gazing at the sun, and wondering if the great world lay beyond the purple forests where the golden-edged clouds shone like dark mountains in the distance. And the name of this princess was Eline.

More and more as she thought of these things she felt sure that there must be a world where things were very different from the happy life in the palace garden; and in the stories which the children heard she thought of many things, which, with the others, she used to pass by without notice. Once they used to hear of no sorrow, no pain, but only joy and peace. Now, in thinking, she sometimes noticed that there were things which were not spoken; that there were things passed by in silence; that there were things which travelers passing through the palace kept back, as though they knew of much which the children must not know, and yet which they would have told had they dared.

Questions Eline asked, and the answers seldom satisfied her, for they never seemed to tell her everything. Every time one of the travelers left the palace to return on his journey there seemed to be a look of appeal in his eyes, an appeal which only Eline seemed to see, and which made her wish to follow them for the very love that shone in the kind faces of these strangers—strangers who told the children stories of things they loved—of wonderful fairy worlds where they were not as in the palace; of worlds where Eline seemed to have traveled many times, long, long ago.

One day she asked her father, the king:

“Shall I never go out of the palace, never leave the garden of delight and see the world that lies beyond the cloud-mountains, beyond the sunset and the whispering forests?”

And the king looked intently at Eline.

“These are strange fancies,” he said. “Are you not happy here in the garden?”

“Yes, I am happy,” she said, “happier than I can tell. But you have not answered me. Is there not a world beyond? Shall I ever see it?”

“Some traveler must have been telling you forbidden tales,” said the king. “These things I have said may not be spoken in my garden.”

“No traveler has told me,” said Eline. “I have seen them looking as though they would tell me, but could not, of things beyond the garden, beyond the palace. I have asked them, and they have told me nothing. Yet I have felt that I long to go with them. I have felt that I remember strange places, strange sights, things I know not here, when they speak. Sometimes, even, it seems that I hear a voice like my own repeating a promise—a promise unfulfilled that must be kept. ‘I will return! I will! I will!’ it says. And I hear voices calling in the wind, in the rustling of the leaves, and in the silence of the day, ‘Come back! Come back!’ And the birds say, ‘Come!’ The pines whisper to me strange things, and the laughing water in the brooks says ‘Come!’ What does it mean?”

“I cannot tell you here,” said the king. “But why do you wish to leave the palace? You are yet young and there are many, many years of happiness before you. You may stay in the palace where all things are good, and put these things out of mind. There is another world, but not for you—yet!”

Eline was troubled, or would have been had such a thing been possible in the palace of the king.

“May I ever see that land? May I ever leave the palace?”

“The children of the king are free to come and go,” he said. “I may not keep them if they will not stay; for I know that they will come again.”

II

Again a traveler came to the palace. He brought with him a harp of seven strings, on which he played to the children. He sang to them for a while and then for a space was silent. Eline listened to the strange, beautiful music. And to her it seemed that there was speech in the harp—that it spoke. The other children seemed to listen to the music, but to them it did not seem to speak. To Eline there were echoes of wonderful things the palace knew not; things that the language of the king could not tell. The harp spoke in a way that the Princess Eline knew and understood, although

there were no words in its tones. There were sad and sorrowful notes that told of sorrows the palace never knew. There were strains of music that sounded harsh to the listening ear, though to the careless they told of happiness alone. And as she listened, Eline dreamed. Clearer and more clear she felt that the harp told of a world of men where sorrow and sadness and strife were not unknown; where joy should be, and was not; where the people groped their way through darkness and thought it light. "Return! Return!" called the harp.



"I WILL RETURN"

And a mighty resolve came to Eline. "I will return! I will! I will!"

She remembered the king's saying: "The children of the king are free to come and go," he had said. "I may not keep them if they will not stay," he had told her.

She loved him much; but the call came clear, and she dared not seek him to say farewell, lest she should be persuaded to remain.

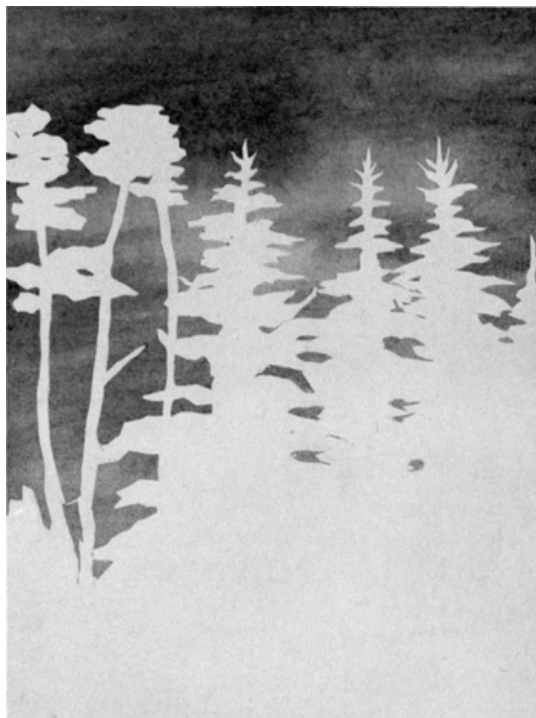
She bowed her head and to the harper spoke:

"I will go," she said. "I will return with you."

