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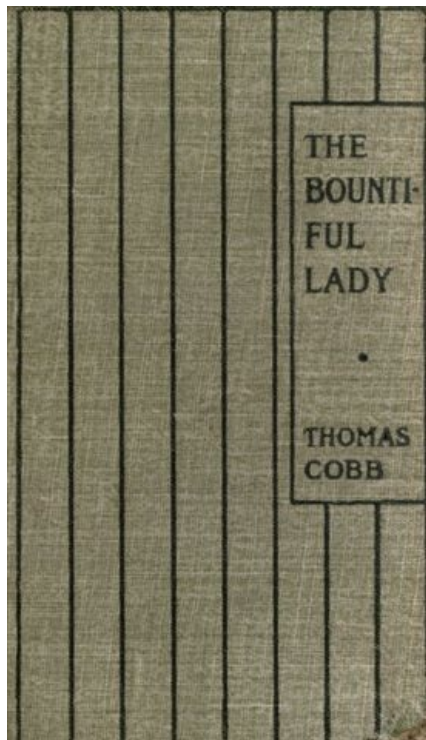
Author: Thomas Cobb

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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE BOUNTIFUL LADY ***



The Bountiful Lady

**—or, How Mary was changed from a very Miserable Little Girl to a very
Happy One**

BY THOMAS COBB

**LONDON: GRANT RICHARDS
1900**



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The Bountiful Lady

I

MARY FINDS HERSELF IN A DIFFERENT PLACE

It was not a dream, this wonderful thing that happened to Mary Brown, although it seemed very much like a dream at first.

Mary was a pretty, round-faced, dirty little girl who had neither a father nor a mother nor a brother nor a sister. Nobody had kissed her since she could remember, although it was only the day before yesterday that Mrs. Coppert had beaten her.

She lived in a poor, narrow street, and during the daytime she spent many hours in the road. During the night she lay on a sack on the floor of a small room with three other children. Sometimes, when she played in the road, Mary almost forgot she was hungry; but for the most part, she was a sorrowful little girl. She had none of the things which you like the best—she did not even know there were such things in the world; she seldom had enough to eat, and her clothes were very ragged and dirty indeed.

One afternoon she was playing in the gutter, it happened to be a little past tea-time, although Mary did not always have any tea; she had no toys, but there was plenty of mud, and you can make very interesting things out of mud if you only know the way. Mary kneeled in the road, with her back to the turning, the soles of a pair of old boots showing beneath her ragged skirt, as she stooped over the mud, patting it first on one side then on the other, until it began to look something like the shape of a loaf of bread. Mary thought how very nice it would be if only it was a loaf of bread, so that she might eat it, when suddenly she seemed to hear a loud clap of thunder and the day turned into night.

She did not feel any pain, but the street and the mud all disappeared, and Mary Brown knew nothing. For a long time, although she never knew for how long, she was NOWHERE!

It might have been a month or a week or a day or an hour or even only five minutes or one minute or a second, but when she found herself SOMEWHERE again it was somewhere else.

Mary had been playing in the road, feeling very hungry, with her hands on the soft mud, when this strange sensation came to her and she knew nothing else. And when she opened her eyes again, she was not in the road any longer, as she would have expected; though for some time yet she could not imagine where she was or how she had come there.

She was lying on her back, but not upon the floor of the poor house in William Street; she lay on something quite soft and comfortable far above the boards. All around her she saw an iron rail, and at the corners two bright yellow knobs. Above, she saw a clean white ceiling, whilst the walls, which were a long way from the bed, seemed to be almost hidden by coloured pictures.

Instead of her ragged dress, Mary wore a clean, white night-gown, and there was not a speck of mud on her hands, which astonished her more than anything else.

'They can't be my hands,' she thought; 'they must belong to somebody else. They look quite clean and white, and I am sure I never had white hands before.'

Then some one came to the bed-side and stood staring down into Mary's face. She wore a cotton dress and a white cap and apron such as Mary had never seen before. She had a pale face, and very kind, dark eyes. Mary liked to watch her when she walked about the room, and presently she brought a tray covered by a cloth, on which stood a cup and saucer. She began to feed Mary with a spoon, and Mary thought she had never tasted anything so nice before. She felt as if she did not want anything else in the world—only to know where she was and how she had come here, and whether she should ever be sent back to Mrs. Coppert and William Street.

But although she wanted to know all this, she did not ask any questions just yet, for somehow Mary could not talk as she used to do. But her thoughts grew very busy; she wondered what were the names of the different things she had to eat; she wondered who the tall, dark man with the long beard could be, who came to see her every morning and looked at her right foot and felt her left wrist in a strange way. One day she raised her head from the pillow to look at the foot herself.

'I see you are better this morning,' said the tall man. 'Do you feel better?'

'Quite well, thank you,' answered Mary, and when he went away, Mary looked up at the lady with the kind, dark eyes, and asked, 'What is the matter with my foot, please?'

'Ah! that is to prevent you from running away and leaving us,' was the answer. 'When we bring little girls here we don't want them to run away again.'

'I shouldn't run away,' said Mary solemnly; 'I shouldn't really. I don't want to run away.'

'That's right.'

'Only where is it?' asked Mary.

'Now don't you think it's a very nice place?'

'Oh, very nice!' cried Mary. 'I know what it is,' she added; 'it's all a dream! Only I hope I'm not going to wake again.'

'What nonsense you're talking,' was the answer. 'Of course you are awake, dear.'

'Why do you call me dear?' asked Mary.

'Because I'm very fond of you.'

'But why are you fond of me?' asked Mary. You will notice she rather liked to ask questions when she got the chance, but they had been very seldom answered until now.

'Well, now I wonder why!' was the answer. 'Let me see! Haven't I made you comfortable and given you nice beef-tea and jelly?'

'I like them very much,' said Mary.

'Well, then, I daresay that's why I like you. Because we generally like persons if we do kind things for them.'

'I see,' said Mary, but she didn't understand at all. 'But I'm sure it's a dream,' she added, 'and I do hope I shan't wake!'

'Oh dear!' was the answer. 'Now, do you know what I do to prove little girls are awake?'

'No,' said Mary, opening her eyes widely.

'Do you know what pinching is?'

'Oh yes,' said Mary, for Mrs. Coppert was very fond of pinching.

'Well, when I want to prove a little girl is awake, I pinch her.'

'But I know I'm not,' said Mary. 'I can't be. It's all part of the dream—your telling me that.'

Mary began to spoil her dream by looking forward to the time when she must awake to find herself upon the floor at the house in William Street, with her ragged dress waiting to be worn again. Still, it was the most real dream she had ever had, and it certainly seemed to be a very

long one.

But when another week had passed, Mary began to see it was not really a dream after all. Everything was just as nice as ever, or even nicer; she had the most delicious things to eat and drink: chicken and toast, and all sorts of nice puddings, boiled custard, jelly, and grapes and oranges. She was able to sit up in bed to eat them too, and she wore a blue dressing-gown, and the lady with the kind, dark eyes read delightful stories. Now, this was something quite new to Mary Brown, and the stories seemed almost as wonderful as the change in her own little life.

She only knew of the things she had seen or heard at William Street—not nice things at all. She had imagined all the world must be like that, for although she was very young, Mary had often thought about things. Still, she had never thought of anything half so wonderful as Jack-and-the-Beanstalk, or Ali Baba, or Aladdin, or Cinderella. Mary grew quite to love Cinderella, and I can't tell you how many times she heard the story of the glass slipper.

'I know how I came here now!' she exclaimed one afternoon.

'Do you indeed?' was the answer. 'Then, perhaps, you will tell me!'

'I'm like Cinderella,' said Mary. 'Cinderella was very miserable, and I was very miserable. Then her fairy-godmother came to make her happy; she gave her all kinds of pretty dresses and things—the fairy-godmother did—and some one has given me all kinds of nice things, and taken me away from William Street and brought me here; so, of course, I know it must be my fairy-godmother too.' Then Mary was silent for a little while. 'Are you my fairy-godmother?' she asked.

'No,' was the answer. 'I am not nearly important enough to be anybody's fairy-godmother.'

'Who are you?' asked Mary.

'Well, I am Sister Agatha.'

'Oh, then it wasn't you who brought me here!' said Mary, looking a little disappointed.

'I wasn't sent for until afterwards,' answered Sister Agatha.

'Who sent for you?' asked Mary.

'The person who brought you here.'

'But who was that?' cried Mary excitedly. 'Please do tell me whether it was a fairy! I'm sure it was, because it couldn't be any one else, you see.'

'Then that settles the question,' said Sister Agatha, with a smile, and Mary thought it did.

'Where is she?' she asked.

'A long, long way off! She had to go away the day after you came, so she asked me to take care of you till she saw you again. But she won't be long now.'

'Is she very beautiful like the fairies you've read to me about?' asked Mary.

'I don't suppose there ever was anybody so beautiful,' answered Sister Agatha.

'And has she got wings like this?' asked Mary, opening a book that lay on the bed and pointing to one of its coloured pictures.

'I shouldn't wonder,' said Sister Agatha; 'only she doesn't show them every day, because it isn't the fashion to wear wings, you know.'

'I think that's a pity,' answered Mary; and from that day she thought of scarcely anything else but how she had been brought away from William Street by her fairy-godmother, just like Cinderella.

Of course, Mary Brown had never imagined that she had a fairy-godmother—who could imagine such a thing in William Street! But then Cinderella had never imagined that she had a fairy-godmother either, until the night of the grand ball.

One day Sister Agatha told Mary she might get out of bed; she was carefully wrapped in a dressing-gown and a blanket and carried to a comfortable arm-chair. On her left foot she wore a pink woollen shoe, but the other foot looked so clumsy in its great bandages, that Sister Agatha covered it over.

'I wish you would untie it,' said Mary; 'I really won't run away. I shan't run away, because I want to see my fairy-godmother so much.'

'Well,' answered Sister Agatha, 'you will see her very soon now; for she is coming to-morrow.'

II

MARY SEES HER FAIRY-GODMOTHER

Mary Brown did not go to sleep very early that night, and as soon as she awoke the next morning,

she began to ask questions. She wanted Sister Agatha to tell her at what time her fairy-godmother would come, and where she was coming from, and what she would be most likely to do when she arrived.

'And what is her name?' she cried.

'Her name is Evangeline Royal,' said Sister Agatha, 'and a very pretty name too.'

'I suppose she doesn't live anywhere?' said Mary.

'Not live anywhere!' cried Sister Agatha. 'Of course she lives somewhere. She lives here.'

'I thought fairies never seemed to live anywhere,' said Mary; 'and it does seem strange she should come to William Street.'

'Ah! well, perhaps, she was looking for you.'

'I should think she's everywhere at once,' said Mary.

'Dear me!' exclaimed Sister Agatha, 'what a funny child you are! Just now, you said she didn't live anywhere.'

'That's what I mean,' answered Mary; 'because if she's everywhere at once, how can she live anywhere, you know?'

Whilst Sister Agatha washed her and put on her dressing-gown, whilst the doctor was there, whilst she drank her beef-tea for luncheon and ate her chicken for dinner, Mary Brown thought of nothing but Evangeline Royal, wondering what she would look like, what she would say, and all the rest of it. And when she went to bed again after dinner as usual and fell asleep, she dreamed of Evangeline Royal still.

But it was a dreadful dream. She dreamed that her fairy-godmother came, and that she wore a veil, and that when she lifted it her face was large and red and shiny just like Mrs. Coppert's. Mary could not forget the dream, even when she was wrapped in the blanket again and sitting in the arm-chair. But she waited with her wondering eyes on the door, watching half afraid for Evangeline.

It had struck four when Sister Agatha went away, leaving Mary alone. She sat very still, staring at the door until presently it opened again, and Mary thought that now she should see Evangeline Royal at last. But it was only Sister Agatha who entered the room.

'She has come!' cried Sister Agatha. 'It won't be long before you see her now. As soon as she has taken off her hat.'

'Does she wear a hat?' asked Mary.

'Indeed, she wears the prettiest hats. She is not like me, you know. I go out in a plain little bonnet. But Evangeline wears the most wonderful hats.'

Sister Agatha had scarcely finished speaking before the door opened again, and Mary leaned forward eagerly in her chair. All her fears left her now, and she held out her arms; for she saw the most beautiful object her eyes had ever looked upon. Evangeline Royal was tall, much taller than Sister Agatha, and a few years younger. She crossed the room so softly that Mary could not hear her footsteps; her hair looked as if the sunshine had fallen upon it and never gone away again, and her eyes were as blue as the sky on the finest day! She came to Mary and took her hands just as if she knew her quite well, and Mary felt as if she had known Evangeline all her life.

'I'm so glad!' exclaimed Mary; 'I wanted to see you so much. I'm so glad you're young too; I'm glad about everything. And how pretty you are!'

'Mary wants to see your wings,' said Sister Agatha, as Evangeline stooped to kiss the child.

'Yes,' cried Mary, 'please do show them to me!'

'Well,' answered Evangeline, 'I'm afraid I cannot show them to you just now.'

'You will, some day!' Mary pleaded.

'Oh, I shall have such lots of things to show you,' said Evangeline.

'And you can tell me when I may walk again,' said Mary; 'because I really won't run away.'

'I fear I can't tell you that,' answered Evangeline a little sadly, and she stooped to kiss Mary again.

'Oh yes, you can!' cried Mary; 'because you can do anything. You brought me here, and I like being here—very much, ever so much! I never want to go away again. You won't let me go away again!' cried Mary.

'You can't go until you can walk, you see,' said Evangeline.

'Shall I be able to walk soon?'

'Ah! that is more than I can tell you, dear.'

'Oh, I hope not! I hope not!' exclaimed Mary.

'But surely you want to be able to walk again?' said Evangeline.

'Not if I have to go away,' Mary answered. 'I hope I shall never be able to walk again, then you will let me stay always.'

As soon as Evangeline left the room, Mary wanted to know when she should see her again, and Sister Agatha said not before to-morrow.

'Then I should like to go to bed now!' cried Mary.

