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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK BOSOM FRIENDS: A SEASIDE STORY ***

Bosom Friends A Seaside Story



The namesakes (page 48)
By ANGELA BRAZIL

Bosom Friends

A Seaside Story

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BOSOM FRIENDS.

CHAPTER I.

FELLOW-TRAVELLERS.

"Say, is it fate that has flung us together,
We who from life's varied pathways thus
meet?"

[6] IT was a broiling day at the end of July, and the railway station at Tiverton Junction was crowded with passengers. Porters wheeling great truckfuls of luggage strove to force a way along the thronged platform, anxious mothers held restless children firmly by the hand, harassed fathers sought to pack their families into already overflowing compartments, excited cyclists were endeavouring to disentangle their machines from among the piles of boxes and portmanteaus, a circus and a theatrical company were loud in their lamentations for certain reserved corridor carriages which had not arrived, while a patient band of Sunday-school teachers was struggling to keep together a large party of slum children bound for a sea-side camp.

The noise was almost unbearable. The ceaseless whistling of the engines, the shouts of the porters, the banging of carriage doors, the eager inquiries of countless perplexed passengers, made a combination calculated to give a headache to the owner of the stoutest nerves, and to drive timid travellers to distraction. All the world seemed off for its holiday, and the bustle and confusion of its departure was nearly enough to make some sober-minded parents wish they had stayed at home.

[7] Leaning up against the bookstall in a corner out of reach of the stream of traffic, clutching a basket in one hand and a hold-all full of wraps and umbrellas in the other, stood a small girl of about ten or eleven years of age, her gaze fixed anxiously upon the great clock on the platform opposite. She was a pretty child, with a sweet, thoughtful little face, clear gray eyes, and straight fair hair, which fell over her shoulders without the least attempt at wave or curl. She was very simply and plainly dressed—her sailor suit had been many times to the laundry, the straw hat was decidedly sunburnt, and her boots had evidently seen good service; but there was about her an indescribable air of refinement and good breeding—that intangible something which stamps those trained from their babyhood in gentle ways—which set her apart at once from the crowds of cheap trippers that thronged the station. From the eager glances she cast up and down the platform she appeared to be waiting for somebody, and she tried to beguile the time by watching the surging mass of tourists who hurried past her in a ceaseless stream. She had listened while the circus manager button-holed the superintendent and excitedly proclaimed his woes; she had held her breath with interest when the slum babies, with their buns and brown-paper parcels, were successfully bundled into the compartments reserved for them, and had craned her neck to catch a last glimpse as they steamed slowly out of the station, their small faces filling the windows like groups of cherubs, and their shrill little voices over-topping all the other noise and din as they joined lustily in the chorus of a hymn. She had witnessed the struggles of several family parties to secure seats, the altercation between the young man with the St. Bernard dog and the guard who refused to allow it in the carriage, the wrath of the gentleman whose fishing-rod was broken, the grief of the lady whose golf-clubs were missing, and the despair of the young couple whose baby had gone on in the train; then, growing rather weary of the ever-moving throng, she turned her eyes to the bookstall, and tried to amuse herself with admiring the large coloured supplements which adorned the back, or reading the names of the rows of attractive books and periodicals which were spread forth in tempting array. She was fumbling in her pocket, and wondering whether she would spend a certain cherished penny on an illustrated paper, or keep it for a more urgent occasion, when her attention was aroused by a pair of fellow-travellers who strolled in a leisurely fashion up to the bookstall, and, standing close beside her, began to turn over some of the various magazines and journals.

[8] They were a tall, fashionably-dressed lady, carrying a tiny white lap-dog under her arm, and a little girl of about her own age, a child who appeared so charmingly pretty to Isobel's eyes that she could not help gazing at her in scarcely-concealed admiration. An older and more practised observer would have noticed that the newcomer's face lacked character, and that her claims to beauty lay mostly in her dainty pink-and-white colouring and her curling flaxen hair, and would have decided, moreover, that the elaborately-made white Japanese silk dress, the pale-blue drawn chiffon hat with its garland of flowers, the tall white French kid boots, the tiny gold bangles and the jewelled locket seemed more suitable for a garden party or a walk on the promenade than for the dust and dirt of a crowded railway journey. To Isobel, however, she appeared like an enchanted princess in a fairy story, and she looked on with thrilling interest while the attractive stranger made her choice among the supply of literature provided for the wants of the travelling public. She seemed somewhat difficult to satisfy, for she threw down one magazine after another in a rather disdainful fashion, declaring that none of them looked worth reading, and, calling to the assistant, bade him show her some story-books. A goodly pile of these was handed down for her inspection, and Isobel, who stood almost at her elbow, could see over her shoulder as she turned the pages. So endless was the variety of delightful tales and illustrations, from legends of King Arthur or the Red Cross Knight to Middle Age mysteries or modern adventures and school scrapes, that it should not have been hard to find something to

[9]

suit any taste, and the little girl in the sailor hat looked on so fascinated with the snatches she was able to read that she did not notice when a sweet-faced lady in black came hurrying up, until the latter touched her on the arm.

[10] "Why, mother dear—at last!"

"Did you think I was lost, darling? I had such terrible difficulty to get a porter, and the brown box had been put in the wrong van, and has gone on to Whitecastle. I was obliged to telegraph about it, but I hope we may get it this evening. Come along! That's our train over there. We've only just nice time, for it will start in a few minutes now. Give me the wraps."

She took the hold-all from the child's hand, and the two hurried across the bridge on to the opposite platform.

"Here's our porter!" cried Mrs. Stewart.—"Have you put all in the van? Yes, these things in the carriage, please. Third class. It seems almost impossible to find a seat. Is there room here? How fortunate!—Come, Isobel; get in quickly."

"Plenty o' room here, marm," shouted a stout, gray-haired, farmer-like old man, as he reached out a strong hand to help her into the carriage, and found a place for her wraps upon the already crowded rack.

[11] The compartment was more than half full. A party of cheap trippers with a wailing baby, and a "pierrot" with a banjo, which he occupied himself with tuning incessantly, did not offer much prospect of a peaceful journey; but Mrs. Stewart knew it was impossible to choose one's company at a holiday season, and wisely made the best of things, while travelling was still such a novelty to Isobel that she would have enjoyed any experience.

"It's no easy job catchin' trains to-day, marm," said the old farmer, with the air of one who enjoys hearing himself talk. "How them porters gets all the folks sorted out fairly beats me. It's main hot, too. I've come all the way fra' Birmingham. Bin travellin' since eight o'clock this mornin', and I shall be reet glad to find myself back at Silversands again. Little missy 'ud like to sit by the window here, I take it?" good-naturedly making room for her.—"Nay, no need o' thanks! You're welcome, honey. I've a grandchild over at Skegness way as might be your livin' image. Bless you! I've reared seven, and I know what bairns like. Sit you here against me, and when the train gets out of the station you'll see the sea and all the ships sailin' on it."

[12] Isobel settled herself in the corner with much content. She had never expected such luck as to secure a window-seat, and she surveyed the ruddy cheeks and bushy eyebrows of her kindly fellow-traveller with a broad smile of gratitude.

"Goin' to Silversands, missy?" he inquired. "Ay, it's a grand place, and I should ought to know, for I've lived there, man and boy, for a matter of sixty year. Where might you be a-stayin', if I may make so bold? Mrs. Jackson! Why, she's an old friend o' mine, and will make you comfortable, if any one can. You ask her if she knows Mr. Binks of the White Coppice. I reckon she won't deny the acquaintance."

"Tickets ready!" cried the inspector, breaking in upon the conversation. "Take your seats, please! All stations to Groby, Heatherton, Silversands, and Ferndale."

There was a last stampede for places among excited passengers, a last rush of porters with rugs and hat boxes; the guard had already unfurled his green flag, and was in the act of putting the whistle to his lips, when two late-comers appeared, racing in frantic haste down the platform.

"O mother!" cried Isobel, "that lady and the little girl are going to be left behind! It's the little girl in the blue hat, too! They were buying papers at the bookstall. Just look how they're running! Oh, the guard's stopping the train for them! I think they'll catch it, after all. Why, they're coming in here!"

[13] "Put us in anywhere—anywhere!" cried the lady in desperate tones, as the inspector flung open the carriage door.

"Here you are, m'm!" cried the porter, seizing the little girl with scant ceremony, and jumping her into the compartment.—"Luggage in the front van, and the light hampers in No. 43. Thank you, m'm.—Stand back there!"