Then the harp sent forth such a melody of joyous music that it echoed thrilling through the hot discordant notes of the world beyond the sunset; and for a moment a chord of harmony ran through the life of men:

"Joy unto you, men of the underworld! Joy unto you, children of sorrow! Joy unto you, sons of forgetfulness! Joy unto all beings!"

They passed out of the garden together, the musician and the soul.



THROUGH PINE FOREST

III

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Westward they traveled, westward, ever westward. The way was dark and sometimes dreary, and Eline felt like one awakened from a beautiful dream before it was ended.

Through the pine forests, over mountains, in deep valleys, and by mighty streams they traveled. Ever they had the harp to cheer the way, to urge their footsteps onward. For the path was untrodden where they went.

"There is a path," the harper said, "a pleasant path and broad, but the journey is long and we must hasten on our way. To the setting sun, to the gleaming sea, we must go; nor may we seek a beaten track lest we be too late."

A river there was in whose waters were reflected pictures of all that surrounded them—such crystal clear reflections that sometimes it seemed as if they looked at real things in the water mirrored in the things around them.

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And on the waters grew beautiful lotus-flowers, lilies with cup-shaped leaves. In the blue and white petals of the lotus also there seemed to be reflections, so clear were they. The musician plucked one of the cup-like lily-pads and filled it with the water for Eline.

The still surface of the water shone like silver in its green cup as Eline held it. Then the musician played. Soft and low and sweet were the notes of that wonderful harp. Scarcely they rippled the surface of the water, and yet they vibrated, trembled, spread, until picture after picture came to the surface of the water in colors of every hue.

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Scarcely may it be told what Eline saw in the magic cup in the water of remembrance. She seemed to see herself—and yet another—in picture after picture. Now she saw herself as part of a golden sea of selves which made but one self, so lifelike were they, so glorious was their unity. Then in life after life Eline seemed to see her other selves living and loving and working, sleeping and suffering and struggling. She saw that on a day she had made her great resolve to help the world. "I will return! I will! I will!"

And now she knew what things they were she had seemed to remember in the king's garden of delight. Joyously, eagerly, willingly, she saw that she had determined to return to earth in body after body, to help the men of sorrow who struggled and slumbered and suffered. She saw that she had before so done; that her work remained unfinished, to be begun again where she had laid it down. There was suffering shown to her in the cup; there were sorrow and

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grief and pain. But she saw that it must all be, and was content. For at other times she had desired just such things that she might know how others felt them, that she might help them the more with understanding. Happiness she had taken to give to others, and she must repay the debt. She saw that all things were just, and when the musician said in a low voice:

“Will you yet proceed?”

“I will!” she said.

“Then drink the cup,” he said, “Drink!”

She drained the green cup of the lotus leaf until scarcely a drop remained, and with that draught she forgot all things that had been—the garden, the king, the journey and the vision, and the master harper—all were forgotten. Only there remained a dim remembrance as of a dream at dawn forgotten.

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DOMES AND SPIRES

IV

A little ship stood by the shore of the great sea; into this Eline entered. There were other ships, some better, some worse. But somehow she knew that just this, and not another, was the ship she wanted, and none questioned her when she entered.

So they sailed away towards the setting sun.

Long was the voyage and lonely; for the seas ran high and all was dark below in the heart of the ship. Nine months they sailed on the ocean, until in the time appointed land appeared. Strange dwellings were there, domes and spires and crowded cities. With wide, wondering eyes Eline watched them as the ship passed them by in strange procession; for the men of that land were like none she knew; none of these things could she remember. For she had forgotten even her name at the river of forgetfulness, where remembrances are left in the mirror of the waters until time and their creator bring them back to life.

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It seemed as though one of wise and kindly countenance held her as a little child in his arms and whispered softly, “Remember! I will return! I will! I will!” A light of happy recollection came to her and she smiled in reply. He had spoken in her own language as the harp had spoken, and strangely, strangely she seemed to see in him the harper whose music had told her of the sorrowful land beyond the sunset. For this moment, she remembered, and then the thought departed.