'Why do you want to go so early?' asked Sister Agatha; 'you generally like to sit up as late as you can.'

'Because I want to-morrow to come soon,' said Mary, and she shut her eyes and tried to go to sleep as soon as her head touched the pillow in order to make to-morrow come sooner.

'You must remember that Evangeline has a great deal to do,' said Sister Agatha, as she dressed Mary the next morning. 'She has been away so long that now she has come home again a lot of people want to see her.'

'Who?' asked Mary.

'Oh, well, wherever there's a very beautiful fairy there is usually a prince not far off,' answered Sister Agatha. 'And some day he will come to take Evangeline away with him.'

'Not if she doesn't want to go,' cried Mary. 'I do hope she won't go. And of course she can do whatever she likes, can't she?'

'She can certainly do a great many things,' said Sister Agatha, when she had put Mary in the arm-chair and given her a cup of soup. 'And she can make other people do a great many things too.'

'How does she make people do things?' asked Mary.

'That depends what kind of people they are,' was the answer. 'There are some, like the prince, who would go to the end of the earth to please her if she only looked at them in a particular manner.'

'I wish he would go there if it's a long way off!' exclaimed Mary; 'because I don't want him to take her away. How does she make other people do things?' she asked.

'She gives them some of her magic counters, you know.'

'Magic counters!' cried Mary, opening her eyes more widely.

'Yes,' said Sister Agatha; 'I don't know whether you have ever seen a magic counter. But they're little round, flat things, very hard and bright yellow. And when she gives them to people they generally do whatever she tells them to do. Now, doesn't that seem very wonderful?'

'Very!' murmured Mary. 'But I shouldn't want her to give them to me. I should do what she told me when she looked at me, like the prince, you know. Is the prince pretty like Evangeline?' Mary asked.

As she spoke the door opened, and Evangeline entered the room.

'Why, you've got another dress on!' cried Mary. For this morning Evangeline was dressed all in white. There was not any colour about her dress, and this seemed to Mary quite as it ought to be, though she could not help thinking she should like to see the wings. 'Is the prince very lovely?' Mary cried, as Evangeline stooped to kiss her, and Sister Agatha laughed as she left the room.

'Yes, dear,' answered Evangeline, sitting on a low stool by Mary's side. 'My prince is beautiful and good and noble.'

'Then he must be everything at once,' said Mary.

'He is everything to me,' answered Evangeline quietly.

'Why do you look so red?' asked Mary, staring into her face.

'Do I look red?' said Evangeline.

'Very,' answered Mary, 'and now you're redder than ever. Sister Agatha,' Mary went on, 'says you can do everything you like, and I know you can, because you brought me here, you see.'

'Not quite everything,' said Evangeline.

'Sister Agatha says you have a lot of magic counters,' answered Mary. 'She says they're flat, round, yellow things that you give to people to make them do what you like.'

'Ah! well,' said Evangeline, 'they will make people do a good many things that would please you very much. Suppose we try!'

'Yes,' answered Mary, 'I should like that.'

'Then you shall tell me what you want,' said Evangeline, 'and we will see whether we can make it come. Now,' she exclaimed, 'what should you like to have first?'

III

MARY SEES WHAT THE MAGIC COUNTERS CAN DO

Mary looked very solemn as if she was thinking deeply, but for a long time she did not speak. In fact, she did not know quite what to say, because she seemed to have everything she wanted just at present.

'Well,' cried Evangeline, 'you are a good while making up your mind!'

'What shall I say?' asked Mary.

'Suppose you said you would like some pretty frocks,' Evangeline suggested. 'What do you think of that?'

'Oh, I should like to have some pretty frocks very much!' answered Mary, as Sister Agatha entered the room. She went to Evangeline's side and whispered something which Mary could not hear, then Evangeline said out loud—

'Mary wants to have some new dresses,' and she looked into Sister Agatha's face with a smile.

'Well, I never!' exclaimed Sister Agatha. 'Who would have dreamed of such a thing! I suppose you will make the incantation? Please begin at once,' she added; 'Mary has never seen you dance, you know.'

With that Sister Agatha began to sing, and Evangeline took one side of her skirt in each hand, and standing in the middle of the room, she danced slowly and gracefully, first raising one hand above her head, then the other, bending now this way, now that, and always making her skirt take a curious shape. Mary sat holding the arms of her chair very tightly, and never taking her eyes off Evangeline; but Sister Agatha stood with her back to the fireplace, just by the bell-handle, and exactly as Evangeline came to a standstill in the middle of the room and bowed so low to Mary that her golden hair, which had become looser whilst she danced, almost touched the floor, just at that moment the door opened, and a woman came in, carrying a great box with a shiny black lid, and she placed the box at Mary's feet.

Then the woman unfastened a wide strap from the box, and Mary clapped her hands as she removed the lid, for the box seemed to be full of the most beautiful dresses!

'They're not for me!' she exclaimed, looking up into Evangeline's face.

'You are to choose the three you like the best,' was the answer.

It took a very long time for Mary to choose. She had them all taken out of the box one after another, and the woman held them up so that Mary could see them better. At last she made her selection: a dark blue dress, a crimson dress, and one of a deep plum colour. Then, although Mary did not know there could be anything else in this wonderful box, a great many other things were taken out of it, such as stockings and shoes and a very nice outdoor jacket. Mary felt delighted with everything, but especially with the outdoor jacket, because it showed that she was to go out again some day.

'I shall go out again!' she cried, as the woman strapped up the box. 'But I shan't go to William Street!' she pleaded, looking up into Evangeline's face.

'William Street!' answered Sister Agatha, 'certainly not. Who wants to go to William Street, indeed. You will go to the loveliest place in the world. You are going to stay in the country.'

'What is the country?' asked Mary, for she had never been a mile away from William Street in her life.

'Now,' cried Evangeline, when the woman with the box had gone away, 'is there anything else you would like to have?'

'I—I don't think so,' answered Mary.

'How about toys?' suggested Sister Agatha.

'Oh yes, I should like some toys,' answered Mary.

'Then,' said Evangeline, as Sister Agatha leaned back near the bell-handle, 'let us have some toys!' and as she spoke she raised her hands above her head and clapped them together.

She had scarcely clapped her hands when the door opened again and a little old man entered the room with a square box which looked far too heavy for him. He had a tiny face, all over lines, and he wore a long coat that reached to his boots. He bowed low to Evangeline, just as Mary expected him to do, and then he went down on his knees to open the box.

By this time Mary naturally thought she should see curious things, because she had no doubt whatever that she was in fairy-land, where all sorts of curious things are always happening, as every one knows. But even if Mary had not known she was in fairy-land before, she would have become quite sure of it now.

You see, everything was so different from what she had seen and heard at William Street. She had such different things to eat. She had actually had three new dresses given to her at one time! And then Evangeline seemed very, very different from Mrs. Coppert, and very, very much nicer.

But if Mary had not already felt sure she was in fairy-land, she could not have thought she was anywhere else when the funny old man began to take those wonderful things out of his box.

Mary had once picked up a broken doll in William Street, and she had grown very fond of it. She had taken it about with her, and sat it in the gutter, with its back against the kerb, while she played in the mud. She used to have long talks with it, but then she had to make the answers herself, and only to pretend the dolly made them. For, of course, Mary knew well enough that dolls can't speak—at least they can't speak in the world she had come from.

But in the world she lived in now it seemed quite different, and Mary knew why that was. It was because there were magic counters in this world and none in the world of William Street. She was beginning to expect everything to be wonderful, but certainly she had not expected to see a doll that spoke. But the funny old man took a doll out of his box that spoke quite distinctly—far more distinctly than little Sally Murphy. It was true the doll could not say many words at present, but as it had once begun to talk, Mary had no doubt that with a little practice it would soon learn to say more, just as Sally had done. Already it said 'Papa' and 'Mama' very nicely.

Mary could not decide which was the more wonderful—a doll that could talk or a doll that could walk! This doll could walk quite a long way, for the old man took it to the farthest corner of the room, placed it on the floor, stooped over it as if he were telling it what to do, then when he took his hand away and stood upright, there, to Mary's astonishment, was the odd little doll moving its legs in the most comical manner and walking across the room entirely without help. There was a kitten that meowed and ran; there was a house with nice bright red walls and doors and windows, and with beds already made in the rooms, for the dolls to live in; and there were ever so many more things for Mary to choose from, and she chose a good many.

When the man had gone away she lay back in her chair with a flushed face, and Sister Agatha sent Evangeline away. But after Mary had been asleep that afternoon, Evangeline came to see her again.

'Well,' she asked, 'and how do you like all your new things?'

'Very much indeed,' answered Mary; 'I think they're lovely.'

'Ah! well, I am glad you are not like the discontented boy,' said Evangeline.

'Is that a story?' exclaimed Mary. 'Do tell it to me, please!' So Evangeline sat down to tell her the story.

IV

THE STORY OF THE DISCONTENTED BOY AND THE MAGICIAN

A long, long time ago, in a country a great way off, there lived a man who was the King's Grand Vizier. Now the Vizier had a son, who was ten years old, and he caused his father a great deal of unhappiness. For he was a very greedy boy, and he grumbled at everything he had.

As long as anything belonged to some one else he liked it very much, and he cried and made a loud noise until it was given to him. But as soon as it became his own Hassan began to find fault with it. It was just the same with little things or big things—as soon as they were put into his own hands he ceased to care for them.

If he sat at dinner and he had tasted every dish but one, he would ask for that, and say he liked it better than anything else; but when it was put on his plate, he would push it away. 'This is horrid!' he would cry. 'I don't want it. Take it away.' And he would throw it on to the floor, plate and all.

Now, as you may suppose, this conduct vexed the Vizier, and presently things came to such a pass that he could think of nothing but his tiresome son. One day he was summoned to the King's presence.

'The affairs of the kingdom are being neglected,' said the King; 'the people are not paying their taxes, yet nobody's head is cut off. This kind of thing cannot be allowed to go on. If I do not see an improvement very soon I shall cast you into prison.'

The Vizier had a great dread of the prison, for he had sent many persons there and he knew exactly what it was like. So he fell on his knees before the King and confessed that Hassan was the real cause of the neglect.

'Very well,' answered the King, 'I shall not be so unjust as to punish you for your son's offence, but if he does not become satisfied within a month from to-day, I shall condemn him to death. But as you have served me faithfully so many years, I shall allow you the privilege of choosing whether his head shall be cut off with an axe or a sword.'

The Vizier thanked the King for granting him this privilege and returned to his own palace; he knew it was useless to speak to Hassan because he had spoken to him so often before, so he sent for a Magician who lived a few miles away. When the Magician heard of the Vizier's distress, he at once promised to help him.

'I believe I can cure your son,' he said, as soon as he entered the palace, 'and I do not think it will take so long as a month.'

'I should like the cure to be perfect,' answered the Vizier, 'and then I shall be able to attend properly to the King's business again.'

'There is only one condition,' said the Magician. 'Hassan must come with me wherever I choose to take him.'

'That is impossible!' cried the Vizier; 'as long as I forbid his going, he will wish to go, but as soon as I give my permission, he will change his mind and insist upon staying at home.'

'He will not have time to change his mind,' said the Magician, and then an attendant was summoned, and a few minutes later Hassan entered the room with a scowl on his face, whereupon the Vizier looked at the Magician as much as to say, 'There! what did I tell you!'

'Good afternoon, Hassan,' said the Magician.

'It isn't a good afternoon,' answered Hassan, scowling more fiercely than before.

'Well, never mind,' said the Magician; 'I daresay it will be a good afternoon to-morrow.'

'Oh yes, to-morrow, I daresay,' answered Hassan. 'What's the use of that?'

'It's very fortunate for me,' said the Magician; 'because I shall be on my travels. I start on a pleasant journey to-day.'

'I wish I might start on a journey,' grumbled Hassan. 'I've always wanted to go on a journey, only they'll never let me.'

'In the place I am going to,' said the Magician with an agreeable smile, 'everybody is allowed to ask for anything he sees.'

'What's the use of asking for things if you don't get them!' exclaimed Hassan.

'But in the place I am going to,' said the Magician, smiling still more pleasantly, if that were possible, 'you may ask for anything you see, and nothing you ask for is refused.'

'That must be a very nice place,' said Hassan; 'just the place I should like to live in, only of course my father wouldn't let me.'

Then the Magician rose, paying no attention to the reproachful glances which the poor Vizier cast upon his son, and crossing the room, he stopped at Hassan's side.

'If you like to come with me on a short visit, you may do so,' he said.

'I shouldn't like it at all,' said Hassan. 'I think it would be horrid.'

'But,' exclaimed the Vizier angrily, 'you said you would like to go.'

'Not for a short visit,' answered Hassan. 'What's the use of a short visit?'

'Very well,' said the Magician, smiling agreeably; 'you may stay as long as you please. And you shall have everything you see.'

'Thank you,' answered Hassan, though he did not look very thankful, 'I don't want anything.'

'Then, come along,' cried the Magician, stepping towards the door.

'But I am not going,' answered Hassan. 'I shan't go. I don't want to go.'

'Come along,' said the Magician cheerfully, and he fixed his small bright eyes on Hassan's face as he spoke. Although the Magician was some yards away, Hassan felt obliged to rise from his chair, and to follow him out into the corridor. Hassan would far sooner have stayed where he was, yet he knew he could not stay even to say good-bye to his father, and he began to feel fonder of the Vizier than he had ever felt before.

Still it was of no use. Hassan really did not know why he went, only that somehow it seemed that he could not stay when the Magician looked at him. So Hassan followed the Magician along the corridor, to the great astonishment of everybody who saw him, for when he did not wish to go anywhere, which was usually the case, he had to be dragged or carried. But to-day Hassan followed the Magician as obediently as a dog follows his master.

Outside the palace he saw a curious-looking carriage drawn by two zebras. 'Step in,' said the Magician politely, and though Hassan would have preferred to stay where he was, he stepped in

as the Magician told him.

'I want to walk,' he said, when the Magician was seated beside him and the zebras had started.

'You will have plenty of walking to-morrow,' was the answer.

'You said I might have everything I asked for,' Hassan grumbled.