He pocketed his tip, banged the door violently, nearly catching Isobel's fingers thereby, the whistle sounded, and the train started off with a jerk that almost threw the newcomers on to the lap of old Mr. Binks, who had watched their sudden arrival with open-mouthed interest. The lady apologized prettily, and finding room between the pierrot and a market-woman with several large baskets, she sank down on the seat with a sigh of relief, and taking a smelling-bottle and a large black fan from her dressing-bag, leaned back with an air of utter exhaustion.

[14] "Mother! mother!" cried the little girl. "Do you see they've put us into a third-class carriage?"

"Never mind, dear," replied the lady. "I was only too thankful to catch the train at all. We can change at the next station if we wish, but it seems scarcely worth while for so short a journey. The carriages are so crowded that the firsts are as bad as the thirds."

"That porter's dirty hands have made black marks on my dress," said the little girl disconsolately. "Why couldn't the train wait for us? They needn't have been in such a hurry when

they saw we were coming."

"Trains don't wait for any one, dear. It was your own fault, for you wouldn't come away from the bookstall. I told you to be quick about choosing."

"I didn't see anything I wanted. Books are all just the same. I don't think I shall like this one, now I have it. Give me Micky, please," taking the pet dog on to her knee. "Shall we have to stay very long in this carriage? I'm so terribly hot."

"Get the scent out of my bag, dearest, and the vinaigrette. You'll soon feel better, now this nice breeze is coming in through the window. If the train's fairly punctual, we shall be there in half an hour."

[15] "It's past three o'clock already!" consulting a pretty enamelled watch which was pinned on to her dress. "Oh dear! I'm so tired! I hate travelling. Why can't we have a carriage to ourselves? This basket's knocking my hat off. *Do* let us change at the next station. How the baby cries! It's making my head ache."

"Young lady don't fancy her company," said the market-woman, moving her basket as she spoke. "I've paid for my ticket same as other folks 'as, and my money's as good as any one else's, so far as I can see."

"Some people had better order a train to themselves if they're too fine to travel with the likes of us," observed one of the trippers with sarcasm.

"I'm sure I'm sorry as he cries so," apologized the weary mother of the wailing baby. "The heat's turned the milk sour, and I durstn't give him his bottle. He won't go to sleep without it, neither, so I can't do nothing with him. Husht! husht! lovey, wilt 'a?"

"Bairns will be bairns," remarked old Mr. Binks sententiously. "I ought to know, for I've reared seven. Live and let live's my motto, and a good un to get along the world with. I'll wager as young missy there meant no offence."

[16] "Indeed she did not wish to hurt anybody's feelings," said the lady hastily, adding in a low tone to the little girl, "Be quiet, dear. Take off your hat, and perhaps you'll be cooler."

Wedged between fat old Mr. Binks and the window, Isobel had sat watching the whole scene. She was terribly hot, but the crowded carriage and its miscellaneous occupants only amused her, and she divided her attention between the quickly passing landscape and her various travelling companions, stealing frequent glances at the pretty stranger opposite, who had closed her eyes in languid resignation, having drawn her white silk skirts as far as possible away from the market-woman, and placed her pale-blue hat in safety upon her mother's knee. The baby was asleep at last, worn out with crying, and the trippers were handing round refreshments—large wedges of pork pie, sticky buns, and cold tea, which they drank in turns out of a bottle. They pressed these dainties cordially upon everybody in the carriage, but the only one who consented to share their hospitality was the market-woman, who remarked audibly that "*she* was not proud, however much some folks might stick theirselves up." In return she produced a couple of apples from her basket, which she presented to the two little tripper boys, who promptly quarrelled which should have the bigger, and kicked each other lustily on the shins, till their father boxed their ears and threatened to send them home by the next returning train. The pierrot created a diversion at this point by playing a few selections upon the banjo and singing a comic song, handing round his tall white hat afterwards for pennies, and informing the company that they could have the pleasure of hearing him again any day upon the pier at Ferndale at 11.30 and 3 o'clock prompt.

[17] "I'm glad we're not staying at Ferndale," thought Isobel, "if all these people are going there! I'm sure Silversands will be ever so much nicer." And she turned with relief to look out through the open window.

After running for a long distance between high embankments, the train had at last reached the coast, and Isobel watched with rapture the sparkling blue sea, the long line of yellow heather-topped cliffs, and the red sails of the fishing-boats which could be seen on the distant horizon. On the shore she could catch glimpses of delightful little pools among the rocks left by the retreating tide, and Mr. Binks, who seemed to enjoy acting as guide, drew her notice continually to rows of bathing-vans, children riding donkeys or digging sand-castles on the beach, or fishwives gathering cockles at the water's edge, pointing out the various objects of interest with a fat brown finger. The few stations which they passed were crowded with tourists, one or two of whom opened the door of the compartment in the hope of finding room, but slammed it again quickly when they saw the number of its occupants.

[18] "They did ought to put on more carriages, so nigh to August Bank Holiday," said Mr. Binks. "We're close on Silversands now—you can see it there, over at t'other side of the bay—so you won't be long waitin' of your tea. You'll be rare and glad to get some, I take it, if you feel like me."

Isobel thought it was the longest and hottest journey she ever remembered; but, like most things, it at length came to a close, and after several halts and tiresome waitings on the line the heavy train crawled into Silversands. It was a little wayside station, with a gay garden running alongside the platform, and the name "Silversands" elaborately done out in white stones upon a green bank. A group of Scotch firs gave a pleasant shade and a suggestion of country woods; the sea and the sands were just visible over a tall hedge of flowering tamarisk, the meadows were

full of buttercups, while cornfields, beginning already to yellow with ripening crops, and gay with scarlet poppies, made a refreshing sight to dusty travellers.

"Here we are, mother!" cried Isobel, with delight. "This is really Silversands at last! Oh, look at the poppies among the corn! Aren't they lovely!"

[19] "Ay, it's Silversands, sure enough," said Mr. Binks, opening the carriage door and descending with the caution his bulk demanded. "Main glad I am to see it again, too. Take care, honey! Let me help you down, and your ma too. You're welcome, marm, I'm sure, to anything as I may have done for you; and if you and missy here is takin' a walk some day towards 'the balk,' just ask for Binks of the White Coppice, and my missus 'ull make you a cup of tea any time as you likes to call. Good-day to you!" And he moved away down the platform with the satisfied air of one who again finds his foot on his native heath.

Silversands seemed also to be the destination of the two travellers in whom Isobel had taken such an interest, as they got out of the train with much apparent relief, and were greeted by quite a number of enthusiastic and smartly-dressed friends who had come to the station to meet them.

"We've had the most *terrible* journey!" Isobel overheard the little girl saying. "We were obliged to go in a third-class carriage with the rudest and dirtiest people! I'm sure I'm black all over. Oh, I'm *so* glad to have got here at last!"

[20] She retailed her experiences to a sympathetic audience, while her mother, who, it appeared, had lost a handbag, insisted upon calling the station-master and giving a full description of both its labels and contents; and until their numerous boxes and portmanteaus had been collected and disposed on a carriage, and they and their friends had finally passed through the gate at the bottom of the platform, it was quite impossible for Mrs. Stewart to secure the services of the solitary porter. She managed at last, however, to gather together her modest luggage, and leaving it to follow upon a hand-cart, set out with Isobel to walk to the lodgings which she had engaged.

[21] CHAPTER II.

MRS. STEWART'S LETTER.

"'Tis half against my judgment. Kindly
fortune,
Send fair prosperity upon this venture!"

"IT will be quite easy to find our rooms, mother," said Isobel. "We know they're close to the beach, and there only seems to be one row of lodging-houses down on the shore. I suppose that must be Marine Terrace, for there isn't any other. What jolly sands! Can't you taste the salt on your lips? I feel as if I shall just want to be by the sea all the time."

"I hope it will do you good, dear," said her mother. "I declare you look better already. I shall expect you to grow quite rosy before we go home again, and to have ever such a big appetite."

[22] "I'm hungry now," replied Isobel. "I hope Mrs. Jackson will bring in tea directly we arrive. I mean to ask her first thing if she knows Mr. Binks. Wasn't it nice of him to let me sit by the window? Do you think we shall be taking a walk to the 'balk'? I don't know in the least what a 'balk' is, but I suppose we shall find out. I should like immensely to go to his farm."

"I dare say we might call there some afternoon. He seemed a kind old man, and I believe he really meant what he said, and would be pleased to see you."

"Weren't the people in the carriage funny, mother? How tiresome that pierrot was with his banjo, and the poor baby that wouldn't stop crying! I was so glad the little girl in the blue hat didn't miss the train. Isn't she lovely?"

"She's rather pretty," said Mrs. Stewart; "but I couldn't see her very well—she was sitting on my side, you remember."