At first the air seemed heavy and oppressive to the wanderer; but by degrees she grew accustomed to it and even, in time, scarcely felt it. Yet ever and again a dim remembrance of brighter, purer skies came to her. She spoke of this more than once; but others only laughed and said: “The child is dreaming!”

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Because she was no longer dressed in shining garments, they did not know her for the princess she really was. Indeed, she was no way different from those around her but that at heart she was still the daughter of the king. They could not see her heart—this they could not know. And seeing that they did not understand, she said no more of the thoughts that came to her. They called it dreaming; but Eline thought that if this were so, a dream were better than a waking life—unless—

Could these be thoughts that came to her of the world beyond the water, the reflection of the real life? She knew not.

“We must teach this little dreamer what is life!” they said. “She will not know what life is if we leave her to her dreams.”

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They made her work and made her play: work that never seemed to do anyone any good, and play that seemed like work. She nearly forgot that in what they called her dreams she had ever known of another life.

Sometimes she sang to herself, strange songs that they said sounded sad and sorrowful, yet of a sweetness all their own.

“Where does she hear them?” people asked.

But Eline never told. For the truth was that they came to her in moments when her thoughts were far away, dreaming.

“She sings like a bird in a cage that knows of a brighter world outside,” said one. But he was a poet, so they only smiled as if they themselves would have made the same remark if it had not been so fanciful.

And though men thought her sad and lonely, there was joy to her in the hum of the bees and the song of the birds and the rustling of the leaves. The butterflies and the flowers and the brooks were her friends.

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“What a strange child,” people said when they heard her talking to these friends. They did not know of the stories her friends told her, stories which reminded her of a wonderful garden of delight where men did not ever stare and stare in gaping wonder because a little child talked with the fairies that live in all things beautiful, clothed in robes of sunlight and rainbow hues.

They would have taken her away from these friends but for one old man, her grandfather, who said:

“The child will be better for the fresh air. Let her live while she may.”

So it was that she played and talked with the flowers and sang to the brooks and listened to the stories of the forest trees that whispered among themselves. None dared take her away.

One day she had been for a long ramble by a mighty river, and the sun had sunk to the westward on its journey; but she turned not to the place she called her home. Tired and worn out with her play, she lay on a rock and slept.

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In her sleep it seemed that a touch upon her forehead awakened in her a vision of things she once had known, but had now almost forgotten. There was the king’s garden and the palace, and the other wonderful buildings, tall and stately—mighty buildings which seemed to speak of mighty builders, noble thoughts and great men’s deeds. Some were even more stately, some more humble, than the palace. But in all there was a sense of grander, nobler life than the life those knew who were with her now, and who, laughing, called her a dreamer.

And she heard a voice repeating, “I will return! I will! I will!”

Again she smiled as she recognized the voice. A feeling of intense happiness and content came to her and she—awoke. More than ever it seemed as if that other were the real life, and this a heavy dream.

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V

The twilight glow still lingered in the west and the evening breeze called her to thoughts of home.

But she had learned wisdom, and when they asked her where she had been, Eline said she had fallen asleep in the sunshine on a rock by the great river. Which was true.

Of her dream she said nothing to any except to the old man who alone seemed to understand her a little. He did not laugh, but looked with thoughtful eyes intent, into the distance, away to the starlit sky, and it seemed to her that he also was trying to remember a forgotten dream of life. And seeing this she put her hand in his trustingly, and they two knew well each other's thoughts though never a word was spoken.

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It seemed to the old man that the child was leading him along a familiar road to a home forgotten—after many weary days of wandering.

"There are some things the heart can say that words can never tell," he said to himself when she was gone. "I think we understand one another."

As time passed by Eline came to know more and more of that other life and she longed to tell these things to the people who struggled and surged in hot strife to win the things of the world they knew, never thinking that there was a happier, purer, brighter world. Some thought they knew of such a one; but all except a few made it seem like the one in which they lived—only they made it a little more bright by day, a little more dark by night, and with a little more success in the strife for the things that change and pass away. These she would tell of the nobler life she knew, but they listened not at all.

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In due time Eline was sent to school to learn. But her teachers found little that she did not quickly understand. For one thing she remembered now plainly, how in the garden of delight everything that was done was well done—were it the telling of a story or the singing of a song or the watering of the flowers that grew in that fair land. All was done with a wonderful thoroughness, and Eline now felt that she must do all things in that way or leave them quite alone. But often they would teach Eline things about which she seemed to care little and to understand as one in a dream. Then they would call her attention to the work only to find that she was learning to understand a great deal more than they themselves could tell. It was so with numbers. When they asked her what the numbers were by name, she not only named them all but told them why they were so named and what each meant. And so with music. With every chord she seemed to see harmonies of color, like beautiful pictures too glorious to paint. And when she said that life itself to her was music, Eline's teachers did not understand.