'When you get there,' said the Magician.

'Where?' asked Hassan.

'Where we are going to,' answered the Magician. 'I always keep my promises. Anything you see you may ask for, and anything you ask for you shall have.' They continued the journey many miles, and presently Hassan wondered where they were to sleep.

'I never go to sleep,' said the Magician; 'time is too precious. But I don't wish to hinder you from sleeping if you are used to it. You may sleep here.'

'How can I sleep here?' grumbled Hassan, but a few minutes later his eyes closed and his chin fell on his chest, and as the carriage was driven swiftly along the road, Hassan's head waggled about very funnily. Presently he was awakened, and opening his eyes he saw that the Magician had been shaking him worse than the carriage.

'I want my breakfast!' he exclaimed.

'I never have breakfast,' answered the Magician; 'but if you like you may breakfast to-morrow.'

'You said I might have anything I asked for,' said Hassan, beginning to feel rather miserable.

'So I did,' the Magician admitted; 'anything you see you may ask for, you know, but I don't think you can see any breakfast, besides,' the Magician added, 'you must wait until we are there, and we have a long way to go yet.'

He told Hassan to get out of the carriage, which was at once driven away. 'Come along,' said the Magician, with a smiling face, and Hassan felt compelled to follow, although he would far sooner have gone home again. He could see nothing but grass all around and the great trees that shaded it from the burning sun. As he trudged after the Magician, Hassan continued to grumble about his breakfast until it was dinner-time, and it seemed useless to grumble about breakfast any more. He began to wonder where the Magician was taking him, because, though he had walked for many hours, he had seen nothing but trees.

One thing astonished Hassan very much indeed. Although it was still quite early in the afternoon, the farther he walked the darker it grew, and at first he thought the dimness was due to the trees. But he noticed there were not nearly so many trees as there had been, and yet the light became fainter and fainter.

'I should like to have some dinner!' cried Hassan, as he followed the Magician. 'I'm hungry, and you promised I might have anything I asked for.'

'When we get there,' answered the Magician; 'we are not there yet, you see, but when we arrive I shall keep my word.'

Hassan wished he had never seen the Magician; he felt so sleepy that he could scarcely prevent his eyes from closing, but still he walked on and on; and still it grew darker and darker. There were no trees now, only a few low bushes, and the sky looked a curious dark colour. There were no stars, no moon; Hassan could scarcely see his way, and gradually everything became invisible except the Magician, until presently he disappeared too. It seemed darker than the middle of the night; when Hassan looked upwards he saw nothing but blackness; when he looked down he saw nothing but blackness; to the right and the left it was the same; he could not see his own hands when he held them close to his nose, and yet his eyes were quite widely open all the time.

'Are you here?' he cried, to make sure the Magician had not gone away and left him alone.

'No,' was the answer, 'we are there now!'

'I'm glad of that,' said Hassan; 'I want some light.'

'Very sorry!' exclaimed the Magician.

'And something to eat,' said Hassan.

'Very sorry,' answered the Magician again, but he did not sound sorry in the least. Hassan thought he sounded quite glad, though there did not seem much to be glad about. Then Hassan began to stamp about on the grass just as if he were at home, and he scowled until his forehead was full of wrinkles, only he might as well have laughed, for there was nobody to see him.

'Now,' said the Magician, 'I hope you will make yourself quite at home. Everybody does exactly as he likes here. What should you like to do?'

'You said I could have anything I asked for,' answered Hassan, 'and I should like something nice to eat.'

'Well,' said the Magician very civilly, 'you can look round and choose anything you see.'

'What's the use of looking round,' asked Hassan, 'if I can't see anything?'

'No, no!' cried the Magician very politely, 'of course not. No use at all.'

'Then why did you tell me to look?' said Hassan.

'Anything you see you may ask for,' said the Magician, as if he were muttering to himself, 'and anything you ask for you may have.'

Hassan felt so cross at hearing these words again that he flung himself on the grass and kicked his legs about and began to cry. He always made a great noise when he cried, but the Magician seemed not to mind in the least. Presently Hassan fell asleep and dreamed he was at a great feast, where the table was loaded with large joints of meat, and with turkeys and pheasants, with a round Christmas pudding at one end. The Magician was just going to carve, and he said that Hassan might ask for whatever he saw. 'I'll have turkey first,' Hassan dreamed he said, 'and then pheasant and then Christmas pudding.' All the things he named were placed upon a plate at once; only, just as he was going to taste the turkey, the plate fell to the ground and Hassan awoke. He felt so hungry and the dream seemed so real, that he sat up and began to feel on the grass for his plate.

'Hullo!' cried the Magician, 'have you lost anything?'

'I dreamed I was just going to have some turkey,' said Hassan.

'Ah, well!' answered the Magician, 'you may ask for anything you see, you know.' But it seemed darker than ever; Hassan could see nothing and he began to feel very miserable indeed. He never learned how long he stayed with the Magician, though it appeared a long time while it lasted, and he began to think it would never come to an end. He did not know whether it was days or weeks, only he felt hungry all the time, and at last he could think of nothing but home. He wished he was back there, and he made up his mind that if ever he did get back, he would not grumble any more.

Now it was a strange thing that whilst Hassan sat on the grass, with his hands clasped round his knees and his eyes on the ground, although of course he could see nothing, it began to grow a little lighter. And the more he made up his mind not to grumble the lighter it grew, so that at last he fancied he could see the Magician. And the Magician was sitting cross-legged on the ground eating some dinner which looked exactly like what Hassan had seen in his dream.

'I'll have that!' cried Hassan the moment he could see it.

'With pleasure,' said the Magician, and he rose and brought the plate to Hassan. Unfortunately Hassan was so much in the habit of grumbling at everything the moment he received it that, as soon as he took the plate in his hand, he said—

'This must have been a poor old turkey and very badly cooked too.'

Before he finished speaking, the light faded, and it grew so dark that he could not see the plate. Worse than that, Hassan could not feel it, but he could hear the Magician as if he were enjoying his meal very much indeed.

'I say!' exclaimed Hassan.

'Well, what do you say?'

'I beg your pardon. I didn't mean it—really,' said Hassan, and suddenly it began to grow lighter again—so light that he could see the Magician, who seemed to have a fresh plate full of turkey. 'I'll have that, please!' cried Hassan, and once more the Magician brought him the plate. As soon as Hassan took it in his hands, he looked at the nice white slices, and he was just going to grumble as usual when he remembered in time. So instead of saying what he intended to say, he ate his dinner in a sensible manner.

And now Hassan began to understand that when he felt inclined to grumble the darkness grew blacker, but that when he made up his mind not to grumble any more, it seemed almost as light as day. As he sat staring straight in front of him, the Magician came to his side—

'Well, Hassan,' he said, 'what is the matter? What are you staring at so attentively?'

'I—I fancied I saw myself at home again,' answered Hassan.

'Ah! I suppose you saw yourself grumbling as usual,' said the Magician.

'No, I wasn't grumbling. I was very happy.'

'Anything you see you may ask for,' answered the Magician, 'and anything you ask for you may have.'

'Why, then!' exclaimed Hassan before the Magician had time to finish speaking, 'of course I'll have that!'

'What?' asked the Magician.

'I saw myself at home again, you know—'

'You were contented,' answered the Magician, 'you mustn't forget that.'

'No,' said Hassan, 'I won't.' And then, to his great surprise, he found himself at home again. He was sitting in the palace garden, rubbing his eyes just as if he had fallen asleep after dinner. But although everything else looked very much the same as it had done before he went away with the Magician, Hassan knew of one thing that was different, and that was himself. For, you see, he had become the contented boy he fancied he saw in the forest—Hassan had become just what he wished to be.

V

MARY SEES THE WINGS, AS WELL AS SOME OTHER WONDERFUL THINGS

'Well,' said Sister Agatha, as she put on one of Mary's new dresses a few mornings later (it was the plum-coloured dress), 'what do you think of your fairy-godmother by this time?'

'I think she's lovely,' answered Mary; 'only I do want to see her wings!'

'You are going to see them,' said Sister Agatha; 'she is going to pay you a visit when she is wearing them one evening. What do you think of that?'

'When?' cried Mary.

'Very soon indeed,' was the answer, 'so don't be surprised.'

Mary could think of nothing else but Sister Agatha's promise that she should see Evangeline's wings, and one evening about a week later, just before she was going to be undressed, she had her wish.

She had sat up rather later than usual, but the electric light had not been switched on and the room was almost dark. Presently, Sister Agatha rose and left Mary alone, and as the child sat in the arm-chair, waiting to be put to bed, she began to feel sleepy.

Every now and then she closed her eyes, and when she opened them she was surprised to see how much darker the room had become. Then she heard laughing outside the door, and the next moment it opened and Sister Agatha entered.

'Now you won't be frightened, will you?' she said.

'Oh no, of course I won't,' answered Mary in a rather shaky voice. As she spoke the room became suddenly so light that her eyes were dazzled and she could see nothing. And a few moments later, when she could see things again, she was scarcely able to believe they were real.

Close to the door stood Evangeline Royal. On her head she wore a crown of diamonds which glistened and sparkled amongst her golden hair. Her shoulders were uncovered and she wore a dress of pure white, and so long that it quite hid her shoes. She carried a long wand in her right hand, and the most wonderful of all! Mary saw her wings. They looked smaller than she expected, and they were so thin that she could see right through them, just as you can see through a window.

'Can you fly with them?' asked Mary as soon as she could speak.

'No,' answered Evangeline. 'They are not of the slightest use—they are only for show, you see.'

'Where are you going?' cried Mary.

'She is going to hold her Court, of course,' said Sister Agatha; 'I should have thought any one would have known that.'

'Is she going to hold it here?' asked Mary. 'In this very room, I mean?'

'The idea of such a thing!' exclaimed Sister Agatha. 'Where do you imagine all the kings and queens and the other wonderful folk would put themselves?'

'Then I shan't see it,' said Mary in a very disappointed tone.

'I wish she could just peep at us!' cried Evangeline, turning towards Sister Agatha.

'I daresay I could carry her down,' was the answer.

'Nobody would notice her if she stayed behind the band,' said Evangeline.

'What would they do if they did notice me?' asked Mary feeling a little frightened.

'Ah! well,' answered Sister Agatha, 'there's no telling what they wouldn't do to us.'

'Still,' said Mary, 'you would be there, too, wouldn't you?'

'Neither of us will be there if some one doesn't go to bed at once!' cried Sister Agatha.

'Oh, isn't it to-night?' asked Mary.

'Not until to-morrow,' was the answer. 'Don't you know that nice things are generally to-morrow?'

Mary turned to look at Evangeline's wings once more before she left the room, and then Sister Agatha put her to bed. To-morrow was one of the most exciting days she had ever passed. For one thing she knew she was going to leave the room for the first time since she had entered it. She had no idea what she should see on the other side of the door, she could only wonder about it just as you may wonder what there is on the other side of the moon.

She sat up much later than usual, too, and she liked that; then she wore the new outdoor jacket over her dress, although Sister Agatha said she was not going out.

'But where are we going?' asked Mary.

'Well,' answered Sister Agatha, 'I think you will say it looks very much like fairy-land.'

'How shall I get there?' asked Mary.

'I am going to carry you, of course,' said Sister Agatha. 'All you have to do is to shut your eyes and keep very still and not to open them until I give you leave.'

Mary shut her eyes so tightly that her little face was full of wrinkles. 'Oh!' she exclaimed, opening them the next moment, 'will the prince be there? Shall I see him?'

'It wouldn't be anything without the prince,' said Sister Agatha, and then Mary shut her eyes again and knew that she was lifted in Sister Agatha's arms. Although she felt very curious to know where she was being carried to, she did not peep once, because she felt afraid of spoiling everything. Presently she knew that Sister Agatha had opened a door, and although her eyes were still tightly closed, Mary felt sure she was in a very light place, the darkness looked so red, you see.

'Please, mayn't I open my eyes now?' she cried.

But she could not hear Sister Agatha's answer, because there was such a loud noise in her ears. She must be close to a band, and a great many persons seemed to be laughing and talking at once. Mary was just thinking it was of no use; she must open her eyes just for a moment to see what was going on around her when she felt Sister Agatha's lips close to her ear.

'You won't be frightened,' she whispered, 'and you mustn't cry out or even speak. Now, open your eyes!'

But though Mary opened her eyes at once, it was some time before she could see anything clearly. It seemed exactly the same as last night, when she first saw Evangeline's wings. The bright light dazzled her, although it was not very long before she knew that she must be really in fairy-land, as Sister Agatha had said.

In front of her were a lot of men in light blue uniforms, with silver lace on their coats, playing all manner of curious instruments. Beyond the band and a little lower, Mary saw an enormous room with no carpet on the floor, and each fresh person astonished her more than the last. Some were dancing, some were sitting down, some were talking and laughing, but although there were so many of them, not one looked cross or sad, which was quite different from anything Mary had been used to.

Of course, she recognised some of the people at once, and she would certainly have called out their names if Sister Agatha had not placed a hand over her lips. She saw Bluebeard, and Jack-the-Giant-killer, Old Mother Hubbard, Aladdin with his lamp, her dear Cinderella, Puss-in-Boots, the White Cat, and ever so many more whose portraits she had seen in Sister Agatha's books upstairs. As to ordinary fairies, there were far too many to count—some tall, some short, some fat and some thin, some fair and some dark, but all with wings exactly like Evangeline's. And yet it was quite easy to pick out Evangeline Royal from the rest, and any one could see that she was their queen.

'Do tell me which is the prince?' asked Mary. 'Oh!' she said, in a very excited whisper the next instant, 'that must be the prince, that one in the white and gold clothes. Look, he's going to dance with Evangeline!'

Mary was quite right. The prince offered Evangeline his right hand and they came to the middle of the large room together. Then the band, which had stopped for a little while, began to play again, and the prince and Evangeline began to dance.

'How lovely the prince looks!' said Mary; 'does he always look like that?'

'Hus—s—sh!' said Sister Agatha, 'or they won't let us stay.'