[23] "I think she's perfectly beautiful!" declared Isobel, with enthusiasm—"just like one of those expensive French dolls at the stores. Did you see them drive away in the landau? I wonder where they're staying, and if we shall ever meet them again?"

"Perhaps you may see her walking on the beach, or in church," suggested Mrs. Stewart.

"I hope I shall. I wonder what her name is. Do you think she'd mind if I were to ask her?"

"Perhaps her mother might not like it," replied Mrs. Stewart. "I'm afraid it would hardly be polite."

"But I do so want to get to know her. I haven't any friends here, you see, and I think she looks so nice."

"I'm sorry, dear, but I shouldn't care for you to try to scrape an acquaintance with these people. We shall manage to have a very happy time together, hunting for shells and sea-weeds. You must take me for a friend instead."

"You're better than any friend!" said Isobel, squeezing her mother's hand. "Of course I like being with you best, sweetest; only sometimes, when you're reading or lying down, it *is* nice to have somebody to talk to. I won't ask her her name if you say I'd better not; but I hope I shall see her again, if it's only just to look at her. Why, this is the house—there's No. 4 over the doorway; and that must be Mrs. Jackson standing in the front garden looking out for us. I think she ought to be Mr. Binks's cousin; she's as fat and red in the face as he is."

[24]

"The place is very full, mum," said Mrs. Jackson, showing them to the little back sitting-room, which, at August prices, was all Mrs. Stewart had been able to afford. "I had three parties in yesterday askin' for rooms, and could have let this small parlour twice over for double the money but what I'd promised it to you. Not as I wanted to take 'em, though, for they was all noisy lots as would have needed a deal of waitin' on. I'd rather have quiet visitors like you and the young lady here, as isn't always a-ringin' their bells and playin' on the pianer till midnight, though I may be the loser by it. I'm short-handed now my daughter Emma Jane's married, and not so quick at gettin' up and down stairs as I used to be."

"I don't think you'll find we shall give more trouble than we can help," said Mrs. Stewart gently. "We seldom require much waiting on, and we hope to be out most of the day."

[25]

"I'm only too glad to do all I can, mum, to make folks feel home-like," declared Mrs. Jackson, showing the capacities of the cupboard, and calling attention to the superior comfort of the armchairs. "And if there's anything else you'd like, I hope as you'll mention it. I'm a little short in my breath, and a bit lame in my right leg, bein' troubled with rheumatics in the winter, but I do my best to please, and so does Polly (she's my niece), though she's a girl with no head, and can't remember a thing for two minutes on end."

"I'm sure you'll make us comfortable," said Mrs. Stewart, "and we hope to have a very happy time indeed at Silversands. We should be glad if you could bring in tea now; we're both very hot and thirsty after our long journey."

"That you will be, I'm sure, mum," returned Mrs. Jackson. "We've not had a hotter day this summer. Little missy looks fair tired out. But there's nought like a cup of tea to refresh one, and I'll have it up in a few minutes; the kettle's ready and boilin'."

"The room feels rather stuffy," said Mrs. Stewart, throwing open the window when her landlady had departed to the kitchen regions. "I'm sorry we have no view of the sea; but we can't help that, and we must be out of doors the whole day long. Luckily the weather is gloriously fine, and seems likely to keep so."

[26]

"What queer ornaments, mother!" said Isobel, going slowly round the room and examining with much curiosity two stuffed cocks, a glass bottle containing a model of a ship with full sail and rigging, a case of somewhat moth-eaten and dilapidated butterflies, a representation of Windsor Castle cut out in cork, some sickly portraits of the Royal Family in cheap German gilt frames, and a large Berlin wool-work sampler, which, in addition to the alphabet and a verse of a hymn, depicted birds of paradise at the top and weeping willows at the bottom, and set forth that it was the work of Eliza Jane Horrocks, aged ten years.

"I think we shan't need quite so many crochet antimacassars," laughed Mrs. Stewart. "There seems to be one on every chair, and there are actually five on the sofa. We must ask Mrs. Jackson to take some of them away. We would rather be without all these shell baskets and photo frames on the little table, too. If we moved it into the window it would be very nice for painting or writing if it should happen to be a wet day."

"I hope it won't be wet," said Isobel. "At any rate, there are some books to read if it is," turning over a row of volumes which reposed on the top of the chiffonnier. "I've never seen such peculiar pictures. The little girls have white trousers right down to their ankles, and the boys have deep frilled collars and quite long hair."

[27]

"They are very old-fashioned books," said Mrs. Stewart, examining with a smile "The Youth's Moral Miscellany," "The Maiden's Garland," "A Looking-Glass for the Mind," and "Instructive Stories for Young People," which, with a well-thumbed edition of "Sandford and Merton," a battered copy of "The History of the Fairchild Family," and a few bound volumes of *Chambers's Journal*, made up the extent of the library. "I should think they must have belonged to Mrs. Jackson's mother or grandmother for this one has the date 1820 written inside it."

"Of course they don't look so nice as my books at home," said Isobel; "but they'd be something new."

"You're such a greedy reader that no doubt you will get through them, however dry they may prove," laughed her mother. "Here comes our tea. We shall enjoy new-laid eggs and fresh country

butter, shan't we?"

"I wonder if they're from Mr. Binks's farm," said Isobel, seating herself at the table.—"Do you know Mr. Binks, Mrs. Jackson? He said I was to ask you, and he was sure you wouldn't deny the acquaintance."

"Know Peter Binks, miss!" exclaimed Mrs. Jackson. "Why, there isn't a soul in Silversands as doesn't know him. Binks has lived at the White Coppice ever since I was a girl, and afore then, and him church-warden too, and owner of the *Britannia*, as good a schooner as any about. His wife's second cousin is married to my daughter, and livin' at Ferndale. Know him! I should just say I do!"

[28] "I thought you would!" said Isobel delightedly. "We met him in the train as we were coming. He gave me his seat by the window, and asked us to go to his farm some day. You'll be able to tell us the way, won't you?"

"Another time, dear child," said Mrs. Stewart "Mrs. Jackson's busy now, and our tea is waiting.—Thank you; yes, I think we have everything we need at present. Polly might bring a little boiling water in a few minutes, and we will ring the bell if we require anything more.—Come, Isobel, you said you were hungry!"

"A nice-spoken lady," said Mrs. Jackson afterwards to her husband in the privacy of the kitchen. "Any one could see with half an eye as they was gentlefolk, though they've only taken the back room. I wonder, now, if they can be any relation to old Mr. Stewart at the Chase. They did say as the son—him as was killed in the war—had married somewhere in furrin parts, and his father was terrible set against it, havin' a wife of his own choosin' ready for him at home. A regular family quarrel it was, and both too proud to make it up; but they said the old man was nigh heartbroken when his son was taken, and he'd never sent him a kind word. I had it all from Peter Binks's nephew, who was under-gardener there at the time."

[29] "It might be," said Mr. Jackson oracularly, taking a pinch of snuff as he spoke, "and, on the other hand, it might not be. Stewart's by no means an uncommon kind of a name. There was a Stewart second mate on the *Arizona* when we took kippers over to Belfast, and there was a chap called Stewart as used to keep a snug little public down by the quay in Whitecastle, but I never heard tell as either of 'em was any connection of old Mr. Stewart up at the Chase."

"It weren't likely they should be," replied Mrs. Jackson, with scorn. "But that don't make it any less likely in this case. I remember Mr. Godfrey quite well when we lived at Linkhead, and I'd used to walk over with Emma Jane to Heatherton Church of a Sunday afternoon. A fine handsome young fellow he was, too, sittin' with his father in the family pew, takin' a yawn behind his hand durin' the sermon, and small blame to him too—old Canon Martindale used to preach that long! I can see him now, if I close my eyes, with his light hair shinin' against the red curtain of the big square pew. Little missy has quite a look of him, to my mind."

[30] "You're always imaginin' romances, Eliza," said Mr. Jackson. "It comes of too much readin'. You and Polly sit over them stories in *The Family Herald* till you make up goodness knows what tales about every new party as comes to the house. There was the young man with the long hair as played the fiddle, whom you was sure was a furrin count, and who only turned out to be one of the band at Ferndale, and went off without payin' his bill; and there was a couple in the drawing-room as talked that grand about their motor car and their shootin' box and important business till you thought it was a member of Parliament and his lady, takin' a rest and travellin' incog., till you found out they was only wine merchants from Whitecastle after all. Don't you go a-meddlin'. Let them manage their own affairs, and we'll manage ours."