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One said: "She has learned these things before in another life."

Another declared: "She sees the heart of things where we see only the outer covering. She sees the soul, we the body."

Perhaps they both were right.

But many gave other reasons for these things and all of them were gravely discussed. But curiously enough, the two who gave the reasons I have told, were laughed at and told that such things could not be. So they said little about their thoughts because, like all those who are sure that they know the truth, they could afford to wait until their words were proved to be right.

VI

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At first Eline longed to tell the world of better things. She would gladly have told the world of the glorious masonry of those noble cities which she saw in her visions—cities where men and women moved like gods; where sorrow and want and selfishness seemed to be unknown. She longed to tell them of the harmonies which came to her of music which might stir a dead world to life, thrilling all nature into blossoms and fruits in abundance, as the music of a waterfall seems to send life into the flowers which grow beside. She would have told them of the colors with which nature loves to paint the sky, the mountains and valleys, sea and land, when all is ready for the master's work. For nature paints wherever the canvas is prepared to receive the picture, and she asks no price for her work. Eline knew of times in the past—times that will come again—when man did not ever strive to be rich regardless of his poorer brothers, but each worked as he was able, all working for the whole world's good. And she would have told them how in those times man did not earn his living by toil unending, by ceaseless pain and sorrow, but that nature helped him as he helped her, and the earth brought out her stores of rich fruits for the welfare of her upgrown sons, well knowing that they in turn with loving service would seek to make nobler and better that which nature gave to them in charge, birds and beasts, flowers and trees, plants and stones and all that lives—which is everything.

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Eline saw how the desire to possess more than enough, for the selfish pleasure of saying, "It is mine!"—how the growth of selfishness in the world; the love of killing nature's younger sons for food and pleasure increased; how the love of ease and forgetfulness of others and of duty to mother nature—how all these things had chilled the warmth of the one great life that is in all things, and crippled the mother's efforts to help her wayward sons.

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Others had told these things; others had striven to show the glorious light of life that shines behind the cold mist of sin and sorrow which has been cast like a veil over the earth; but all had been rejected. Some were ill-received; some were stoned; some were killed.

"How can I raise this humanity which like a great orphan has cut itself off from its mother and now lies ignorant of the happiness that awaits its coming?" thought Eline. "I have returned to tell them of the way, and they will not hear. Others have returned as far as they might and have been rejected. Others still have boldly plunged deeper yet in the hot sea of human life and have been lost in its poisonous fumes. Even so, I will again return, yet lower, if by chance there be a few who will not reject my message."

VII

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So Eline hid in her heart the things she knew and the things she would have told, as she had hidden in her soul at the river of forgetfulness the memory of the king's garden of delight. And she took her way into the world with messages of love and of hope, such simple messages as the children understood, better sometimes than their elders. She told the children many beautiful fairy stories and they listened eagerly. They did not know that these were the stories which she had told to the learned ones of the earth and which were really true, though they had not believed.

The children listened, and they said: "It is beautiful. Some day we will seek out such a beautiful world as that of which the stories tell."



SHE TOLD THE CHILDREN STORIES

There were houses, too, which they built—little toy houses with toy bricks. But Eline showed them how to shape the bricks and how to make each brick fit in its proper place so that never a one should lose its worth. And Eline showed the children how that behind the building of beautiful mansions there was the beautiful thought that made the masonry so noble a work, though it were only toy masonry. And the children understood.

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In their games they had done each his best and they did well. But Eline showed them games in which they all acted together, even the little ones helping and sharing. It was wonderful to them that they had not thought of this before, because now they found that they could do more than ever they had done when each worked alone and for himself.

Near the city where they dwelt was a vast plain full of great boulders, which they could have made into a great park and a beautiful garden; but the people of the city cared not for such things and would not help them. By themselves they knew not how to move the rocks. So it remained a waste of wild growth, except in those places where the children had moved one by one, and with great difficulty, the smaller stones.

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Now Eline bid them take a strong rope. "For," said she, "we will clear that plain, and it shall be for a dwelling and a garden for all." She was thinking of the king's garden.

The children looked at her in astonishment as though they wondered if she meant the thing she said.

"We have no rope," they said, "and none will give us any."

"There is your rope," said Eline, pointing out the overgrown plain, where, amid the rocks in the great patches from which they had slowly and painfully drawn the smaller stones, grew masses of pale blue flowers, beautiful, delicate little blossoms, like wind-flowers.

Again the children looked at her, questioningly; not as the people at first had done, but trustingly, though they knew not what she would have them do, but sought to learn her wishes.