'Oh, do please let us stay,' answered Mary in such a low whisper that Sister Agatha scarcely knew she had spoken at all. But if ever she stepped away from the band, which seemed to make a great noise close to Mary's ears, Mary began to look tearful, so, although she felt rather heavy and Sister Agatha's arms were beginning to ache, she let the child stay on, until presently she found that she was fast asleep. And the next thing Mary knew was that she was sitting on her own bed, whilst Sister Agatha took off her stockings, and all the wonders she had seen were at an end for the present.

VI

MARY IS TAKEN AWAY

Mary quite believed that she was living in an enchanted place where she would always be able to have everything she wanted, and even a great many things she did not want in the least. Where there would always be plenty of nice things to eat and drink, and Evangeline to tell her stories as nobody had done before.

She hoped she should never see Mrs. Coppert again as long as she lived, because Evangeline had said that she should not go away until her foot was well again, and although it was certainly better it was not quite well yet.

But there were times when Mary felt just a little afraid, for now and then she dreamed she was back at William Street, where everything seemed much worse than it used to be. And one morning the tall man with the long beard looked at her foot a great while, and when it was covered over again, he quite frightened Mary.

'It is very much better,' he said, 'and there is no reason why she should not try to walk. In fact, the sooner she goes away the better.'

'There now,' said Sister Agatha when he had gone, 'what do you think of that? Won't it be nice to walk again? You will like that, won't you?'

'No,' answered Mary; 'I shan't like it at all. I don't want to walk.'

'Oh yes, you will like it!' said Sister Agatha. 'Now suppose you try to walk across the room.'

Mary rose from her chair, and Sister Agatha held her hand while she limped along by her side. It felt odd to be walking again, and Sister Agatha suggested she should race with her doll. So the doll was placed in a corner, and then Sister Agatha turned the key, which was necessary, she said, because the doll could not eat as Mary did, and the race began. But although Mary seemed to walk much more slowly than the doll, who made a great fuss whenever it walked a few yards, she reached the door first. Sister Agatha clapped her hands, and gave Mary a prize; she gave her a lump of sugar.

But although Mary laughed about the race, she began to look miserable again when she remembered that the tall man had said she was to go away, for of all things in the world she did not wish to leave Evangeline and Sister Agatha. When Evangeline came to see her that afternoon, Mary clasped her small arms round her neck and clung to her, and cried, 'Please don't send me away! Pray don't send me back to Mrs. Coppert!'

'Why, my dear child,' said Evangeline; 'I am not going to send you back. I have never dreamed of such a thing.'

'But he said I was to go away,' answered Mary.

'So you are going away,' Evangeline explained; 'but not to William Street. Sister Agatha and I are going with you, and I think you will like it very much indeed.'

'I shall if you and Sister Agatha go,' said Mary, and now she felt more satisfied, and she spent a happy afternoon with her toys. She went to bed quite happily, but when her head had been some time on the pillow Evangeline entered the room.

'Poor child!' she said, 'is she asleep yet?'

'Yes,' answered Sister Agatha, looking down at Mary's closed eyes; 'she did not lie awake long to-night.'

'How alarmed she was at the idea of leaving us,' said Evangeline quietly.

'And yet,' answered Sister Agatha, 'it is certain she can't stay here for ever. You will have to make up your mind what is to be done before long. Mary will soon be quite well again; besides, you will have other things to think of.'

This conversation made Mary feel uncomfortable again. Of course she ought not to have listened to it; she ought to have sat up in bed, or at least to have called out to let Evangeline know she was not asleep. But the fact was that Mary felt so interested to hear anything about herself that she could not resist the temptation to listen, and after Evangeline had gone downstairs again she still kept her eyes shut, although it was late before she really fell asleep that night.

There were so many other things to think of that she soon forgot all about her fear of going back to William Street, especially when Sister Agatha began to pack a trunk with Mary's clothes and toys. She told her they were going into the country—she and Evangeline and Mary. Of course Mary had no idea what the country could be like, but she tried to find out by asking a great many questions. Sister Agatha said there were fields instead of houses, and trees instead of lamp-posts, but Mary did not understand very clearly what a field was like; still the morning came when they were to start, and Mary was ready first. When she stood before the looking-glass with her new hat and jacket on, really she hardly knew herself. It seemed as if Evangeline must have changed her as Cinderella was changed, for you remember that even Cinderella's sisters did not recognise

her at the ball.

Mary Brown stood before the tall glass, and she saw a little girl with a rather pale face; it looked very clean, and her brown hair was carefully tied back with ribbon. She wore tan-coloured stockings and high button boots, and altogether it was a little difficult to believe she was the same Mary Brown who used to wear the ragged dress and to make mud pies in the gutter.

She went downstairs holding Sister Agatha's hand, and on reaching the hall she saw two very tall men in pale blue coats and white stockings. Although they looked quite young men their hair was white, and one of them took Mary in his arms to carry her across the pavement to a carriage that was waiting before the door. It seemed so nice to be out in the sunshine that Mary laughed aloud, but she was soon seated in the carriage with Evangeline and Sister Agatha; then the horses started, and presently they reached a large railway station. Mary knew all about trains, because there was a bridge over William Street, and whilst she played in the road they used to rush by overhead with a noise like thunder. But she had never entered a train before, so that she felt curious to see what it would be like inside. She thought it seemed very nice, with soft blue cushions to sit upon, and windows to look out at.

Presently the train began to move, and looking out at the window Mary saw rows and rows of houses which looked very much like those in William Street. But when the houses were left behind Mary opened her eyes very widely; she thought she had never seen anything quite so wonderful as this! Not even the wonderful things she had seen the night Sister Agatha carried her downstairs had astonished her so much! For there were no houses, and she had never seen ground without houses until now.

She looked upon wide open spaces, with dozens of trees and oxen in green meadows, and the consequence was that she began to ask so many questions that Sister Agatha suggested that she should sit down and try to go to sleep.

'Oh no, thank you,' answered Mary, 'I'm not at all sleepy. I'd much sooner look out of window.'

'I thought perhaps you would like me to tell you a story,' said Evangeline.

'Yes, I should like you to tell me a story!' cried Mary, and she climbed down from the seat and nestled close to Evangeline's side.

VII

THE STORY OF THE LITTLE GIRL, THE DOG, AND THE DOLL

Once upon a time there was a little girl whose name was Bertha. She had no brother or sister, but she had two very dear friends: one was a doll with a broken nose and only half an arm; the other was a white terrier with a brown patch on his back, a short stump of a tail, and a cold black nose.

The dog's name was Samuel, and whilst he was very fond of Bertha he was deeply attached to Moggy too; Moggy, you understand, was the doll. Moggy might often be seen leaning against the nursery fender, with Samuel by her side blinking solemnly at the fire. But every now and then he would turn to look at Moggy, and put out his tongue and waggle his stumpy tail from side to side on the carpet.

Though Samuel wore a handsome collar he had quite forgotten what a chain was, for he had not been tied up for years. He never slept in the old kennel outside the kitchen door, because he preferred the mat in the hall.

Now, for a long time Moggy had slept on Bertha's pillow, and though Bertha had other dolls who were much prettier than Moggy she never took them to bed with her. But one day—it was Bertha's birthday—her mother bought her the prettiest doll she could find, a doll that opened and shut her eyes.

'I really think,' said Mrs. Western when Bertha bade her good-night, 'you ought to take the new doll to bed with you, or what is the use of having a doll who can go to sleep?'

'What would Moggy do?' asked Bertha, looking doubtful about it.

'Moggy is really too old to be jealous,' answered her mother.

So Bertha said she would take the new doll to bed, then she went upstairs with Samuel who was always in the room whilst she undressed. Bertha slept in a room by herself, but there was a door that led to her mother's room and this stood open all night. Moggy lay on the round table in the middle of the room, and she looked very shabby beside the fine new doll; still Bertha felt sorry for her as she got into bed. She placed the new doll on her pillow and said good-night to the nurse.

'Good-night, Miss Bertha.'

'Don't quite shut the door, please,' said Bertha; and leaving the door a little open as usual the nurse went downstairs, followed by Samuel. And nobody heard anything more of Bertha until the

next morning.

As soon as she awoke she turned to look at her new doll, but to her great astonishment she could not see her. She could not see anything of the new doll, but there lay Moggy on the pillow just as she had done for many months past. Bertha sat up in bed and rubbed her eyes, thinking she could not be quite awake yet, but there was no mistake about it; it was certainly Moggy on her pillow, and there was no sign of the new doll.

'Nurse!' cried Bertha, when it was time to be dressed, 'what have you done with my new doll?'

'Why, Miss Bertha,' answered the nurse, 'you laid her on your pillow last night.'

'But she's not there now,' said Bertha, 'and Moggy is there. I can't see my new doll anywhere!'

The nurse stared at Moggy, and Moggy stared back with her dark eyes at the nurse; then the nurse began to search for the lost doll, but she could not find her anywhere. So she dressed Bertha, who went downstairs to breakfast.

'Mother!' she exclaimed, 'where's my new doll?'

'I thought you were going to take it to bed with you last night,' said Mrs. Western.

'So I did,' answered Bertha; 'and I left poor Moggy on the table, but when I woke this morning the other doll was gone and Moggy was on my pillow.'

'Nonsense,' said Mrs. Western; 'you must be making a mistake,' and Bertha looked as if she was going to cry. 'Sit down to breakfast,' her mother continued, 'and when we have finished we will go upstairs to look for her.'

But although they searched all over the nursery and looked into every corner, and although Samuel trotted about the room with his ears cocked and his tail wagging, the new doll could not be seen.

'Nurse,' said Mrs. Western, 'what can have become of Miss Bertha's new doll? She says she took it to bed with her last night!'

'So she did,' answered the nurse, 'because I gave the doll to Miss Bertha after she was in bed, and Moggy was lying on the table.'

'Then who do you suppose can have taken her away?' exclaimed Mrs. Western. Bertha seemed so disappointed that Mrs. Western took her out that afternoon to buy another doll—not quite such a nice doll as that which had disappeared, but a pretty doll all the same. 'This time,' said Mrs. Western, 'I shall see it laid on your pillow myself,' and she stayed in the nursery whilst Bertha had her bath. Then, as Samuel frisked about the room, Bertha got into bed and Mrs. Western placed the newest doll beside her on the pillow.

'Don't quite shut the door, please!' cried Bertha, and in two minutes she fell fast asleep. But on waking the next morning, it seemed a very strange thing! she found that her newest doll had disappeared whilst Moggy lay peacefully beside her on the pillow. She dressed more quickly than usual and ran downstairs so fast that her mother came out of the dining-room to tell her not to tumble head-foremost to the hall.

'Mother!' cried Bertha, 'she's gone! The doll you bought me yesterday's gone and Moggy was lying on the pillow.'

'Nonsense, Bertha,' said Mrs. Western, 'you must be making a mistake, because I laid her on your pillow myself.'

'She wasn't there when I woke this morning,' answered Bertha.

'Well, I cannot understand it!' cried Mrs. Western.

'I can understand it very easily,' said Mr. Western; 'of course the child is making a mistake. It must have been Moggy she took to bed.'

'I am sure it was not,' answered Mrs. Western; 'besides, what has become of the two new dolls? How do you account for their disappearance?'

'Oh, you will find them in the nursery!' he insisted. 'But to make sure, I will go upstairs with Bertha after breakfast and help her look.' So they all went upstairs together this time: Mr. Western, Mrs. Western, Bertha, and Samuel. And they examined every corner; they opened every cupboard, Samuel sniffed about the fireplace and wagged his tail, but still they saw nothing of either doll. 'Well,' said Mr. Western, 'I really can't lose any more time. You have put the dolls away somewhere and forgotten where.'

'I am positive,' said Mrs. Western, 'that the doll lay on Bertha's pillow last night and Moggy was on this table.'

'I wish you would buy another doll this afternoon,' he replied with a laugh, 'and to-night I will see it safely on Bertha's pillow myself.'

That day Mrs. Western bought a third doll, and when Bertha was comfortably tucked up in bed, her father came to her room to the great delight of Samuel. They all stood beside the bed, and

having made sure that Moggy was on the table, they saw that the new black-haired doll lay beside Bertha.

'There will be no mistake this time,' said Mr. Western, and Samuel wagged his tail as if he thought on the whole his master was quite right. 'There she lies,' said Mr. Western, 'and she isn't likely to move before breakfast-time.'

But he was quite mistaken and also very much surprised. Being dressed early that morning, Mr. Western went to Bertha's room before she was up, she was in fact still asleep.

'This is really very remarkable!' he exclaimed. For there, on the pillow, lay poor Moggy, whilst he could not see the new black-haired doll anywhere. 'I can't buy a new doll every day,' he said when they were all downstairs. 'Besides, it seems to be of no use to buy them.' He looked quite bothered about it; he could not enjoy his breakfast, which was a good thing for Samuel, who had a whole sausage off his plate. 'Well,' said Mr. Western presently, 'I suppose Bertha must have another doll; this will be the fourth in four days! But,' he added, 'I am determined she shall not get away this time. I shall tie her to the bed.'

And this was what he did. He went to Bertha's room after she was in bed, and with a strong piece of string he tied the fourth fair-haired doll to the back of the bedstead. 'There!' exclaimed Mr. Western, 'I don't think this one will disappear.'

It did not disappear. But to his astonishment, when he came to the room before Bertha was awake, he saw two dolls on her pillow: one being the new, fair-haired doll, the other Moggy, whom he had left on the table in the middle of the room.

'I can't understand it at all,' he said at breakfast-time; 'any one would think that Moggy was alive.'

'At all events, she must be jealous,' answered Mrs. Western, while Samuel sat on his haunches begging for bacon.

'Well,' said Mr. Western, 'we shall not have to buy another doll to-day—that will be a change anyhow. But I am determined to find out how it happens. To-night I shall leave the new doll untied and fasten Moggy to the table.'

'Poor Moggy!' cried Bertha, looking quite tearful about it.