[31] "How you talk!" declared Mrs. Jackson indignantly. "Who wants to meddle? As if one couldn't take a bit of interest in one's own visitors! There's the drawin'-room a-ringin', and the dinin'-room will be wantin' its tea. Stir the fire, Joe, and hold the toast whilst I answer the bell. Where's that Polly a-gone to, I wonder?"

In spite of her husband's disdainful comments, Mrs. Jackson's surmises were not altogether groundless; and if she had peeped into her back sitting-room that evening, when Isobel was in bed, she might have seen her visitor slowly and with much care and thought composing a letter. Sheet after sheet of notepaper was covered, and then torn up, for the writer's efforts did not seem to satisfy her, and she leaned her head on her hand every now and then with a weary air, as if she had undertaken a distasteful task.

"I do not ask anything for myself," wrote Mrs. Stewart at last. "That you should care to meet me, or ever become reconciled to me, is, I know, beyond all question. My one request is that you will see your grandchild. She is now nearly eleven years of age, a thorough Stewart, tall and fair, and with so strong a resemblance to her father that you cannot fail to see the likeness. I have done my utmost for her, but I am not able to give her the advantages I should wish her to have, and which, as her father's child, I feel it is hard for her to lack. She is named Isobel, after your only daughter, the little sister whose loss my husband always spoke of with so much regret, and whom he hoped she might resemble. You would find her truthful, straightforward, obedient, and well-behaved, and in every respect worthy of the name of Stewart. It is with the greatest difficulty that I bring myself to ask of you any favour, but for the sake of the one, dear to us both, who is gone, I beg that you will at least see my Isobel, and judge her for yourself."

She addressed the letter to Colonel Stewart, the Chase, sealed it, stamped it, and took it herself

[32] to the post. For a moment she stood and hesitated—a moment in which she seemed almost inclined to draw back after all; she turned the letter over doubtfully in her hand, went a step away, then suddenly straightening herself with an air of firm determination, she dropped it into the pillar-box and returned to her lodgings. Going upstairs to the bedroom, she tenderly lifted the soft golden hair, and looked at the quiet, sleeping face of her little girl.

"He cannot fail to like her," she said to herself. "It was the only right thing to do, and what *he* would have wished. I'm glad I have had the courage to make the attempt. He will surely acknowledge her now, and my one prayer is that he will not take her away from me."

[33] CHAPTER III.

A MEETING ON THE SANDS.

"What's in a name? That which we call a
rose,
By any other name would smell as
sweet."

[34] **T**HE little town of Silversands was built on the cliffs by the sea, so close over the greeny-blue water that the dash of the waves was always in your ears and the taste of the salt spray on your lips. The picturesque thatched fishermen's cottages lay scattered one above another down the steep hillside at such strange and irregular angles that the narrow streets which led from the quay wound in and out like a maze, and you found your way to the shore down flights of wide steps under low archways, or by a pathway cut through your neighbour's cabbage patch. It was not difficult to guess the occupation of most of the inhabitants, for fishing-nets of all descriptions might be seen hanging out to dry over every available railing; great flat skates and conger eels were nailed to the doorways to be cured in the sun; rosy-faced women appeared to be eternally washing blue jerseys, which fluttered like flags from the various little gardens; and the bare-headed, brown-legged children who gathered cockles on the sands, or angled for crabs from the jetty, seemed as much at home in the water as on dry land. The harbour was decidedly fishy; bronzed burly seamen were perpetually unloading cargoes of herrings which they stowed away into barrels, or lobsters that were carefully packed in baskets to be dispatched to the neighbouring towns. There was a kind of open-air market, fitted up with rickety stalls where you might buy fresh cod and mackerel still alive and shining with all the lovely fleeting colours which fade so quickly when they are taken from the water. You could afford to be extravagant in the way of shell-fish, if you liked such delicacies, since a large red cotton pocket-handkerchief full of cockles and mussels only cost a penny, and whelks and periwinkles sold at a halfpenny the pint.

[35] At high water the quay was always agog with excitement, the coming in of the boats being accompanied with that hauling of ropes, creaking of windlasses, shouting of hoarse voices and general confusion both among toiling workers and idle loungers that seem inseparable from the business of a port, while the occasional advent of an excursion steamer was an event which attracted every looker-on in the harbour. All the talk at Silversands was of tides and storms, of good or bad catches, the luck of one vessel or the ill-fortune of another, and to the fisher-folk the affairs of the empire were of small importance compared with the arrival and departure of the herring-fleet. The schools gave a thin veneer of education, but it seemed to vanish away directly with the contact of the waves, so that the customs and modes of thought of most of the people differed little from those of their forefathers who slept, some in the churchyard on the edge of the cliff, with quaint epitaphs to record their virtues, and some in those deeper graves over which no stones could be reared.

[36] Standing apart from the old town was a modern portion which was just beginning to dignify itself with the name of a seaside resort. To be sure, it was yet guiltless of pier, promenade, band, or niggers; but, as the owner of the new grocery stores remarked, "you never knew what might follow, and many a fashionable watering-place had risen from quite as modest a commencement." There was already a row of shops with plate-glass windows and a handsome display of spades, buckets, shell-purses, baskets, china ornaments, photographic views, and other articles calculated to tempt the shillings from the pockets of summer visitors; there were several streets of lodging-houses near the railway station, as well as the long terrace facing the sea, dignified rather prematurely by the name of "The Parade," and an enterprising tradesman from Ferndale had opened a tea-room and a circulating library. The proprietor of the bathing machines was doing a good business, and had set up a stand with six donkeys; a photographer had ventured to erect a wooden studio upon the beach, where he would take your likeness for eighteenpence; and the common was occasionally the camp of some travelling circus, which, though *en route* for a larger sphere of action, did not disdain to give a performance in passing.

[37] Like a link between the old and the new, the ancient gray stone church stood on the verge of the cliff above the harbour, looking out to sea as if it were always watching over those of its children who had their business in great waters, and sending up silent prayers on their behalf. In the square tower the bells had rung for seven hundred years, and the flat roof with its turreted battlements told tales of wild times of Border forays, when the people had fled with their goods to the one spot of safety, and watched the smoke of their burning farms, as the victorious Scots drove away their cattle over the blue line of hills towards the north.

[38] But I think the great attraction of Silversands was its delightful beach. The sands were hard and firm, and covered in places with patches of sea holly or horned poppies and the beautiful pink bindweed growing here and there with its roots deep down among the clumps of stones. Above rose the cliffs in bold craggy outlines, their tops crowned by a heather-clad common which stretched far inland, while the low tide disclosed attractive rocky pools where anemones, hermit crabs, sea urchins, jelly fish, mermaids' purses, starfishes, and all kinds of fascinating objects might be captured by those who cared to look for them.

The afternoon of the day following her arrival found Isobel wandering along this shore alone. Mrs. Stewart had been unfortunate enough to meet with an accident that morning: slipping on the rocks she had twisted her ankle severely, and it was only with the greatest difficulty that she had managed to limp back to the lodgings.

"It's a bad sprain, too," said Mrs. Jackson, shaking her head as she helped to soak cold water bandages. "You won't be able to put that foot to the ground for a matter of ten days or more. It's a good thing now as I didn't sell the sofa, which I nearly let it go in the spring, as it do fill up the room so; but you can rest there nicely, and keep puttin' on fresh cloths all the time, though it do seem a pity, with your holiday only just begun."

"I must try to be patient, and get it well as fast as possible," replied Mrs. Stewart.—"I'm afraid it will be very dull for you, Isobel, my poor child, while I'm lying here. You will have to amuse yourself on the beach as best you can. I certainly can't have you staying indoors on my account."

"It will be much duller for you, mother dear," said Isobel. "I shall be all right—I like being on the shore—but you won't have anything to do except read. What a good thing we brought plenty of books with us! I'm so sorry our sitting-room hasn't any view. I shall try to find all the shells and sea-weeds and things that I can, and keep bringing them in to show you."

[39] It was on a quest, therefore, for any treasures which she thought might interest her mother that Isobel strolled slowly along, looking with delight at the gleaming sea, the red sails of the herring-fleet, and the little white yacht which came slowly round the point of the cliff, waiting for a puff of wind to take her to the harbour. The tide was coming in fast, and the churning of the waves, as they ground the small pebbles along the beach, had the most inspiriting and refreshing sound. She stooped every now and then to pick up a shell, or to clutch at a great piece of ribbon sea-weed which was dashed to her feet by an advancing wave; she had an exciting chase after a scuttling crab, and missed him in the end, and nearly got drenched with spray trying to rescue a walking-stick which she could see floating at the edge of the water. She had filled her pockets with a moist collection of specimens, and was half thinking of turning back to retrace her footsteps to Marine Terrace, when from behind a crag of rock which jutted out sharply on to the sands she heard a sound of children's voices and laughter. Moved with curiosity she peeped round the corner, and found herself at the edge of a small patch of green common that ran along the shore between the cliffs and the sea. It was covered with soft fine grass and little low-growing flowers; the broken masts washed up from a wreck made capital seats; and, altogether, it appeared as pleasant a playground as could well be imagined.