So at her bidding they gathered all the ripened stalks of the little flowers and laid them out in the sun as she directed.

Almost it seemed a pity to destroy the plants. One little worker asked Eline of this matter for he loved the flowers and was sorry to see them gathered and dried.

"Does it not hurt the flowers to pluck them?" he asked. "Some say that you can talk with them as with all living things, and you can tell if the flowers do not suffer in the gathering, although they are old and ripe."

His was a loving heart and Eline saw that he asked this out of no mere curiosity. Gently she touched his forehead with her finger.

"Look!" she said. "Look and listen, for I have opened the seeing eye to you."



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VIII

And the boy looked around in wonderment, amazed, and saw that the whole great plain was full of teeming life which he had not before seen. Fairies and elves peeped from every flower, gnomes and earthmen worked and played and danced among the boulders. And where before was silence but for the rustling of the leaves in the breeze, there rose a murmur of many voices, like the humming of bees in the

sunshine. The boy listened and at once he knew what the flowers were whispering.

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"There is a saying that the flax-people are being used for a mighty work," said one little blue fairy to another.

"I heard a bee spreading the news," said another. "All the flax-people are asked to give their dresses to help in clearing the plain for a palace and a garden where kings may dwell—not kings of earth and of little cities, but kings of wisdom whom nature loves to obey, and we among her children."

"Body after body have I grown," said the other. "I have struggled and striven to grow useful in this glorious brotherhood of nature, and my only success seems to be that I have a pretty head. It is good to be beautiful, perhaps, but I have always thought that I would sacrifice my beauty for a chance of sharing in noble deeds."

A butterfly that had stopped to listen now spoke to her:

"You have waited and now you will have your reward. For surely your body will be taken to help in the work that is going forward. The flax-people have indeed lived to good purpose."

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"They certainly do not seem afraid to die," said the boy to himself.

And as if in answer to his whispered thought the little flax-fairy said:

"Of course we are not afraid! I have been told that there are giants of men who really think that when they leave their worn-out stalks—bodies they call them—behind, they live no more, or at least are not sure what becomes of themselves. But it cannot be true—it must be a fairy story!" laughed the little elf. "They must know, as we know, that all things sleep awhile and then take new bodies like dresses woven while they worked in their last awaking which men call life. And then one day we know that we shall have woven dresses so fine that we shall be free to leave them as the butterfly leaves his dull-hued robes and spreads his bright wings for flight into the grand unknown which we all long to know."

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"But *how* do you know that these things are so?" asked the boy.

"How do I know that I am alive?" answered the flax-fairy in a murmur. Fainter grew the voices and the vision faded from the boy's sight.

He knew not how long it was he stayed there, but after awhile he awoke with a start to find that Eline was no longer with him, and that he had slept among the flax in the sunshine.

IX

"It must have been a dream!" he said. But he did not believe it was a dream—for all his words. And really the flowers seemed to him to bear a new life after that wonderful vision which came to him when Eline gave him for an hour the seeing eye.

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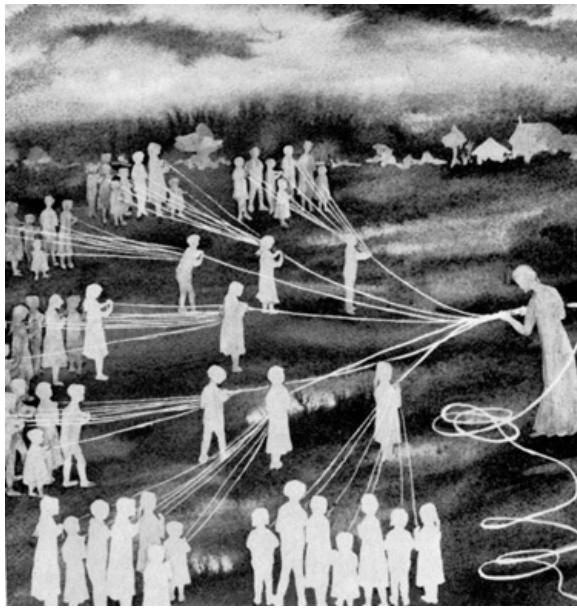
Working with the others joyfully and happily without a moment's pause or one thought of failure, they saw quickly growing an immense heap of beautiful fine white thread. The children had helped the flax to grow and now in turn it aided them to clear more ground.

For in no long time all was finished and before them they had a mighty rope growing greater every day under their Leader's eye.

One strange thing there was about the rope. For there were golden threads interwoven which the children did not remember having seen among the flax. And they wondered.

But Eline only said "It is golden flax."