When bedtime came, Mr. Western took a piece of cord from his pocket and tied it tightly round Moggy's waist—she had a rather large waist, Moggy was not at all a fashionable doll—then he passed the cord under the table and fastened it securely to the leg. Samuel agreed with Bertha; he did not like to see his dear old friend treated in this way; he seemed very much distressed about it, and Bertha almost thought she heard him growl.

'There, Miss Moggy!' cried Mr. Western; 'I don't think your rest will be disturbed to-night.' And her rest was not disturbed, for when Mr. Western visited the nursery the next morning he found Moggy lying on the table in the middle of the room just as he had left her. 'Ah!' he said to himself, 'I thought so; I thought you would be safe this time!' And he turned towards Bertha's bed.

But where was the new doll? It was certainly not on the pillow where Mr. Western had left it last night! What could have become of it? He looked about the room, but there was no sign of the doll anywhere.

All breakfast-time Mr. Western was silent. He said nothing about the doll, he took no notice of Samuel, but when he rose from his chair, he said in a low, solemn voice—

'I should like you to buy another doll to-day—it need not be an expensive doll, because this will be the fifth doll we have bought in six days. But,' he added, 'it shall certainly be the last.'

So that afternoon Mrs. Western took Bertha out to buy another doll. Now she was growing used to it, Bertha rather liked the idea of having a new doll almost every day. But this doll was not a very nice one. Its hair was not real; it was only painted on its head. Bertha never felt quite at home with the doll, and it did not feel soft and warm when she pressed it against her cheek. Still her mother wished her to take it to bed with her and to leave Moggy on the table.

'Good-night, nurse,' said Bertha; 'don't quite shut the door, please.' She felt just a little disappointed that neither her father nor her mother came up as they had done the last two nights, but she soon fell asleep and forgot all about them.

Bertha had not been asleep many minutes before her door was pushed farther open, and Mr. Western softly entered the bedroom. Crossing the floor on tip-toes, he went to the window and loosening the wide curtains, carefully hid himself behind them. There he stood in a very uncomfortable position without moving for a long time. Now and then Bertha stirred in her sleep, but neither Moggy on the table nor the newest doll with the painted head, who lay on the pillow, moved the hundredth part of an inch. Although the room was dim it was not quite dark, because some light came in from the gas outside on the landing. For a long time Mr. Western stood behind the window-curtain, and presently—it must have been about a quarter to ten—he heard a soft pattering on the floor. Peeping out cautiously from behind the curtain, he saw first the tip of Samuel's nose, then his whole head, and at last his body. And now Mr. Western knew how the dolls had disappeared. He knew that Samuel was the culprit, and he smiled as he waited, expecting to see the terrier jump on the chair which stood beside the table and seize Moggy's

skirt between his teeth. But before Samuel reached the chair he suddenly stopped and began to sniff. Then putting his nose close to the floor he slowly drew near to the window. After sniffing at this for some moments he seemed quickly to change his mind, and turning round he ran out of the room.

Mr. Western at once followed him. On reaching the drawing-room door, Samuel wanted to enter, but Mr. Western said—

'Samuel, come along!' and with his short tail close to his body and his head held very near the ground Samuel followed his master downstairs. At each step the dog looked more guilty, and when Mr. Western stopped outside the kitchen door, Samuel lay flat on the ground and turned over on his back, looking out of the corners of his eyes all the time. But when Mr. Western put his right hand into the kennel which Samuel never slept in, the dog became so excited again that he sprang to his feet and began to frisk about as if he had done something very clever indeed.

Mr. Western put his hand into the old kennel, and you can guess what he drew out. He drew out the black-haired doll, and with this in his hand he looked down and shook his head at Samuel. Then Samuel turned over on to his back again just as he did when he pretended to be dead. One after the other Mr. Western drew out of the kennel five new dolls, and as he stood holding them in his arms Samuel got upon his legs again and began to howl dismally.

'Come upstairs to your mistress, sir,' said Mr. Western, and Samuel followed him upstairs. But when she saw Mr. Western enter the drawing-room with the five dolls in his arms Mrs. Western laughed, and he threw them all into an arm-chair by the fireplace.

'The fact is,' said Mrs. Western, 'Samuel is a great friend of Moggy's, and I suppose he did not like to see another doll put into her place,' and Samuel wagged his tail just as if he understood all she said and quite approved of it. 'So,' she continued, 'he must have gone to the nursery after Bertha was asleep and moved Moggy from the table and put her on the pillow. Then he must have dragged the new doll downstairs. Very naughty of you, Samuel,' said Mrs. Western, shaking her finger.

Samuel crept along the carpet to her shoes and began to lick them.

'Up!' she cried, and as quickly as possible Samuel was in her lap, being kissed and patted and made completely happy. 'What a fine story we shall have to tell Bertha to-morrow!' said Mrs. Western, 'and I really think she will have to take Moggy back to sleep with her.'

VIII

MARY SEES SOMETHING WHICH SHE HAS NEVER SEEN BEFORE

Evangeline finished her story just as the train stopped at a small country station, where a porter opened the door and they all got out. The station looked like a summer-house, and when Mary went outside into the road, she clapped her hands with delight.

There was quite a small crowd of people waiting there, but what pleased Mary the most was a little brown carriage with four cream-coloured ponies. Beside the ponies stood two boys with bright buttons on their coats, whilst three rough, brown dogs jumped up at Evangeline as if they wanted to lick her face. Evangeline drove the ponies, and Mary sat wedged in between her and Sister Agatha. The two boys with bright buttons on their coats climbed into a seat behind; Evangeline flourished the whip, the sun shone, and the dogs ran barking beside the carriage.

'Where are the streets?' asked Mary a few minutes later. 'Oh!' she exclaimed, 'look at the stars on the ground!'

'Stars!' said Sister Agatha.

'Aren't they stars?' asked Mary.

'Why, of course not——'

'Then I know what they are,' said Mary; 'they're the magic counters you give to people when you want them to do things.'

'I'm afraid those don't grow by the roadside,' answered Evangeline; 'these are primroses, Mary.'

'What are primroses?' asked Mary with wondering eyes.

'You see,' said Evangeline, 'every winter the earth grows hard and cold; but when it feels the sun shine on it again it smiles, and to show you how glad it is, it puts forth all these bright little flowers.'

'I see,' answered Mary, still looking as if she did not understand at all.

'Perhaps you would like to pick some,' said Evangeline. She stopped the ponies, and at the same moment the two boys sprang to the ground and stood very stiffly at their heads. Sister Agatha and Mary got out of the carriage and, stooping by the roadside, plucked primrose after primrose,

whilst the three dogs sniffed about as if they wanted to make a meal off the sweet, yellow flowers.

Then they got into the carriage again, and Evangeline flourished her whip. The boys climbed up into the back seat, and Mary felt she should not mind being driven along that sunny road for ever, or at least until tea-time. She had never smelled the air so sweet nor seen the sky so blue.

Presently they reached some shops and small houses, and the people came out to stand at the doors and bow to Evangeline as she passed.

'Why do they do that?' asked Mary.

'If you saw a fairy-queen driving four cream-coloured ponies past your house, don't you think you would bow to show how pleased you felt?' said Sister Agatha.

'I suppose I should,' answered Mary, as they came to a gate with a cottage beside it. Out from the cottage a funny little old woman came with a face the colour of a russet apple; she curtsied so low that her chin seemed almost to touch the ground, and she wore a red cloak. In one hand she carried a stick, and Mary wondered whether she was a witch. She opened the gate, and stood bowing as Evangeline drove through it, and when Mary looked back at her afterwards the little old woman was bowing still.

Now, the road ran through a large park, and in the distance Mary saw a great white house, a part of which shone very brightly in the sunshine.

'Is that the palace?' asked the child.

'Yes,' answered Sister Agatha, 'that is your fairy's palace.'

'Why does it shine so much?' asked Mary.

'Oh, that's to welcome the queen, you know!'

'What are those things?' exclaimed Mary the next minute; 'those funny things with trees on their heads?'

'Those are deer,' said Evangeline.

'But that's what you call me!' cried Mary, with her eyes very widely open.

'Well,' said Sister Agatha, 'you're a dear too, only a different kind of dear.'

'I can't run so fast,' answered Mary. For as she spoke the deer began to trot away, then they stopped again, and one that was bigger than the rest stood in front whilst they all watched the carriage.

Several people stood at the door of the house, which seemed to be partly built of glass. All the people were young like Evangeline, and they all appeared pleased to see her. But Mary felt a little disappointed that none of them took any notice of her, and very few spoke to Sister Agatha, who took Mary's hand, and led her into the house. They passed through a wide hall with animals' heads hanging on the walls, and there was a large table with a green top and red and white balls on it.

'Where are their bodies?' asked Mary, as she walked upstairs with Sister Agatha.

'Whose bodies?'

'Belonging to the great heads downstairs?' said Mary.

'Oh!' answered Sister Agatha, 'I daresay their bodies have been turned into men.'

'I never heard of animals' bodies being turned into men before,' said Mary. 'Did Evangeline do that?' she asked; but before Sister Agatha answered she led Mary into a pretty room with two beds in it. And Mary became so deeply interested in the room that she forgot all about the animals' heads. She looked into each corner; she wanted to know which bed she was to sleep in, and then she went to one of the three windows.

'Sister Agatha!' she exclaimed the next moment, 'Sister Agatha!'

'What is the matter now?' asked Sister Agatha, with a smile.

'Do come here!' cried Mary excitedly; 'do come here! Look!' she said, pointing out at the window; 'there are two skies. This is a wonderful place!'

'I only see one,' answered Sister Agatha, coming to her side.

'But look! there are two. There's one up above and another down there.'

'That is the sea,' said Sister Agatha. 'Haven't you seen the sea before? But, of course, you have not. Yes,' said Sister Agatha quietly, as she placed a hand on Mary's shoulder, 'the sea is very wonderful!'

'What is the sea?' asked Mary.

'A great, great piece of water——'

'The same as we drink?' asked Mary.

'It would not be at all nice to drink,' was the answer. 'It would taste salt, you know.'

'Then what's the use of it if you can't drink it?' said Mary. Then she suddenly began to jump about more excitedly than ever. 'Look! look!' she cried. 'Look at that funny thing with smoke coming out of it! How fast it goes! What is that?'

'That is a ship,' Sister Agatha explained. 'It takes people on long journeys.'

'Where does it take them?' asked Mary.

'To countries a long way off.'

'Farther than we've come to-day?' cried Mary.

'Yes,' said Sister Agatha, 'a great deal farther—to countries where there are all kinds of wonderful things to be seen.'

'Not more wonderful than there are here,' said Mary.

'No,' answered Sister Agatha; 'they only seem more wonderful because we are not used to them. Everything is wonderful, you know; only we become so accustomed to things we see every day that they don't seem wonderful any longer. Now there's nothing more wonderful than a little girl, unless it is a big girl.'

'Oh, I think there is!' said Mary. 'I think ships are much more wonderful, and the sea, and the ponies, and primroses, and Evangeline, and——'

'And tea!' exclaimed Sister Agatha. 'I am going to ring for it, and then, when you have had tea, it will be time to go to bed. Now,' she added, 'we will pull down the blind.'

IX

EVANGELINE GIVES MARY SOME MAGIC COUNTERS

Sister Agatha felt afraid that Mary would be too excited to go to sleep that night, but as soon as her head touched the pillow she shut her eyes, although she dreamed of all manner of strange things. When she awoke the next morning Sister Agatha was already dressed, and as the blinds had been drawn up, Mary slipped out of bed and limped to the window.

Although her foot was a great deal better, she still walked as if she was lame, and she soon grew tired. She limped to the window, and if the sea had looked beautiful yesterday, it looked far more beautiful with the morning sun shining on it. When Mary was dressed, Sister Agatha took her downstairs to a smaller room, with open glass doors instead of windows, and when she stepped through them she found herself in a lovely garden. Some men who were digging in it touched their caps to Mary, and she said—

'Good morning,' and felt that she was quite an important little person. Then Sister Agatha called her into the room again, and they sat down to breakfast. 'I wish I could go to the sea,' said Mary.

'So you shall,' answered Sister Agatha, 'but not this morning. I am going to show you the park this morning.'

'This afternoon, then?'

'This afternoon there will be the Maypole,' said Sister Agatha.

'What's a Maypole?' asked Mary.

'I knew you would say that,' said Sister Agatha; 'but I am afraid you must wait until you see it.'

'Where's Evangeline?' cried Mary presently. 'I wish she could have breakfast with us!'

'The idea of such a thing,' was the answer. 'Evangeline has a great deal to do and a lot of friends to entertain.'

'Does the prince live here?' asked Mary.

'He lives next door,' said Sister Agatha; 'only next door is a quarter of a mile away.'

'How funny!' exclaimed Mary.

'And some day,' said Sister Agatha, 'he will go to live a long way off, and Evangeline will go with him—that will be very soon now.'

'Will she take me?' asked Mary, looking a little anxious.

'No,' said Sister Agatha quietly; 'I don't think she will want either of us, dear.'

'Shall I stay here?' asked Mary.

'No, you certainly can't stay here.'

'Then what shall I do?' cried Mary, putting out her lower lip, and looking as if she were going to cry.

Sister Agatha passed her right hand over the little girl's brown hair, and stared rather sadly into her face: 'I am sure I don't know what will happen,' she answered. 'But come, we will put on our clothes and go into the garden.'

When once they were out of the house, there were a great many things to see. There were the chickens to begin with, dozens of them, and they all came round Mary cackling so loudly that she could hardly hear herself speak. Then she went into a field where there were a lot of sheep with tiny frisking lambs, and into another field where six brown calves stood close together by the gate, and would not move to let Sister Agatha pass through. On the way home they went into a house built of glass. It felt very hot, and there were ever so many bunches of grapes hanging from the roof. And in the afternoon there was the Maypole. Mary stood in front of the house a little way from Evangeline and the prince and the other people, but they all seemed to be laughing and talking too much to look at Mary.