[40] So, at any rate, seemed to think the group of boys and girls who were assembled there, since they had set up some wickets, and were enthusiastically engaged in a game of cricket, for which the short fine grass made an excellent pitch. It looked so interesting that Isobel strolled rather nearer to the players, and finding an upturned boat upon the beach, she curled herself under its shadow, and settled down, apparently unnoticed, to watch the progress of the game. She could hear as well as see, and her ears were keenly alert to the scraps of lively conversation which floated towards her.

"Have you found the ball?"

"Yes; under a heap of nettles, and stung my fingers horribly. Just look at the blisters."

"Don't be a baby. Go on; it's your play."

"I can't hold the bat while my hands hurt so."

"Then miss your turn.—Come along, Bertie, and have your innings; Ruth doesn't want hers."

[41] "Yes, I do! I'm older than Bertie, so I must go in first. If you'd only wait a minute, till I can find a dock leaf."

"We can't wait. How tiresome you are! Here, Bertie, take the bat."

"It's not fair! We were to go in ages, and I'm six months older than he is."

"You can have your turn after Joyce."

"Joyce! She's only nine, and I'm eleven."

"Then miss it altogether, and don't make yourself a nuisance!—Now then, Bertie, look out for a screw."

"It's a shame! I always seem to get left out of things!" grumbled the little girl, with a very aggrieved countenance, sitting down upon a rusty anchor, and nursing her nettled hand tenderly.

"It's your own fault this time, at any rate," said a companion, with scant sympathy. "There are plenty of dock leaves growing under the cliff if you want them."

"Bravo, Bertie! Well hit!"

"Quick with that ball, Arthur!"

"Play up, Bertie!"

"Well run! Well run!"

"Oh, he's out! Hard luck!"

"Whose turn is it now?"

"Belle's."

"Where is she?"

"Here I am, ready and waiting. Now give me a good ball. It's Hugh's turn to bowl, and if he sends me one of his nasty screws or sneaks I shan't be friends with him any more."

Isobel gazed at the last speaker, entranced. There was no mistaking the apple-blossom cheeks and the silky flaxen curls of her fellow-traveller in the crowded carriage, though to-day the white silk dress and the blue hat were replaced by a delicate pale pink muslin and a broad-brimmed straw trimmed with a gauze scarf. She looked even more charming than ever, like some fairy in a story-book or one of the very prettiest pictures you get upon chocolate boxes; she seemed to put all other children round her in the shade, and as she stood there, a graceful little figure at the wicket, Isobel's eyes followed her every movement with an absolute fascination.

The first ball was a slow one, and she hit it fairly well, but did not make a run; the next she merely slogged; the third was high, and as she wisely let it alone, it cleared the wicket; the fourth was a full pitch: she tried to play it down, but unfortunately it hit the top of her bat, and went right into the long-stop's hands.

"Caught!"

"She's out!"

"What an easy catch!"

"Come along, Aggie, your innings."

The vanquished player put down her bat somewhat reluctantly, and walked slowly away in the direction of the old boat. She sat down on the sand close by Isobel, and taking off her hat, began to fan her hot face with it. After stealing several glances at her companion, she at length volunteered a remark.

"It was too bad, wasn't it," she said, "to be caught out first thing like that?"

"Much too bad!" replied Isobel. "But I think they were horrid balls."

"So they were. Hugh always sends the most mean ones. Weren't you in the train with us yesterday?"

"Yes. I saw you first at the bookstall at Tiverton."

"Didn't you think the people in the carriage detestable? I nearly died with the heat and stuffiness."

"It was dreadfully hot and noisy."

"Noisy! I don't know which was worse—the baby or the banjo! You were better off sitting by the window, though that fat old man would keep talking to you."

"He was rather kind," said Isobel; "I didn't mind him."

"I suppose you're staying at Silversands, aren't you?"

"Yes, at 4 Marine Terrace."

"We're in Marine Terrace too, at No. 12. We have the upstairs suite. They're not bad rooms for a little place like this, but they don't know how to wait. Mother says she wishes they'd build a hotel here. What's it like at No. 4?"

"It's quite comfortable," replied Isobel. "We have a nice landlady."

"Are there only just you and your mother?"

"That's all."

"Have you no father?"

"He's dead. He was killed in the Boer War."

"Was he a soldier, then?"

"Yes; he was a captain in the Fifth Dragoon Guards."

"My father is dead too. Have you any brothers and sisters?"

"No. I never had any."

"Neither have I. I only wish I had. It's so lonely without, isn't it?"

"It is, rather; but I'm a great deal with mother."

"So am I; still, when she's at home she's out so much, and then I never know what to do."

"Don't you read?" said Isobel.

"I'm not fond of reading. I only like books when there's really nothing else to amuse myself with."

"You were buying a book at Tiverton. Which one did you get? Is it nice?"

[45]

"It's just a school story. I forget its name now. I haven't looked at it again."

"Then you didn't choose 'The Red Cross Knight' after all?"

"Oh, that's too like lessons! I've had all that with my governess, and about King Arthur too. I'm quite tired of them. Have you a governess?"

"No," replied Isobel; "I do lessons with mother."

"How jolly for you! I wish I did. I'm to be sent to school in another year, and I don't think I shall like that at all. When are you going?"

"Not till I'm thirteen, I expect."

"How old are you now?"

"Almost eleven."

"Why, so am I! When's your birthday?"

"On the thirteenth of September."

"And mine is on the tenth of October, so you're nearly a month older than I am. You haven't told me your name yet?"

"My name's Isobel Stewart."

"What!" cried the other, opening her blue eyes wide in the greatest astonishment. "That's *my* name!"

"*Your* name!" exclaimed Isobel, in equal amazement.

"Of course it is. *My* name's Isabelle Stuart."

[46]

"How do you spell it?"

"I-S-A-B-E-L-L-E S-T-U-A-R-T."

"And mine's spelt I-S-O-B-E-L S-T-E-W-A-R-T, so that makes a little difference."

"So it does. I'm called 'Belle,' too, for short. Are you?"

"No; never anything but Isobel."

"It's funny. We're the same name and the same age, and we're staying in the same terrace. I think it is what you'd call a 'coincidence.' We came to Silversands on the same day, too, and in the same railway carriage. We ought to be twin sisters. You're really rather like me, you know, only you're pale, and your hair doesn't curl."

[47]

Isobel shook her head. She had a very modest opinion of her own attractions, and would not have dreamt of comparing her appearance with that of her pretty companion, so very far did she think she ranked below the other's style of beauty.

"I should like to be friends, at any rate," she said shyly. "Perhaps I shall see you again upon the shore. I'm afraid that's your mother calling you. I think I ought to go home now too; I didn't mean to be out so long."

Isabelle Stuart sprang to her feet.

"Yes, it's mother calling," she said. "She's walked up with Mrs. Rokeby. I must fly. But I hope we shall meet again. I shall look out for you on the sands. Good-bye!"

[48]

"Good-bye!"

Isobel stood watching her as she ran lightly away; then turning, she hurried home as fast as possible along the beach, for she was very excited at this strange meeting, and was anxious to give her mother a full and detailed account of it.

"I didn't ask her *her* name, mother," she explained. "It was she who asked me mine. You told me I'd better not speak to her; but she spoke to me first, and asked me ever so many questions. Isn't it queer that our names should be just the same, and our ages too? You'll let us be friends now, won't you? I think she's the nicest girl I've ever met in my life, and I can't tell you how much I want to know her."

CHAPTER IV.

THE SEA URCHINS' CLUB.

"'Twas here where the urchins would gather to
play,
In the shadows of twilight or sunny midday."

ISOBEL found her namesake waiting for her on the beach next morning.

"I thought you'd be coming out soon," announced Belle, "so I just stopped about till I saw you. We're all starting off to play cricket again on the common down under the cliffs, and I want you to go with us. I've taken *such* a fancy to you! I told mother I had, and she laughed and said it wouldn't last long; but I *know* it will. I feel as if you were going to be my bosom friend. You'll come, won't you?"

"Of course I will," replied Isobel, accepting the offered friendship with rapture. "Mother told me to do what I liked this morning."

"Let us be quick, then. The others have run on in front, but we'll soon catch them up."