Whatever it was, it shone brightly in the sun until it looked like a ray of real sunlight in the rope.



MAKING ROPE

One little child said:

“It looks like a brother to the sun!”

“Perhaps it is,” said Eline, and smiled.

The work grew apace. And the play grew apace, because the children scarcely knew which was work and which was play. They seemed to have found something better than both. Stone after stone, rock after rock, was encircled with the cord and triumphantly drawn by that merry army of children to the edge of the plain. Clearer and clearer grew the space. Where before the stones had been, little pools of water formed, while round them grew masses of beautiful flowers, among which was a new crop of the little blue flax, stronger and better grown than any that had been there before. Gradually there grew up a great wall of rock around the plain where the boulders were drawn by the children, for each was taken to its nearest boundary, as Eline told them this would be the simplest way to clear the plain.

Some mighty rocks yet remained in the center of the plain but the children had so seen the wisdom of their Leader that they doubted not that these too would be removed without difficulty, although how this was to be done they could not tell.

And as the work was nearing an end they did as their Leader bid them in perfect trust. Actually they put their ropes around a rock which some said was like a small mountain. They pulled with a will, but the rock moved not.

Still they pulled willingly and with all their might, for now they had grown strong until they scarcely knew their own powers.

From the great city, from the mountains, and from the country round about, came sightseers and inquirers. At first they only laughed and talked, and helped not at all. But among them came men of strange countenance, strong men, wise in looks, men of kingly bearing.

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CLEARING THE PLAIN

These said: "It is not right that these children should work for ever alone."

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And they too, with strong grip of a strange sort, laid hold of the golden ropes, seeing which, the idlers too came and helped until with a mighty song of joy the children saw the great rock move, slowly at first, then faster, faster, until with a run they had placed it in a far corner of the great plain, standing like a sentinel to the North.

X

Another and yet others followed. East and South and West the unhewn boulders stood like guardians of the plain. A circle of twelve yet remained in the center, like giant pillars supporting the sky. But these Eline said should stand, as also some smaller ones which were placed across their tops like great beams resting upon a doorway. How this was done I cannot say; but there is a saying in the city that, in the night before they were found placed high above the giant circle, the sound of a great and joyous song, a hymn of power, was heard like the tones of a great bell shaking the houses with its vibrations and putting men in fear of the destruction of their city. But at sunset the children had not returned from the plain, so that they were not in the city when this happened. And not until the sunrise did the people flock to the doors and windows for a glimpse of the joyous army that marched in their streets. Led by the men of kingly bearing the children marched, singing a song of triumph, with such shining glory in their faces that all the people marveled.

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Tired they were, and slept; but when in the late noontide the people asked them what had happened, all seemed like the forgotten glory of a dream. They could remember little except that they were filled with the joy of wonderful things which no tongue could tell.

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The work had not taken one day, or two, but many days. Months and even years had passed since the children played together in the sunshine. Strong and sturdy lads and lasses were they now. A beautiful temple had arisen within the giant circle, and all around it was a garden of beauty like no garden which they had seen.

But when Eline looked amid the rare flowers and found a little purple star with heart of gold, she knew that it was a flower from the king's garden, and she was glad that it could grow where all was rock before. There were great purple pansies, too, like thoughts from the palace in which Eline had lived.

Now it was that the children came to the temple to learn of Eline, and she taught them the wonderful truths which she knew; to them she told the wonderful things that have been and the more wonderful things that may be, if men will only try to bring them about.

[56]

She taught them things so simple that they often wondered why they had not already known them without the telling. They did not know that there was a good reason why it should be so. Eline taught them, too, how by all working together for the welfare and progress of all, there is no task we may not overcome.

"We know it," said the children, remembering the waste of rocks in the plain where now the garden stood and the temple.

"Each by himself can do much, but all working together can move the world," she

said. "Now I will tell you a strange thing, which is yet true. For we are not at all separate from any other thing in the world, but the same nature is in us as in them—in the rocks and the flowers, in the forests and streams, in city and mountain, in air and fire and water, just as the rocks and this temple are of the same stone, although they differ in shape. And if we only will, we can make all our rocks into beautiful, glorious temples.

[57]

"When the world of men has learned this lesson the earth itself will become a mighty temple, that the wise teachers of old, whom men call gods, may come to us again and live with us in peace for evermore.

"And it shall be known that music is life, for in music is harmony, and by harmony all things live, each note in its own place, doing its perfect work, be it great or small. For this too is a brotherhood of harmony."

Because in those days the people listened to the teachings from the temple and to the great ones who came to dwell therein when it was finished, and who taught the seekers after truth, through their messenger Eline, there were happiness and joy and peace in all the land. Men became nobler as they thought of nobler things than had hitherto been their custom.