She felt disappointed that Evangeline took no notice of her, and she held Sister Agatha's hand more tightly. It was true that Sister Agatha was not quite so pretty as Evangeline nor so young, and she always wore the same dress, but still she was very nice for all that. Mary had always felt she belonged to Evangeline, because it was Evangeline who took her away from William Street. Besides, Sister Agatha seemed more like an ordinary person, only nicer and kinder than any one Mary had ever known, but Evangeline was not an ordinary person at all.

The Maypole stood before the door with a crown of flowers at the top, and a lot of prettily dressed children around it. Each child held a coloured ribbon in one hand, and they all sang as they danced round the Maypole winding and unwinding the ribbons. Mary thought it was all very nice, only she would have liked to hold one of the ribbons too, though it was true she did not know much about dancing, even if her foot had been quite well.

But the most delightful thing Mary had ever seen was the sea. It had been surprising when she looked at it from the window, but when Sister Agatha took her on to the beach, and her feet sank into the soft sand, and there were so many nice wet things to pick up, Mary began to laugh and to clap her hands for joy.

She liked to see the waves curling towards her, then to watch whilst they changed from green to the purest white, and just when she thought they were going to wet her shoes, they ran away again with a noise that made Mary think they were laughing at her, as if they were only playing and quite enjoying the game.

'There's another ship!' cried Mary. 'I wonder where it's going to?' she said, looking up into Sister Agatha's face.

'A long, long way,' was the answer. 'To a place where the people are different from us. They are all black, and they don't wear clothes.'

'What do they do when it's cold?' asked Mary.

'It's never cold in those countries,' said Sister Agatha. 'It is always very hot—far hotter than it is here.'

'Oh, then that's fairy-land, too!' Mary exclaimed.

'Yes, every place is full of wonders, you know,' answered Sister Agatha.

'All except William Street,' said Mary, and Sister Agatha took her hand and they walked slowly back to the house. The next day happened to be wet, and during the afternoon Evangeline came to see Mary for the first time since she left London. But when Mary had made up her mind for a nice chat, or perhaps for a story, Sister Agatha gave her a picture-book and told her to sit down.

'We have very serious matters to discuss,' she said, 'so you must keep still and not speak a word.'

Mary opened the book, but her attention soon turned from the pictures to Evangeline, who was sitting at a round table with a pencil in her hand making figures. Presently Evangeline took a purse from her pocket, and emptied it on to the table.

'I know what those are!' exclaimed Mary, unable to keep silent any longer. 'They're the magic counters! I wish I might have one,' she said.

'What should you do with it?' asked Evangeline.

'I should give it to some one when I wanted anything done very much,' said Mary.

'You may have one if you like,' answered Evangeline, and Mary eagerly held forth her hand. That evening Sister Agatha gave her a purse to keep her treasure in, but Mary was always taking it out to look at it and to make sure it was safe.

She had never had anything in her life that she liked so much. It was not only that it was bright and pretty to look at, but it made her feel so much safer. If she wanted anything done—anything very important—she could give some one the magic counter, and he would be sure to do it. Not

that there seemed anything that Mary wanted done very particularly, only to see a little more of Evangeline. As it was, she saw hardly anybody but Sister Agatha, of whom she grew fonder each day. The fact was, they were all busily preparing for a great and important event, and sometimes even Sister Agatha was too busy to give much time to Mary.

Mary would have liked to see more of Evangeline, but there was another person whom she did not wish to see at all, and that was Mrs. Coppert. She had made up her mind to keep her magic counter lest Mrs. Coppert should ever try to take her back to William Street, then she would use it to send Mrs. Coppert away again.

But although Mary had quite decided to keep the counter for the benefit of Mrs. Coppert, she was tempted to change her mind one day. It was in the afternoon; she was sitting by the window that opened on to the garden, and being quite by herself she felt rather lonely. Then she saw Evangeline pass the window.

'Please come in!' Mary cried. 'I'm all alone!' and, stepping into the garden, she caught hold of Evangeline's dress.

'I'm afraid I haven't time to come in just now,' answered Evangeline, standing outside the window.

'Do come in and tell me a story!' pleaded Mary.

'I will try to tell you a story to-morrow,' said Evangeline.

'No, to-day!' said Mary, and, as Evangeline shook her head, Mary suddenly recollected her magic counter. She felt she wanted so much to hear a story that she could not even save the magic counter for Mrs. Coppert. So she put her hand in her pocket, and took out her purse, but unfortunately she could not open it.

'I want you to open it,' said Mary, holding out the purse to Evangeline. When the purse was opened Mary took it back, and she made up her mind that she would not quite shut it another time. Then she managed to take out the flat, round, yellow thing, which she placed in Evangeline's hand.

'What is this for?' asked Evangeline, looking a good deal surprised.

'It's one of the magic counters, you know,' said Mary, 'and I want you to tell me a story—a fairy story, please.'

Now as this was the first time she had used the magic counter, Mary felt a little anxious to see how it would act, and at all events she hoped Evangeline would give it back to her again, although she did not feel at all sure about it. She was greatly relieved to see Evangeline smile and look at the watch which she wore on her wrist.

'You can put this back in your purse again,' said Evangeline, and entering the room she sat down and drew Mary to her side.

'You'll tell me the story all the same,' answered Mary, as she put the magic counter back into her purse.

'Oh yes, I must, you see!' cried Evangeline with a laugh; 'only it will have to be rather a short one. You said nothing about the length.'

'Not too short,' said Mary, 'and about fairies, please;' and then she nestled snugly against Evangeline as she began the tale.

X

THE STORY OF THE PRINCE, THE BLUE-BIRD, AND THE CAGE

The Princess Fantosina had a very beautiful voice, and whilst walking in the palace gardens one day in spring, she began to sing. She was about to leave off singing and to re-enter the palace when she saw a strange-looking, little, old woman.

'My dear,' said the little old woman, hobbling towards the Princess Fantosina, 'I have not heard that song for two hundred years, and I should like you to sing it again.'

'I will sing it again with pleasure,' answered the princess, and she sang the song again from beginning to end.

'Now,' said the strange-looking little old woman, 'you have gratified me very much by singing without being asked twice, and I should like to do something to please you in return. Tell me what you would like to have done.'

'I don't think there is anything, thank you,' said the Princess Fantosina.

'There must be something,' was the answer, 'because the most contented person in the world always wants something else. Now,' said the old woman, 'how about a prince?'

'Oh!' cried Fantosina, smiling very brightly, 'my prince is on his way. He lives a long distance off, but he has set forth on his journey to fetch me. And though I have never seen him, I know he is very good and very handsome, and that I shall love him very dearly.' Whilst Fantosina was speaking a dove flew by. 'Oh!' she cried, 'how delightful it must be to fly!'

'So you shall,' said the little old woman. 'How should you like to be able to turn into a dove whenever you wished.'

'I should like it very much,' answered Fantosina, 'only a dove cannot sing—it can only coo, you know.'

'Then,' said the old woman, 'you shall have the power to take the form of a bird that sings more sweetly than the nightingale. It shall have a bright blue body and scarlet wings, and the loveliest song in the world. Now,' the little old woman continued, 'you must listen carefully to what I am going to say. If you pluck a primrose and hold the petals to your lips you will at once change into this bird, and a bird you will remain until you fly to a cowslip field and take a portion of the flower in your beak, then you will become a princess again just as you are now.'

With this the old woman hobbled away, and although the Princess Fantosina called to her several times she did not even glance back. So the princess returned to the palace wondering whether she should ever find the courage to pluck a primrose. Ever since she had been a small child she had thought how delightful it must be to fly through the air; to rest on the topmost branch of a tree in the sunshine and sing and sing to her heart's content.

And yet now Fantosina had the power to do what she had always longed to do, she did not feel at all sure she should do it. The reason was, that she feared lest any accident should prevent her from reaching a cowslip field and so becoming a princess again. For although she thought it would be very nice to be a bird for a few hours now and then, she would have been sorry to remain a bird always, especially as the prince was on his way to make her his bride.

But presently Fantosina went into the gardens again, and then she walked to a meadow where the grass beside the hedges was yellow with primroses. She looked around to make sure that nobody was in sight, and stooping she plucked a primrose. She did not put it at once to her lips, but carried it in her hand until she had crossed three fields and come to a standstill by a cowslip bank.

Even now she felt a little afraid to put the primrose to her lips, but the sun shone so brightly and the cloudless sky looked so blue, and she thought how delightful it must be to soar in the air on such a glorious day, and she told herself she would just change for a few minutes to see how the charm acted.

So the Princess Fantosina held the primrose to her lips and breathed upon its petals, and then there was no one standing on the cowslip bank but only a small bird with a blue body and scarlet wings hopping about the grass.

Fantosina could hardly believe at first that the bird was herself, although she was able to think of things just the same as before. But the first thing she thought of was, that it would be very pleasant to fly from the ground to the top of the tall acacia tree which stood a few yards from the bank. Only she might fly up there and be unable to come down again, or she might become giddy and tumble before she reached a bough. Still she began to move her wings, and then she felt the most delightful sensation you can imagine. She did not seem to be doing anything at all, and yet she was rising quickly through the air. It seemed so enjoyable that, when she got to the tree, she did not like to leave off flying, and instead of settling at once, she circled round and round several times before she came to rest on the highest branch.

She was not in the least frightened or giddy now; she could see farther than she had ever seen before, and everything looked very clear and distinct. She looked in the direction from which her prince was to come, but she could not see any sign of his arrival yet. Presently Fantosina began to sing, and that seemed even pleasanter than flying. She sang so loudly and so fast and enjoyed it so much, that it was later than she had intended before she thought of descending from the acacia tree. But at last she spread her scarlet wings, and dropped slowly to the grass; then she hopped to the nearest cowslip, and no sooner touched it with her beak than she became a princess again, just as she had been before.

From that day she never spent a morning without becoming a bird; she would leave the palace when nobody saw her, pluck a primrose, and walk or run to the cowslip bank. And gradually she grew bolder, and instead of waiting until she reached the cowslips, she would hold the primrose to her mouth at once, because she could fly to the other field much more quickly than she could walk. She amused herself by flying to the palace and singing outside her mother's window, and one day, after Fantosina had become a princess again, the queen spoke about the wonderful bird.

'I have never listened to such a beautiful song,' she said. 'I hear it every morning at the same hour. Have you heard it, Fantosina?'

Fantosina felt very much amused. 'Yes,' she answered, 'I heard it this morning.'

'I heard it too!' cried Abdullah, Fantosina's younger brother. 'But though I have looked for it I have not seen the bird yet.'

'It is the most beautiful bird in the world,' said Fantosina, trying not to laugh. 'It has a blue body

and bright red wings. I don't believe there is another bird like it.'

Now Abdullah, being very fond of his sister, and seeing that she admired the strange bird, made up his mind to catch it for her, but he did not say anything of his intention, because he wanted to give Fantosina a pleasant surprise. But the next morning he hid himself in the shrubbery, and waited until he heard the bird's song; and peeping out he saw a scarlet wing flash in the sunshine. That afternoon Abdullah prepared a net, and the next morning again he hid in the same place. As soon as he heard the song he peeped forth and saw a spot of blue against the green leaves of an oak tree which grew close to the house, then he waited until Fantosina thought it was time to come back to her proper shape. In order to return to the cowslip bank she left the tree and flew along just above the ground, and she had spread her wings and was enjoying herself very greatly when she saw Abdullah running after her. And she saw too that her brother carried a long stick in his hands, and at the end of the stick was a large thin green net, the same as boys use to catch butterflies.

Fantosina had never felt so frightened in her life. Suppose Abdullah caught her before she could reach the cowslip bank! He might put her in a cage, or he might kill her and have her stuffed! She thought how sad it would be to have to spend her whole life in a cage, or to be put under a glass case in the queen's drawing-room!

The worst of it was that she could not tell him who she really was. When she tried to speak she could only sing, and it made her so nervous to see Abdullah running just underneath her that she could not fly nearly so fast as usual. But she did reach the sloping bank at last, and just as she was going to seize a cowslip, Abdullah held out his net. This alarmed her so much that she flew out of his reach to the top of the acacia tree, and made up her mind to stay there until Abdullah went home to luncheon.

She did not think he would stay where he was very long, because the king was a punctual man and never liked any one to be late for meals; as it was, he would be sure to miss his daughter, but he would never see her again if once Abdullah got her into his net!

So Fantosina waited on the tree a long, long time, and at last she thought Abdullah must have gone home, so she dropped to a lower branch, and holding her little blue head on one side she looked carefully around. There was no sign of her brother. He had evidently given up his attempt to capture her for to-day, and she would take care he did not have a chance again. She saw no sign of Abdullah, who was standing close to the trunk of the acacia tree; but in order to be quite safe Fantosina flew to a still lower branch, and holding her little blue head on one side again she once more looked around. Suddenly she felt confused; everything seemed to look dark and green as if she held a piece of coloured glass before her eyes, and when she tried to fly to a lighter place she knocked against a thin green wall. She tried to tear it with her beak, she tried to scrape it with her claws, but it was of no use; she could not escape do what she would; she felt she was being drawn nearer and nearer to the grass, until at last she stood exactly on top of a cowslip. Oh, if only she could get one of its petals in her beak! the very tiniest morsel would do, but the horrid green net prevented her, and then Abdullah put his hand round her and carried her home; and Fantosina knew she should never become a princess again as long as she lived.

'Look, look!' he cried, as he entered the palace. 'Look, Fantosina, I've caught the bird! Give me a cage!'

'I wish,' said the king, 'that instead of catching birds you would return in proper time for your meals.'

'I knew Fantosina wanted it,' answered Abdullah. 'Where is there a cage?'

'I don't know what has become of your sister,' said the queen, little imagining that Fantosina was held tightly in his hand, and listening to every word she said.

'I never wait for anybody!' exclaimed the king; 'kindly sit down to luncheon.'

'I will just put the bird in a cage,' said Abdullah. 'I wish Fantosina would come. How pleased she will be; won't she, mother?'