[49]

"Are you going to the same place where you were playing yesterday?" asked Isobel.

"Yes; we call it our club ground. We mean to have matches there almost every day. It'll be ever *such* fun. You see there are several families of us staying at Silversands that all know one another, so we've joined ourselves together in a club. We call it 'The United Sea Urchins' Recreation Society,' and it's not to be only for cricket, because we mean to play rounders and hockey as well, and to go out boating, and have shrimping parties on the sands. We arranged it last night after tea. There are just twenty of us, if you count the Wrights' baby, so that makes quite enough to get up all sorts of games. Hugh Rokeby's the president, and Charlie Chester's secretary, and Charlotte Wright's treasurer. We each pay twopence a week subscription, and at the end of the holiday we're going to have what the boys call a 'regular blow-out' with the funds—ginger beer, you know, and cakes, and ices if we can afford it. I wanted to make the subscription sixpence, but Letty Rokeby said the little ones couldn't give so much. I'll ask them to elect you a member. You'd like to join, wouldn't you?"

"Immensely. But I haven't any money with me now."

[50]

"Oh, never mind! You can give it to Charlotte afterwards. Here we are. I expect they're all waiting. I see they've put the stumps up. You don't know anybody except me, do you? I'll soon tell you their names."

The party of children who were assembled upon the green patch of common certainly appeared to be a very jolly one. First there were the Rokebys, a large and tempestuous family of seven, who were staying at a farm on the cliffs by the wood.

"A thoroughly healthy place," as Mrs. Rokeby often remarked, "with a good water supply, and no danger of catching anything infectious. We've really been so unfortunate. Hugh and Letty took scarlet fever at the lodgings in Llandudno last year, and I had the most dreadful time nursing them; Winnie and Arnold had mumps at Scarborough the year before; and the three youngest were laid up with German measles at Easter in the Isle of Man; so it has made me quite nervous."

Just at present the Rokebys did not seem in danger of contracting anything more serious than colds or sprained ankles, for a more reckless crew in the way of falling into wet pools, climbing slippery rocks, or generally endangering their lives and limbs could not be imagined. It was in vain that poor Mrs. Rokeby dried their boots and brushed their clothes, and implored them to keep away from perilous spots; they were full of repentance, and would vow amendment with the most warm-hearted of hugs, but in half an hour they had forgotten all their promises, and would be racing over the rocks again as wet and jolly as ever.

[51]

"I really do my best to keep them tidy," sighed Mrs. Rokeby pathetically to Mrs. Barrington. "Their father grumbles horribly at the bills, but they seem to wear their clothes out as fast as I buy them. Bertie's new Norfolk suit is shabby already, and Winnie's Sunday frock isn't fit to be seen. As to their boots, I sometimes think I shall have to let them go bare-foot. Other people's children don't seem to give half the trouble that mine do. Look at them now—dragging Lulu down the sands, when I told them she mustn't get overheated on any account! The doctor said we were to be so careful of her, and keep her quiet; but it seems no use—she *will* run after the others. Oh dear! I can't allow them to turn her head over heels like that!"

[52] And Mrs. Rokeby flew to the rescue of her delicate youngest, administering a vigorous scolding to the elder ones, which apparently made as little impression upon them as water on a duck's back. The untidy appearance and unruly behaviour of her undisciplined flock were really a trial to Mrs. Rokeby, since they generally managed to compare unfavourably with the Wrights, a stolid and matter-of-fact family who were staying in rooms near the station.

"You never see Charlotte Wright with her dress torn to ribbons, or her hair in her eyes," she would remonstrate with Letty and Winnie. "Both she and Aggie can wear their sailor blouses for three days, while yours aren't fit to be seen at the end of a morning."

"The Wrights are so stupid," replied Winnie, "you can hardly get them to have any fun at all. They spend nearly the whole time with that mademoiselle they've brought with them. They're so proud of her, they do nothing but let off French remarks just to try to impress us. She's only a holiday governess too—they don't have her when they're at home—so there's no need for them to give themselves such airs about it. I believe their French isn't anything much either, they put in so many English words."

"Arthur Wright actually brings his books down on to the shore," said Letty, "and does Greek and Euclid half the morning. He says he's working for a scholarship. You wouldn't catch Hugh or Cecil at that."

[53] "I'm afraid I shouldn't," sighed Mrs. Rokeby. "To judge from their bad reports at school, it seems difficult enough to get them to learn anything in term time. As for mademoiselle, you might take the opportunity to talk to her a little, and improve your own French."

"No, thank you!" said Winnie, pulling a wry face. "No holiday lessons for me. I loathe French, and I never can understand a single word that mademoiselle says, so it's no use. If the Wrights like to sit on the sand and 'parlez-vous,' they may. They're so fat, they can't rush about like we do. That's why they keep so tidy. Charlotte's waist is exactly twice as big as mine—we measured them yesterday with a piece of string—and Aggie's cheeks are as round as puddings. You should see how they all pant when they play cricket. They scarcely get any runs."

"And they really eat far more even than we do, mother," said Letty. "Aggie had five buns on the shore yesterday, and Eric took sixteen biscuits. I know he did, for we counted them, and he nearly emptied the box."

[54] "The Chesters are five times as jolly," declared Winnie. "Both Charlie and Hilda went out shrimping with us this morning, and got sopping wet, but they didn't mind in the least, and Mrs. Chester only laughed when they went back. She said sea water didn't hurt. She's far nicer than Mrs. Barrington. I wouldn't be Ruth Barrington for all the world. She and Edna never have any breakfast, and they're made to do the queerest things."

The unlucky little Barringtons were possessed of parents who clung to theories which they themselves described as "wholesome ideas," and their friends denounced as "absurd cranks." Many and various were the experiments which they tried upon their children's health and education, sometimes with rather disastrous results. Being at present enthusiastic members of a "No Breakfast League," which held that two meals a day were amply sufficient for the requirements of any rational human being, they had limited their family repasts to luncheon and supper, at which only vegetarian dishes were permitted to appear; and the poor children, hungry with sea air and with running about on the sands, who would have enjoyed an unstinted supply of butcher's meat and bread and butter, were carefully dieted on plasmon, prepared nuts, and many patent foods, which their mother measured out in exact portions, keeping a careful record in her diary of the amount they were allowed to consume, and taking the pair to be weighed every week upon the automatic machine at the railway station. Their costumes consisted of plain blue over-alls pinafores and sandals, and they wore neither hats nor stockings.

[55] "It's all right for the seaside," grumbled Ruth to her intimate friends, "because we can go into the water without minding getting into a mess; but we have to wear exactly the same in town, and it's horrible. You can't think how every one stares at us, just as if we were a show. Sometimes ladies stop us, and ask our governess if we've lost our hats, and hadn't she better tie our handkerchiefs over our heads? We shouldn't dare to go out alone even if we were allowed, we look so queer. We went once to the post by ourselves, and some rude boys chased us all the way, calling out 'Bare-legs!' It's dreadfully cold in winter, too, without stockings, and when it rains our heads get wet through, and we have to be dried with towels when we come in again. I wonder why we can't be dressed like other people. I wish I had Belle Stuart's clothes; they're perfectly lovely!"

[56] Ruth's rather pathetic little face always bore the injured expression of one who cherishes a grievance. She was a thin, pale child, who did not look as though she flourished upon her peculiar system of bringing up, which seemed to have the unfortunate effect of completely

spoiling her temper, and making her see life through an extremely blue pair of spectacles. This summer she certainly thought she had a just cause of complaint, since her two schoolboy brothers, instead of spending their holidays as usual at the seaside, had been dispatched on a walking-tour to Switzerland with a certain German professor, who, in accordance with the latest educational fad, was conducting a select little party of boys on an open-air pilgrimage, the main features of which seemed to be to walk bare-foot by day and to sleep in a kind of wigwam at night, which they erected out of alpenstocks and mackintoshes.

[57] "It's too disgusting!" said Ruth dolefully. "Just when Edna and I had been looking forward all the term to the boys coming home, and making so many plans of what we would do and the fun we would have, some wretched person sent father a copy of *The Educational Times*, with a long account of this horrid walking-tour, and he said it was the exact thing for Clifford and Keith, and insisted upon arranging it at once. I think mother was really dreadfully disappointed. I believe she wanted to have them home as much as we did, because she said they ought to go to the dentist's, and she must look over their clothes, and she should like to give them some phosphates tonic; but father said they could have their teeth attended to at Geneva, and she could send the tonic to the professor, and ask him to see that they took it. I know the boys will be furious; they hate taking medicine: they generally keep it in their mouths, and spit it out afterwards. They'll have to talk German all day long too, and they can't bear that. You've no idea how they detest languages. I had a picture post-card from Clifford yesterday, and he said his feet were horribly sore with walking bare-foot, and his tent blew away one night, and he was obliged to sleep in the open air."