Seeing the beauty of the temple and the mighty work that comes of aiding nature, working in unity and harmony, they also built their houses to be like the temple. Stone they used for brick, beautiful they built them within and without, and they labored to make their dwellings fit temples for the gods. For it was said among them that sometimes strangers would visit their city, and seeking entrance, would dwell with them awhile where they found a welcome. And it was noticed that always they came to such dwellings as those where the beauty and harmony of the building showed beauty and harmony within. And when they left the house, always there seemed to remain a memory of their presence as a ray of light at sunset leaves a memory of joyous days and a sense of hope for brighter days yet to come.

[58]

When this thing happened the neighbors would gather together and it was said:

"The Master has built the house."

Then the great beam which rested on the pillars of the doors was lifted and where it had stood was built an arch of stone. And last of all was dropped in place the keystone which held the arch, and there was great rejoicing, for the people said: "The house is finished." Some there were who would have lifted the beam and built the arch, but unless the Master had been in the house, always some accident would occur and the house be destroyed.

[59]

In the center of the arch was placed a great light which was ever kept burning, for it was fed with oil of gold which never burns away, but whose smoke ever turns to oil again. Each light was like the greater light which ever shone from the dome of the temple, a light to lighten all around, such light as it was said went out to the world from the temple itself in the knowledge of the laws of life and of all things good and great and beautiful. Never was the light to be put out, lest harm should come. Day and night it was held a sacred duty to guard the light.

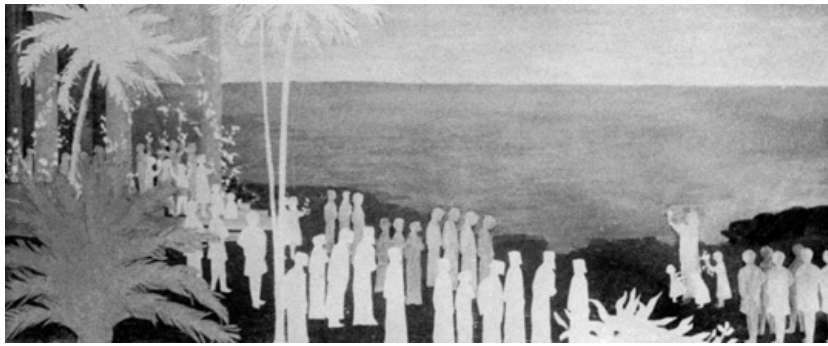
[60]

When that light shone there was peace and plenty in the land, for fellowship made life joyful. Some called that glorious time the Golden Age; some there are even now among us who will to bring that golden age again to earth as then, through brotherhood and the joy of life, that misery shall not always be among us, nor poverty, sorrow, and pain.

XI

But there came a day when messengers from far off lands came over sea a great journey to the temple. And to Eline they told the despair and want and the madness of unbrotherliness that men knew in the countries whence they came, countries where the light shone no longer. Of wars and of famines they spoke, of poverty, oppression, and crime.

[63]



“GUARD WELL THE TEMPLE”

Eline’s great compassion could not be silent to appeal. “From these things, I say Humanity SHALL be saved!” said she. “I have a duty here, but there are guardians in the Temple, and the call comes loud to me from the world beyond. I will go!”

Those messengers heard with joy of the success of their journey, for they had traveled far and had overcome many trials and difficulties by the way. And all the time they had hoped in perfect faith that they would return with some encouragement to the country whence they came. And doubtless it was because of the grand faith they showed that Eline herself answered their call.

“Guard well the temple while I am away,” Eline charged her people. “I must travel far, but in no long time I will return!—I will return! Be watchful, therefore, that the light be burning, that the oil fade not. None can tell the time of the coming, whether it be by night or day. With your lives must you guard the light!”

[64]

She spoke somewhat sadly as it seemed to them, and they supposed she thought of the great misery and need of those she went to succor in their distress.

And they answered the more eagerly:

“We will! We will!”

For the first time since it had been built the temple was left without its head—a sacred trust indeed.

They thought they knew themselves; they thought they knew the evil in their natures, and the good, did those temple watchers.

And in their surety of knowing they grew careless, so that in no long time they lost their caution. Some there were who were faithless, and these began to tell them of their great success; how they had built the temple; how their industry and labor had succeeded; how well they had learned to know themselves. Gently they suggested these things, gently these sayings took root, almost unperceived.

[65]

“Our temple which we have built is very mighty. It can never fall,” they said.

Some few there were who would have spoken for Eline, but they were timid and afraid of those who talked so boastfully. Wherefore they were silent. It is true that one or two attempted to recall the noble deeds of the absent one, and to point out that she had really built the temple; they had supplied only the labor; yet the fruits of it were theirs and the world’s.