Abdullah left the room and soon found an empty bird-cage, then he put Fantosina into it, and she sat down on its floor with all her feathers ruffled, and feeling extremely miserable as you may imagine. When luncheon ended and still there was no sign of Fantosina, the king became even more alarmed than the queen; he sent men in all directions to search for her, but night came and no Fantosina. The king and queen did not go to bed all night, and a light was kept burning in every window of the palace. They were both very tired at breakfast the next morning, and when Fantosina sat on a perch in her cage and sang her loudest in her effort to make them know who she really was, the queen said the song made her head ache, and ordered that the cage should be covered over.

How miserable Fantosina felt in the darkened cage! How she longed to be able to fly from tree to tree again even if she could not return to her proper shape! But all the longing in the world was of no use. Day after day passed, the king's hair grew gray from grief, and the queen became pale and thin, while Abdullah took no pleasure in anything but the bird. Everybody in the palace went into the deepest mourning because they thought Fantosina must be dead, and once she heard her father and mother talking about the prince who was coming to marry their daughter.

'I wish we could prevent him from coming,' said the king; 'and if I knew which direction he had

taken, I would send messengers to meet him.'

'It will be a great disappointment to him,' answered the queen; 'but when he sees we are in sorrow, he will not stay long.'

One day Fantosina heard that he had arrived, and she saw him through the bars of her cage that evening at dinner. He was very tall and handsome, just the kind of prince she had hoped he might be, but all she could do was to sing her best in his honour.

'What a charming song!' exclaimed the prince, 'and what beautiful plumage! I have never seen a bird like that before.'

'Abdullah caught it the day poor Fantosina disappeared,' said the queen, and she became so deeply distressed that she apologised to the prince and left the table.

'It was a pity to catch the bird,' answered the prince; 'its plumage will fade in the cage and its song will die away.'

'I caught it to please my sister,' said Abdullah, 'for I knew she would be delighted with it.' Fantosina's wings felt redder than ever, for she blushed to remember that it was quite true she had often kept birds in cages, though she was sure she should never do so again even if she had the opportunity.

'As I have found you all in such distress,' said the prince presently, 'I shall of course not stay so long as I intended. I think I shall ask you to let me depart to-morrow.'

The king offered no objection to this, for to tell you the truth, he felt pleased to get rid of the prince now he had lost Fantosina; it was not a time for visitors. After breakfast the next morning, the prince ordered a large parcel to be carried in, and when it had been unfastened he took out the costly presents he had brought from his father's kingdom. These consisted of embroideries and jewels and swords and various other things which the king and queen and Abdullah admired exceedingly. Then the king said—

'I do not know what to offer you in return for all these treasures, because I had intended to give you the most valuable of all my possessions, and that was my poor Fantosina. Now, alas! I have no daughter, and I do not know what to offer you.'

'There is one thing I should like, if you will graciously present it to me,' said the prince.

'I beg you will do me the honour to choose whatever in my kingdom pleases you the best,' answered the king.

'Then,' said the prince, 'I choose this beautiful bird.'

As the prince spoke Fantosina began to sing, for although she had made up her mind she could never be other than a bird as long as she lived, she had already grown to love the prince so dearly that she felt pleased at the idea of going away with him. The prince was to set forth at four o'clock the same afternoon, and from the window where her cage hung Fantosina could see the people making ready for his departure. When the four white horses were put into his carriage, she began to fear lest she should be forgotten, and to remind the prince, she began to sing her loudest. Presently Abdullah came to the room and climbed on to a chair to take down the cage, which he carried outside the palace. The king and queen and several courtiers stood around the prince to bid him farewell, and when Abdullah joined the group with the cage in his hand, the king felt ashamed of the smallness of his gift.

'I fear,' he said, as Abdullah handed the cage to the prince, 'you will find the bird troublesome on your journey.'

'No,' answered the prince, 'I shall not find it in the least troublesome, because I do not intend to take it on my journey.' And Fantosina felt deeply disappointed to think she was going to be left behind after all. But the next moment the prince held the cage above his head and opened the door. The instant the door was opened Fantosina flew out of the cage, but Abdullah, thinking she had escaped by an accident and that the prince would be disappointed to lose the bird, ran after her, followed by the prince, who vainly called to him to come back. The king followed his guest, from politeness, but at a slower pace, and even the queen and the courtiers walked in the same direction.

Fantosina felt almost too much excited to fly; after her confinement in the cage, her wings were a little stiff too, so that long before she reached the cowslip bank, she feared she might fall exhausted to the ground and be caught again. Then she wondered whether she find all the cowslips dead, and this idea alarmed her so much that she flew slower and slower, though she tried to fly faster and faster. Abdullah was close to her tail, the prince a little behind him, the king was in the next field, and the queen and the courtiers in the next but one.

As Fantosina drew near to the bank, she could not see one cowslip; at last she was exactly over the bank, and just as she felt she could not fly another yard, she saw a single cowslip under her claws. In an instant she dropped to the ground, and at the same moment Abdullah seized her tail. But Fantosina put forth her beak as far as it would go and just succeeded in touching the pale yellow petal of the one cowslip which was left.

To the astonishment of Abdullah and of the prince, the blue bird with the scarlet wings

disappeared and in its place stood the most beautiful princess the prince had ever seen.

'Fantosina!' exclaimed Abdullah.

'Fantosina!' cried the king, almost out of breath.

'Fantosina!' cried the queen in the next field. But the prince said nothing until Fantosina held out her hand to him.

'If you had not been so good to me,' she said, 'I should have lived in a cage all my life.'

'I had no idea I was serving the Princess Fantosina,' he answered with a smile.

'No,' she said, 'but a kind action is never quite wasted,' and then the queen came up with her hand on her heart, for she had begun to run as soon as she saw her daughter, and she took Fantosina in her arms, and they all seemed very pleased to see her again, and presently they walked back to the palace. The prince's horses were sent to the stables, for of course he did not go away that day, and all the people retired to exchange their mourning garments for the very gayest they could find. A few weeks later the prince and Fantosina were married, and she went with him to his own country. But although a great many primroses grow there each spring-time, Fantosina has never changed into a bird again.

XI

MARY SEES MRS. COPPERT AND MRS. COPPERT SEES MARY

During the next few days Mary saw nothing of Evangeline, though she would have liked very much to hear another story. Sister Agatha often took her on to the beach, and Mary found that, although it is possible to make a great many things out of mud, you can make more and much nicer things out of sand.

Sometimes she thought she should like to have other children to play with, but not the same little boys and girls with whom she used to play in William Street, because she wished never to have anything to do with William Street or Mrs. Coppert again.

One day Mary was sitting with Sister Agatha as usual, when Evangeline entered the room, but she seemed too busy to take much notice of anything except the new dress which she had come to show Sister Agatha. The dress was all white and shiny, with small flowers about it, white flowers, too, and Mary admired it so much as Evangeline held it across her arms that she touched it with her finger-tips.

'Don't you think Mary might go out into the garden?' said Evangeline.

'I ought to fetch her hat then,' said Sister Agatha.

'It is beautifully warm,' answered Evangeline; 'I don't think it can hurt her to go as she is.'

So Sister Agatha told Mary she might go, and she stepped out through the open window just as she was—pinafore and all. For a few minutes she walked about the grass watching a gardener who was mowing it. She looked on whilst he swept the grass he had cut into a basket and emptied the basket into a wheel-barrow. Then he wheeled the barrow to an iron gate, and having passed through the gate, he disappeared round the corner.

Now, Mary thought it would be rather nice to go through that gate and round the corner too, and a minute later she found herself in the same road, with trees on each side of it, along which Evangeline had driven the cream-coloured ponies on the day of her arrival. Mary walked on and on, until presently she reached the cottage where she had seen the old woman in the red cloak. But no one was to be seen at present, and on going close to the gate, Mary found there was a smaller one by its side, and as this happened to be open, she passed through it into the public road.

She felt so glad to be in the road that she began to jump about and to clap her little hands. And yet she did not know why she should be glad, for the park was a far nicer place after all. Still she did feel pleased, and without thinking where she was going, or whether Sister Agatha would like her to go or not, Mary began to scamper away from the house.

The sun felt very hot, and Mary soon became breathless, so she stopped just where the road bent round towards the railway station and sat down by a high, green, flowery bank.

It really seemed very nice sitting there in the brilliant sunshine, and she leaned back until her head touched the green bank. Presently Mary closed her eyes, and though she opened them once or twice it was not long before she fell fast asleep. She did not know how much later it was when she awoke in a great fright, for she dreamed she heard Mrs. Coppert's voice, heard it quite distinctly, as if it were only a few yards from her ears. Of course it was a dream! Mary told herself that before she had time to open her eyes; but when she did open them she looked up and saw Mrs. Coppert in the road, staring down at her.

Nobody was in sight—nobody but Mrs. Coppert! Mrs. Coppert was a fat woman and tall; she had

a large, shiny, red face, and great arms and hands under her cloak, and a bright blue feather in her bonnet. She was not a nice-looking person at all, and she spoke as if she were going to cry. But Mary had never seen her cry, though she had seen her make children cry very often.

'Dear me!' exclaimed Mrs. Coppert, 'if it isn't little Mary Brown! So smart, too,' she said, leaning forward and taking Mary's skirt between her fingers. 'And to think of those other poor children at home. They don't wear such fine dresses, and you haven't even asked how they are!'

'How are they?' whispered Mary, feeling very frightened.

'Haven't they got names of their own?' asked Mrs. Coppert.

'How are Sally and 'Liza and Tubby?' said Mary, knowing it was always the best to obey Mrs. Coppert.

'So happy, you'd never believe it,' was the answer. 'Troublesome, I must say; but that's overfeeding. I always did overfeed my children. And they're quite longing to see Mary Brown again, and so they shall, bless 'em!'

Mary still sat on the grass with her right hand in her pocket. Tightly between her finger and thumb she held her purse which contained the Magic Counter. Perhaps you wonder why she did not give it to Mrs. Coppert and tell her to go away at once. It is quite true that Mary believed that if she gave it to anybody, it would make her do whatever she wished, and she certainly wished Mrs. Coppert to go away. But at the same time Mary felt sure that Mrs. Coppert would keep whatever was given to her, and put it in her large pocket; while she was a woman who never did what she was asked to do. What Mary hoped was that some one else might come along the road, and then she would take out the Magic Counter at once and ask that Mrs. Coppert should be sent away.

'I'm not going to see them,' said Mary with tears in her eyes; 'I don't want to see them.'

'There now!' cried Mrs. Coppert, 'there's ingratitude! And them like brothers and sisters almost. You just get up off that grass and come along of me.'

'I want to go home,' answered Mary. 'I must go home, I must,' she said, and now she was crying as if her heart would break.

'Of course you must!' exclaimed Mrs. Coppert. 'Ain't I going to take you home? Isn't William Street your home? Haven't you lived there all your life? Haven't I been a mother to you?'

'But I—I can't go without saying good-bye to Sister Agatha and Evangeline!' cried Mary, as she stood upright. 'I must say good-bye,' she sobbed; 'they won't know where I am.'

'Oh yes they will,' was the answer. 'I'll see to that,' said Mrs. Coppert, taking one of Mary's arms; 'never you fear. Wait till we get back to William Street and I'll write a nice letter. So just you come along and no nonsense!'

Mrs. Coppert held Mary's arm so tightly that it quite hurt, but fortunately it was the left arm which she held, so that Mary could still keep her right hand in her pocket. And she managed to put one of her fingers inside the purse and to take out the Magic Counter.

She held it all ready to give to the first person she saw come along the road, and although she felt more frightened than she had ever felt before, Mary still hoped that something might happen to prevent her from being taken back to William Street. But at present Mary saw nobody from one end of the road to the other, nobody but Mrs. Coppert, whom she did not want to see. She was dragged along the sunny road almost blind with tears, but as they drew nearer the railway station Mrs. Coppert held her less tightly.

Mary wondered whether it was the same road that Evangeline had brought her along the day she arrived, but she did not think it could be the same, for, to-day, she had not passed the shops and small houses. At all events, whether it was the same road or not she thought she could see the small railway station only a little way off, and now Mary grew more afraid than ever, for if she was once inside the station she might be put into a train and taken back to London after all! She was just wondering whether it would not be possible to give the Magic Counter to the man who drove the train and tell him to take her back to Sister Agatha, when she uttered a cry of surprise, for she saw a tall young man coming towards them and she recognised him at once.

'It's the prince!' she exclaimed, 'it's the prince!'

Now Mary had never felt very, very fond of the prince, because he was going to take Evangeline away from her. Of course she admired him, for he was a very handsome prince, but Mary had never spoken to him although she had often seen him in the garden. She felt greatly delighted to see him now, however, and she held her Magic Counter so that she could take it out of her pocket directly he came near. Still it is not very nice to have to speak to a person you have never spoken to before, and Mary felt a little shy about it.

'It's the prince, is it?' said Mrs. Coppert laughing; 'as if princes went walking about in that way.'

'I know he is a prince,' answered Mary, 'because Sister Agatha says so.'

'Oh, so he's a friend of hers, is he?' asked Mrs. Coppert; and Mary thought she looked rather anxious. 'I suppose now he doesn't happen to know you?'

'No,' answered Mary; 'but that doesn't matter,' she added.

'Well,' said Mrs. Coppert, 'just you listen to me. What you've got to do is to walk nicely by my side as if you were coming willingly—none of your crying or hanging back, or it'll be the worse for you.'

She released Mary's arm now, and for a few yards the child walked quietly by her side, but as soon as the prince drew nearer, Mary ran away from Mrs. Coppert and stopped right in front of him, looking up anxiously into his face and holding the Magic Counter out for him to take.

'Hullo!' he cried, looking a little amused, 'what's that for?'

'Take it, please,' said Mary, pressing it against his hand. 'Please take it,' she said. 'I do want you to take it quickly,' and she glanced over her shoulder at Mrs. Coppert, who had stopped in the middle of the road.

'Are you Mary Brown?' asked the prince, taking the Magic Counter in his hand. For although he had never spoken to her, it is very likely he had heard her story from Evangeline.

'Yes,' answered Mary, 'I'm Mary Brown, and this is Mrs. Coppert. She wants to take me back to William Street and I don't want to go. And I shan't have to go now, because you must send Mrs. Coppert away and take me back to Sister Agatha.'