[58] No greater contrast could be found to the Barringtons than the Chester children. Charlie, the elder, a lively young pickle of twelve, was on terms of great intimacy with all the fishermen and sailor boys whose acquaintance he could cultivate, talking in a learned manner of main-sheets, fore-stays, jibs, gaffs, booms and bowsprits, and using every nautical term he could manage to pick up. He had a very good idea of rowing, and would often persuade the men to let him go out with them in their boats, taking his turn at an oar, much to their amusement, and setting log lines with the serious air of a practised hand. His jolly, friendly ways won him general favour, and he was allowed to make himself at home on many of the little fishing smacks, learning to hoist sails, to steer, and to cast nets, though sometimes a too inquiring mind led him to interfere on his own account in the navigation, with the result that he would be unceremoniously bundled back to shore again, with a warning to "keep out of this" in the future.

[59] He was the envy of his eight-year-old sister Hilda, who would have liked to follow him through thick and thin, but the sailors drew the line at little girls, and would politely request "missy" to "return home to her ma," as there was no place for her "on this 'ere craft," much to her indignation. She consoled herself, however, by organizing the games of the younger Wrights and Rokebys, making wonderful sand harbours with their aid, and sailing a fleet of toy boats with as keen an enthusiasm as if they were real ones.

At the end of a morning on the common Isobel found herself on quite an intimate footing with the Wrights, the Rokebys, the Barringtons, and the Chesters, besides being a duly elected member of "The United Sea Urchins' Recreation Society."

[59] "I've never had such fun in my life," she confided to her mother at dinner-time. "We played cricket, and then we went along the shore, because the tide was so low. I picked up the most beautiful screw shells, and razor shells, and fan shells you ever saw. I had to put them in my pocket handkerchief because I hadn't a basket with me. Bertie Rokeby got into a quicksand up to his knees, and Lulu sat down in the water in her clothes. You must come and see our club ground, mother, when you can walk so far. We have it quite to ourselves, for it's right behind the cliff, and none of the other visitors seem to have found it out yet; and if anybody else tries to take it, the boys say they mean to turn them off, because we got it first. They're all going to carry their tea there this afternoon, and light a fire of drift-wood to boil the kettle. So may I go too, and then we shall play cricket again in the evening?"

CHAPTER V

A HOT FRIENDSHIP.

"I was a child, and she was a
child,
In this kingdom by the sea."

[60] **B**Y the time Isobel had been a week at Silversands she had begun to feel as much at home there as the oldest inhabitant. She had won golden opinions from Mrs. Jackson at the

lodgings, and had been invited by that worthy woman into the upper drawing-room during the temporary absence of its occupiers, and shown a most fascinating cabinet full of foreign shells, stuffed birds, corals, ivory bangles, sandal-wood boxes, and other curiosities brought home by a sailor son who made many voyages to the East.

"Don't you wish you could have gone with him and got all these things for yourself?" said Isobel ecstatically, when she had examined and admired every article separately, and heard its history.

[61] "Nay," replied Mrs. Jackson, "I've never had no mind for shipboard, though my second cousin was stewardess on a Channel steamer for a matter of fifteen year, and made a tidy sum out of it too. She could have got me taken on by the Anchor Line as runs to America if I'd have signed for two years. That was when my first husband died, and afore I married Jackson; but I felt I'd rather starve on dry land than take it, though it was good wages they offered, to say nothing of tips."

"Why, it would be glorious to go to America," said Isobel, sighing to think what her companion had missed. "You might have seen Red Indians, and wigwams, and medicine men, and 'robes of fur and belts of wampum,' like it talks of in 'Hiawatha.' Do you know 'Hiawatha'?"

"There were an old steamer of that name used to trade from Liverpool in hides and tallow when I were a girl, if that's the one you mean. I wonder she hasn't foundered afore now."

"Oh no!" cried Isobel hastily. "It isn't a steamer; it's a piece of poetry. I've just been reading it with mother, and it's most delightful. I could lend it to you if you like. We brought the book with us."

[62] Mrs. Jackson's acquaintance with the muse, however, seemed to be limited to the hymns in church, and a hazy remembrance of certain pieces in her spelling book when a child, and being apparently unwilling to further cultivate her mind in that direction, she declined the offer on the score of lack of time.

"Not but what Jackson's fond of a bit of poetry now and again," she admitted. "He sings a good song or two when he's in the mood, and he do like readin' over the verses on the funeral cards. He pins them all up on the kitchen wall where he can get at them handy. What suits me more is something in the way of a romance—'Lady Gwendolen's Lovers,' or 'The Black Duke's Secret'—when I've time to take up a book, which isn't often, with three sets of lodgers in the house, and a girl as can't even remember how to make a bed properly, to say nothing of laying a table, and 'ull take the dining-room dinner up to the drawing-room."

The much-enduring Polly, though certainly not an accomplished waitress, was the most good-tempered of girls, and an invaluable ally in saving the treasured specimens of flowers or seaweeds which Mrs. Jackson, in her praiseworthy efforts at tidiness, was continually clearing out, under the plea that she "hadn't imagined they could be wanted."

[63] "She even threw away my mermaids' purses and the whelks' eggs that we found on the sand-bank," said Isobel to her mother. "But Polly climbed into the ashpit and grubbed them up again. She washed them in a bucket of water, and they're quite nice now; so I shall put them in a box, to make sure they'll be safe. Polly's father is part owner of a schooner, and sometimes they fish up the most enormous fan shells. She says she'll ask him to give me a few when she's time to go home, but she hasn't had a night out for nearly three weeks, the season's been so busy."

[64] "Perhaps old Biddy could get you some large fan shells," suggested Mrs. Stewart. "I believe they find them sometimes very far out on the beach when they're shrimping."

Biddy was a well-known character in Silversands. She was a lively old Irishwoman, with the strongest of brogues and the most beguiling of tongues. In a blue check apron, and with a red shawl tied over her head, she might be seen every morning wheeling her barrow down the parade, where her amusing powers of blarney, added to the freshness of her fish, secured her a large circle of customers among what she called "the quality." She had a wonderful memory for faces, and always recognized families who paid a second visit to the town.

"Why, it's niver Masther Charlie, sure?" she exclaimed with delight, on meeting the Chesters one day. "It's meself that knew the bright face of yez the moment I saw ut, though ye're growed such a foine young gintleman an' all. Ye was staying at No. 7 two years back with yer mamma—an illigant lady she was, too—and your sister, Miss Hilda, the swate little colleen. Holy saints! this must be herself and none other, for it's not twice ye'd see such a pair of eyes and forgit them."

What became of Biddy during the winter, when there were no visitors to buy her fish, was an unsolved mystery. "Sure, I makes what I can by the koindness of sthrangers during the summer toime!" she had replied when Isobel once sounded her on the subject. "There's many a one as gives me an extra penny or two, or says, 'Kape the change, Biddy Mulligan!' The Blessed Virgin reward them! Thank you kindly, marm," as Mrs. Stewart took the hint. "May your bed in heaven be aisy, and may ye niver lack a copper to give to them as needs it."

[65] Besides Biddy, Isobel had a number of other acquaintances in Silversands. There was the coastguard at the cottage on the top of the cliffs, who sometimes allowed her to look through his telescope, and who had an interesting barometer in the shape of a shell-covered cottage with two doors, from one of which a little soldier appeared when it was going to be fine, while a nautical-looking gentleman in a blue jacket came out to give warning of wet weather. Then there was the owner of the pleasure boats, who had promised to take her for a row entirely free of charge on

the day before she was going home; and the bathing woman, who always tried to keep for her the van with the blue stripes and the brass hooks inside because she knew she liked it. The donkey boy had christened the special favourite with the new harness "*her* donkey," and made it go with unwonted speed even on the outward journey (as a rule it galloped of its own accord when its nose was turned towards home); and the blind harpist by the railway station had waxed quite confidential on the subject of Scottish ballads, and had allowed her to try his instrument.

[66] As for the members of the Sea Urchins' Club, she felt as if she had known them all her life, and the sayings and doings of the Chesters, the Rokebys, the Wrights, and the Barringtons occupied a large part of her conversation. Jolly as they were, none of them in Isobel's estimation could compare with Belle Stuart, who from the first had claimed her as her particular chum. The two managed to spend nearly the whole of every day together, sometimes in company with the other children, or sometimes alone on the beach, hunting for shells and sea anemones, picking flowers, or just sitting talking in delicious idleness under the shade of a rock, listening to the dash of the waves and the screams of the sea gulls which were following the tide.