“True,” said the wicked and faithless ones, “she had a great mind for building; but she made mistakes. She herself said so. We have learned by those mistakes and we know. She would have made the temple teachings too common altogether. Why, she actually began to turn into a teacher of virtues of which the world is weary, instead of building as at first. She had taught all she knew, but we can teach greater things, and better things; we can teach the world twenty different styles of building in metals, wood, stone, and marble; of ornaments and decorations enough to last for a century. Thus we honor her; thus we carry on her work and make it grow—although she made mistakes.”

[66]

“Indeed she did make mistakes,” said one, “and the greatest mistake of all was when she chose such faithless craftsmen for the temple work. Shame on you!”

“O faithful one!” said they. “Such faith deserves a great reward. To you we will entrust the duty of finding her. We will give you all you need for the voyage—a ship and provisions enough for a year!”



ADRIFT ON THE SEA

XII

[69]

So those treacherous ones cast adrift on the ocean the one who remained faithful. And those others who would have spoken out for their absent Teacher were silenced against their own better natures. For those wicked ones had been great among them, and they were afraid.

It was thought that in no long time the winds and the waves would destroy the little ship with its lonely voyager; yet with stout heart, knowing that he might not return alone, he held on fearless and determined. Sometimes it seems that those who so follow the voice of their inner wisdom in dauntless courage are helped by nature, as though she ever loves such brave hearts. I have heard the story told how the great Columbus who found a new world was beset by his followers to return. How nature sent him messages that he was nearing land—birds and driftwood, branches of trees and floating weed. He read the message with the eyes of one who loves all nature well, and promised sight of land to his men in three days, a promise that was fulfilled.

[70]

So it was that the little ship with the one who remained faithful did a greater work than ever those desired who sent it.

Slowly, slowly, in the Temple, it came about that the guardians forgot their duty, forgot that they were there to guard the temple in sacred trust for humanity; and as the wicked ones among them wished, they busied themselves about many things; but not the one thing needful, the welfare and the progress of mankind.

How can the tale be told? A tale that is new, yet old—old beyond count of years.

For the enemies of the world, with whom those wicked ones were leagued, came suddenly by night, when the sacred lamp which sent rays of hope over the great ocean was allowed to flicker and to go out. And those enemies destroyed the temple so that scarcely one stone remained upon another. And with it were destroyed those weak ones who failed in their trust. All perished and with them perished for a time the Light of the World.

[71]

XIII

It is said, how truly I know not, that beneath the foundation pillars of the temple was wisely prepared by Eline a vault, a vast cave wherein were hidden the most sacred records of the temple and the sacred secret name which they had forgotten.

To her over the sea came the knowledge of the faithless guard, and in her agony she called upon that sacred name if by chance the temple should be saved.

In days of old men knew that there is a power in words, a power now forgotten. Stories there are which tell of city walls falling at a trumpet blast, of cities rising as if by magic at a word, of mighty doors thrown open, of nature spellbound by a song, of mighty names the jinns and genii of the desert obey.

[72]

And this sacred name was such a one as these; for with its whispering a mighty thrill passed out over the world and the foundations of the sea were shaken. Vast continents were destroyed, and men said the world was at an end. Terrible was the

time, but Eline knew that it was better so; for the remnant of the living might one day restore the ancient glory of that land. But had it been that the land remained, those wicked ones would have lived and worked to destroy the whole world so that not even a remnant should be left in the bosom of the waters to re-people the earth.

After many days, tossed and beaten by the waves, the little ship with the outcast faithful one came drifting to the land where Eline was.

The winds and the sea conspired, as it seemed, to urge the ship on her voyage, and the dwellers of the ocean pointed the way, watchful ever and untiring in their duty. Small as it was, and ill-found, Eline chose this ship for her return, and once again she came to the place where the temple had stood—she and that faithful one. [73]

She gazed on the ruins of that sacred spot and sadly looked at the tops of the mighty pillars just rising above the waves of the sea which at times filled the arches in between so that no man might pass beneath.

Unseen guards there were, Eline knew, guards who would keep that spot free for future generations of a world to come. Water-nymphs, sea-sprites, and earth-goblins, undines, gnomes, and sylphs dwelt there as sentinels of a sacred trust, and Eline was content to go.

“For,” she said, “the secret vault of the sacred name yet stands intact until these same faithless ones shall come again, purified by many wanderings and trials, and shall again guard that new-old temple with me. That time they shall not fail!” [74]

And a ray of glorious hope shone in her face as she left the ruined temple.

“I will return!” she said. “I will return!”



“I WILL RETURN”

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