Then the prince looked at Mrs. Coppert and she made a curtsy. 'I understood,' said the prince, 'that Miss Royal had arranged everything satisfactorily with you.'

'It ain't very satisfactory to part with one you've been more than a mother to,' answered Mrs. Coppert, and Mary thought her voice sounded as if she were going to cry. 'You come along of me,' she added, seizing Mary's arm again. But the prince would not allow this, and in fact Mary did not feel in the least frightened now, because she had given him the Magic Counter, you see! He lifted Mary Brown in his arms and carried her towards the house, and as she looked back over his shoulder, she saw Mrs. Coppert following some distance off. When the prince carried Mary into the park Mrs. Coppert began to run, and her large face looked redder and more shiny than ever. The prince carried Mary in at the front door, and a lot of people who were pushing balls about on the green table with long sticks left off to laugh at him.

But suddenly Evangeline appeared amongst them; Mary did not know where she came from, but of course Evangeline could appear when and where she pleased; and instead of laughing when she saw the prince with Mary in his arms, she ran towards him looking very glad and whispering something that Mary could not hear. Then Evangeline took her upstairs to the bedroom, where she found Sister Agatha. Sister Agatha took Mary on her knees and said she had done wrong to leave the garden, but she kissed her instead of scolding her any more, and Mary liked it much better.

'Only you must never go away like that again,' she said. 'Because we did not know what had happened to you, and you frightened us very much. But still,' Sister Agatha added, 'even if Mrs. Coppert had taken you to London, we should have come to fetch you away again.'

XII

EVANGELINE SAYS GOOD-BYE TO MARY BROWN

Mary felt greatly relieved to hear that Sister Agatha would have fetched her away again if Mrs. Coppert had taken her to William Street, but still she seemed tired after her adventure, and as soon as she finished tea she was put to bed. She did not have very agreeable dreams that night, and even the next morning she could think of nothing but Mrs. Coppert.

When Evangeline came to see her during the afternoon, Mary looked up wonderingly into her face and said—

'What I can't make out is how Mrs. Coppert knew where I was! How did she know I was here?'

'If you sit down,' answered Evangeline, 'I will tell you a story.'

'Bring your stool close to me,' said Sister Agatha. And without losing a moment, Mary carried her stool to Sister Agatha's side and sat down. Then Evangeline began the story.

'Once upon a time there lived in London a young woman whom we will call—what shall we call her? Suppose we say her name was Gertrude! She lived in a large house and she had a lot of money, and she was very fond of driving nice horses. One afternoon, being a little late, she drove through the streets more quickly than she ought to have done. It was growing dark, and as she drove along a narrow street she ran over a poor little girl who was making mud-pies in the gutter, and knocked her down and hurt her very much.

'At first Gertrude feared she was dead, for her face was quite white, and her eyes were closed, and she neither spoke nor moved. But presently she moved a little, although she did not open her eyes.

'Now Gertrude felt very sorry, especially because she knew she had been to blame in driving too fast through the street, and she felt anxious to do whatever she could to make Lucy—we will call the little girl Lucy—quite well again. Of course a crowd soon collected to see what was the matter, and some one in the crowd told Gertrude where Lucy lived. But Gertrude thought the child would be more likely to get well if she took her to her own house, so she sent one of her servants to Lucy's friends to explain what had happened, but Lucy, herself, was put into the carriage and driven away with Gertrude.

'When they reached the house Lucy was carried upstairs to a spare room and put to bed, then a doctor was sent for, and when the doctor had gone Gertrude wrote to the best woman she knew. This person used to be a great friend of Gertrude's until she made up her mind to have nothing more to do with such idle, good-for-nothing people. So she went away from her friends and spent her life nursing poor folk who were sick. Well, this person, whose name ought to have been Sister Benevolence, agreed to take care of Lucy until the child grew strong again.

'But Gertrude feared she would never be quite so strong as she used to be, and she felt very, very sorry about it. But, you see, she couldn't undo what was done; she could only make up her mind to be much more careful in the future. She saw Lucy's friends, who were not very nice persons, and they said that Lucy had neither a father nor a mother, nor anybody who really belonged to her, so—so Gertrude gave her friends money, and they said she might keep Lucy at her house for ever.

'You must understand that Gertrude made up her mind that Lucy should not go back to the place she had come from, but that as soon as she grew better, she should be sent to school. But now I am going to tell you both a little secret about Gertrude. She often said she would do things, and yet when the time came she found she could not possibly do them. She intended to be very good, and when she saw people unhappy she always wanted to make them happy. Only she thought a great deal about her own happiness too, and in thinking of herself she forgot the others, and when she remembered them again, sometimes it was too late.

'So when Lucy grew stronger, and the doctor said she would soon be able to walk quite nicely again, perhaps Gertrude did not think about her so much as she had done at first. She was going to be married, you see, and to live in a foreign country, and even if she sent Lucy to boarding school, she did not know who was to look after her during the holidays. But to tell you the truth, Gertrude had so many other things to think of that she forgot all about Lucy's future, and although she would be going away very soon now, nothing had been done to provide for the child.

'Then something happened to remind Gertrude how necessary it was that Lucy should be taken care of after she went away, only she had so little time left that she did not know in the least what to do.

'One day Lucy wandered out of the garden and into the road, where the woman with whom she used to live saw her and wanted to take her back again. Not that the woman was fond of Lucy; she only wanted to take her away so that Gertrude should pay more money to get her back again.'

At this part of the story the door opened and a servant entered to say that Evangeline was particularly wanted somewhere else, and rising from her chair, Evangeline walked to the door.

'Please finish the story!' exclaimed Mary, running after her. 'I do want to know how it ends and what became of Lucy!'

'My dear little girl,' answered Evangeline, 'it is a very difficult story to finish. At all events, I cannot stay to finish it to-day,' and she left the room, closing the door behind her.

Mary felt very deeply interested in the story, because she thought that Lucy seemed rather like herself, and that Gertrude was like Evangeline. Certainly Sister Benevolence was very much like Sister Agatha! Still Mary did not feel very clear about it, because she had no recollection of being knocked down and run over. If anything of that kind had happened to her, surely she would have known all about it! At any rate she felt the strongest interest in Lucy and she wanted to know what became of her, and especially she would have liked to hear that she did not go back to the place she had come from, which might be as bad as William Street.

She did not see Evangeline any more that day, but the next afternoon she came to the room to speak to Sister Agatha.

'Tell me the rest of the story now!' exclaimed Mary, taking hold of her dress; 'I do want so much to hear how it ends.'

'What story is that?' asked Evangeline, and she seemed to have forgotten all about it.

'Why, the story about Lucy and Gertrude and Sister Benevolence,' said Mary, but Evangeline looked at her without answering for a few moments, then she said—

'You must ask Sister Agatha. She can finish it better than I can.'

'Will you, Sister Agatha?' asked Mary, as Evangeline left the room.

'You know,' she answered, 'I never could tell tales out of my head. I can't tell you to-day. You see how busy I am!'

'When will you tell me then?' cried Mary with a disappointed expression.

'After Evangeline has gone away,' said Sister Agatha.

'But when is she going?' asked Mary.

'Why, didn't you know she is to be married the day after to-morrow?' said Sister Agatha.

Mary did not know it was to be quite so soon as that, and it made her rather miserable to think that Evangeline would be going away almost directly. But when Sister Agatha promised to take her to see the wedding she looked more cheerful, for she liked to be taken to see things.

The day after to-morrow soon came, and long before the usual time for breakfast, Sister Agatha drew up the blind to look at the weather. She seemed very pleased to see how fine and sunny the morning was and she put on Mary's lightest dress—the pale-blue one.

'Won't she come to see us before she starts?' asked Mary, when Sister Agatha was ready.

'The idea of such a thing!' was the answer; 'you must wait until she goes to the church.'

It seemed to Mary that she had to wait a long time, but when once she had taken her seat in a pew, there was plenty to look at. The prince stood at one end of the church, and Mary noticed how often he looked at his watch. At the other end by the door were six little girls dressed all alike in primrose colour, and Mary could not help wishing she was one of them! The church became full, and everybody seemed to be very smartly dressed, and nearly all the ladies carried large bunches of flowers.

Presently the organ began to play, and then Evangeline walked along the middle of the church holding an old gentleman's arm. She did not see Mary or anybody else because she kept her eyes on the ground; but she looked beautiful in her white dress, and she also carried a bunch of flowers—the largest bunch Mary had ever seen. Mary would have clapped her hands if Sister Agatha had not prevented her, but Sister Agatha could not prevent her from asking—

'What are you crying for?'

'S—s—sh,' said Sister Agatha.

'Don't you want her to be married?' whispered Mary.

'Yes, of course I do,' was the answer.

'Then why are you crying?' asked Mary.

By this time Evangeline was standing at the prince's side, and a clergyman was speaking, though Mary could not hear what he said. After a long time the organ began to play again very loudly, and suddenly Mary noticed that Evangeline had disappeared.

'Where has she gone to?' she asked.

'She will be back again directly,' answered Sister Agatha, and soon afterwards Mary saw the prince, with Evangeline holding his arm, going towards the door again, while some tiny children threw flowers on the floor for them to walk upon.

Sister Agatha was almost the last to leave the church, and when Mary reached the house again she saw a great many carriages before it. But she was taken upstairs as usual, and after dining alone with Sister Agatha she wanted to know what would happen next.

'We are going to see them start,' was the answer, and they went out of doors a few minutes later. All the carriages had moved away into the park, and only the small brown one with the four cream-coloured ponies stood before the door. But a great crowd of people was there, and the prince and Evangeline, who had changed her white dress for a dark one, came out, and everyone seemed to want to kiss her. Some laughed and some cried, and Mary felt inclined to do both at once.

'Isn't she going to say good-bye to us?' cried Mary, as Evangeline stepped into the carriage and sat down. But Sister Agatha did not seem to hear her. The prince also got into the carriage and took the reins, then the ponies started and everybody began to cry, 'Hip, hip, hurrah!' Mary saw Sister Agatha take something white from under her cloak and throw it after the carriage. It looked like a slipper, only she could not imagine why Sister Agatha should throw a slipper at Evangeline; it hit her too!

'Why did you do that?' asked Mary.

'That,' said Sister Agatha in a curious voice. 'Oh! that is for luck: God bless her.'

When the slipper fell into the carriage striking Evangeline's knees, she looked round to see where it came from, and noticing Sister Agatha she spoke to the prince, who laughed and stopped the ponies. Then Sister Agatha took Mary's hand and ran to the carriage. Evangeline leaned forward to kiss her and then she stooped to kiss Mary as well.

'I'm glad she said good-bye,' whispered Mary as the four cream-coloured ponies started again, but Sister Agatha did not speak until after they were indoors. 'Shan't I ever see her again?' asked Mary, as they entered their own room.

'Never is a long day, you know, Sister Agatha answered; 'but certainly neither of us will see her for many, many years.'

When Mary had taken off her hat she went downstairs to tea, and during the meal she could talk about nothing but Evangeline and the wedding. But when she had finished and the tea-things had been removed, she brought her stool to Sister Agatha's side and looked up a little wistfully into her face; she felt she had nobody but Sister Agatha now.

'Please tell me the end of the story about Lucy,' she said.

'To begin with,' answered Sister Agatha, 'I think Evangeline made a little mistake. I don't fancy the little girl's name was Lucy after all. I think it must have been Mary.'

'Was it Mary Brown?' asked Mary, with her eyes very widely open.

'Yes,' said Sister Agatha.

'I—I wondered whether it was,' said Mary solemnly.

'And,' Sister Agatha continued, 'I rather think that Sister Benevolence should have been called Sister Agatha, although it isn't nearly such a nice name.'

'I thought it was you,' answered Mary.

'Well,' said Sister Agatha, 'Mary was a dear little girl and Sister Agatha grew very fond of her. And when Evangeline was very busy and didn't know quite what to do with her—why Sister Agatha thought it was time to put her thinking-cap on.'

'Is it like the cap you've got on now?' asked Mary, staring up at Sister Agatha's white cap.

'When I think I generally take that off,' said Sister Agatha, 'and after to-morrow I don't think I shall wear it again. Well, I put my thinking cap on, and I began to wonder whether I could manage to keep you with me always.'

'Oh!' exclaimed Mary, and she seemed to be hugging herself as if she felt very pleasant indeed.

'And,' Sister Agatha said, 'after thinking about it a long time, I fancied that perhaps I *could* keep you with me always.'

'Here!' cried Mary. 'Should we live here?'

'No, we are going away from here to-morrow,' was the answer.

'Where to?' asked Mary.

'Suppose, now, we take a nice little house somewhere near the sea,' said Sister Agatha.

'I should like that!' cried Mary.

'I think I should like it too,' answered Sister Agatha. 'Because I shall always have some one to look after, and I like looking after people. And we shall grow very fond of each other, sometimes we shall play on the sands, or row on the sea, and then I shall teach you to read and write, and when you can read you will begin to see what a wonderful world you live in—and you will find that life is far more wonderful than any fairy-tale.'

'Shall I?' asked Mary, and rising from her stool, she stood leaning against Sister Agatha's knees. 'But, still,' she said presently, 'you'll be there, won't you?'

'Why, of course I shall be there,' said Sister Agatha.

'And you won't go away the same as Evangeline!'

'No,' said Sister Agatha with a smile; 'that is not at all likely.'

'And,' said Mary looking up anxiously into her face, 'you'll never send me away either?'

'No, I shall never send you away either,' answered Sister Agatha, and she placed her arms round Mary Brown and drew the child's head on to her shoulder. It rested there a long time, and Mary felt quite contented and not at all anxious any more.

The next day they were driven to the station with their luggage, and they travelled to a small town by the seaside. At first they lived in lodgings, but presently Sister Agatha took a pretty house of her own; it had a nice garden where Mary likes to sit reading on summer afternoons. She can read easily now, if Sister Agatha tells her the meanings of the long words, and she has grown so tall that Mrs. Coppert would hardly recognise her if she saw her. But I don't think Mrs. Coppert will ever see Mary again.

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