"I'm not generally allowed to make friends with any one whom we don't know at home," Belle had confided frankly. "But mother said you looked such a very nice lady-like little girl, she thought it wouldn't matter just for this once. I told her your father had been an officer, and she said of course that made a difference, but I really was to be careful, and not pick up odd acquaintances upon the beach, for she doesn't want me to talk to all sorts of people who aren't in our set of society, and might be very awkward to get rid of afterwards."

[67] Isobel did not reply. She would never have dreamt of explaining that it was only due to her most urgent entreaties that she, on her part, had been allowed to pursue the friendship. Mrs. Stewart, from somewhat different motives, was quite as particular as Belle's mother about chance acquaintances, and had been a little doubtful as to whether she was acting wisely in allowing Isobel to spend so much of her time with companions of whom she knew nothing, and whether this new influence was such as she would altogether wish for her.

"But I can't keep her wrapped up in cotton wool," she thought. "She has been such a lonely child that it's only right and natural she should like to make friends of her own age, especially when I'm not able to go about with her. She'll have to face life some time, and the sooner she begins to be able to distinguish the wheat from the chaff so much the better. Thus far I've perhaps guarded her too carefully, and this is an excellent opportunity of throwing her on her own resources. I think I can trust her to stick to what she knows is right, and not be led astray by any silly notions. She'll soon discover that money and fine clothes don't represent the highest in life, and I believe it's best to let her find it out gradually for herself. She's like a little bird learning to fly; I've kept her long enough in the nest, and now I must stand aside and leave her to try her wings."

[68] For the present, at any rate, Isobel could see no fault in her new friend. Belle had completely won her heart. Her charming looks; her fair, fluffy curls; her little, spoilt, coaxing ways; the clinging manner in which she seemed to depend upon others; her very helplessness and heedlessness; even the artless openness with which she sought for admiration—all appealed with an irresistible force to Isobel's stronger nature. If it ever struck her that her companion was lacking in some of those qualities which she had been taught to consider necessary, she thrust the thought away as a kind of disloyalty; and if it were she who generally carried the heavy basket, searched for the lost ball, fetched forgotten articles, or did any of the countless small services which Belle exacted almost as a matter of course from those around her, it certainly was without any idea of complaint. There are in this world always those who love and those who are loved, and Isobel was ready with spendthrift generosity to offer her utmost in the way of friendship, finding Belle's pretty thanks and kisses a sufficient reward for any trouble she might take on her account, and perhaps unconsciously realizing that even in our affections it is the givers more than the receivers who are the truly blessed. Belle, who usually found a brief and fleeting attraction in any new friend, was pleased with Isobel's devotion, and ready to be admired, petted, and waited on to any extent. I think, too, that, to do her justice, she was really an affectionate child, and at the time she was as fond of her friend as it was possible for her light little character to be. She would not have troubled to put herself out of the way for Isobel, and it would not have broken her heart to part with her, but she enjoyed her company, and easily gave her the first place among the dozen bosom friends each of whom she had taken up in turn and thrown aside.

[69] One particular afternoon found the namesakes strolling arm in arm along the narrow sandy lane which led inland from the beach towards the woods and the hills behind. It was the most delightful lane, with high grassy banks covered with pink bindweed and tiny blue sheep's scabious, and bright masses of yellow bedstraw, and great clumps of mallows, with seed-vessels on them just like little cheeses, which you could gather and thread on pieces of cotton to make necklaces. There was a hedge at the top of the bank, too, where grew the beautiful twining briony, with its dark leaves and glossy berries; and long trails of bramble, where a few early blackberries could be discovered if you cared to reach for them; and down among the sand at the bottom of the ditch you might find an occasional horned poppy, or the curious flowers and glaucous prickly leaves of the sea holly. Isobel, on the strength of a new bright-green tin vasculum, purchased only that very morning at the toy-shop near the station, and slung over her shoulder in the style of a student in a German picture-book, felt herself to be a full-fledged botanist, and rushed about in a very enthusiastic manner, scrambling up the banks after pink centauries, diving into the hedge bottom for campions, or getting her hair caught, like Absalom, in

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a prickly rose-bush in a valiant endeavour to secure a particularly fine clump of harebells which were nodding in the breeze on the stones of the old wall.

"They're perfectly lovely, aren't they?" she cried. "I've got fourteen different sorts of flowers already, and I'm sure some of them must be rare—anyway, I've never seen them before. I'm going to press them directly I get home. Do you think this stump will bear me if I climb up for that piece of briony?"

"I'm afraid it won't," said Belle, fastening some of the harebells in her dress (they matched her blue sash and hat ribbons). "It looks fearfully rotten. There! I told you it wouldn't hold," as Isobel descended with a crash. "And you're covered with sand and prickly burrs—such a mess!"

"Never mind," said Isobel, the state of whose clothing rarely distressed her. "They'll brush off. But I must have the briony. I'll climb up by the wall if you'll hold these hips for a moment."

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"Oh, do come along—that's a darling!" entreated Belle. "I don't want to wait. They're only wild things, after all. I wish you could see our garden at home, full of lovely geraniums and fuchsias and lobelias, and the orchids and gloxinias in the conservatory. They're really worth looking at. Carter, our gardener, takes tremendous pains with them, and he gets heaps of prizes at shows."

"But I like wild flowers best," said Isobel. "You can find them yourself in the hedges, and there are so many kinds. It's most exciting to hunt out their names in the botany book."

"Do you care for botany?" said Belle. "I have it with Miss Fairfax, and I think it's hateful—all about corollas, and stigmas, and panicles, and umbels, and stupid long words I can't either remember or understand."

"I haven't learnt any proper botany yet," said Isobel, "only just some of the easy part; but when we come into the country mother and I always hunt for wild flowers, and then we press them and paste them into a book, and write the names underneath. We have eighty-seven different sorts at home, and I've found sixteen new ones since I came here, so I think that's rather good, considering we've only been at Silversands a week. How hot it is in this lane! Suppose we go round by the station and up the cliffs."

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The little lane with its high banks was certainly the most baking spot they could have chosen for a walk on a blazing August afternoon. The sun poured down with a steady glare, till the air seemed to quiver with the heat, and the only things which really enjoyed themselves were the grasshoppers, whose cheery chirpings kept up a perpetual concert. In the fields on either side the reapers had been busy, and tired-looking harvesters were hard at work binding the yellow corn and the scarlet poppies into sheaves. Little groups of mothers and children and babies had come to help or look on, as the case might be, and brought with them cans of tea and checked handkerchiefs full of bread and butter.

"Don't they look jolly?" said Isobel, peeping over the hedge to watch a family who were picnicking among the stooks, the father in a broad-brimmed rush hat, his corduroy trousers tied up with wisps of straw, wiping his hot forehead on his shirt sleeves; the mother putting the baby to roll on the corn, while she poured the tea into blue mugs; and the children, as brown as gypsies, sitting round in a circle eating slices of bread, and evidently enjoying the fun of the thing.

"Ye-e-s," said Belle, somewhat doubtfully, "I suppose they do. Are you fond of poor people?"

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"I like going with mother when she's district-visiting, because the women often let me nurse the babies. Some of them are so sweet they'll come to me and not be shy at all."

"Aren't they rather dirty?"

"No, not most of them. A few are beautifully clean. Mother says she expects they know which day we're coming, and wash them on purpose."

"Babies are all very well when they're nicely dressed in white frocks and lace and corals," remarked Belle, "so long as they don't pull your hair and scratch your face."

"One day," continued Isobel, "we went to the *crèche*—that's a place where poor people's children are taken care of during the day while their mothers are out working. There were forty little babies in cots round a large room—*such* pets; and so happy, not one of them was crying. The nurse said they generally howl for a day or two after they're first brought in, and then they get used to it and don't bother any more. You see it wouldn't do to take up every single baby each time it began to cry."

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"I wish you'd tell that to the Wrights; they give that 'Popsie' of theirs whatever she shrieks for. She's a nasty, spoilt little thing. Yesterday she caught hold of my pearl locket, and tugged it so hard she nearly strangled me, and broke the chain; and the locket fell into a pool, and I couldn't find it, though I hunted for half an hour. The nurse only babbled on, 'Poor pet! didn't she get the pretty locket, then?' I felt so cross I wanted to smack both her and the baby."

"And haven't you found the locket yet?"

"No, and I never shall now; it's been high tide since then."

"What a shame! I should have felt dreadfully angry. I don't like the Wrights' nurse either. She borrowed my new white basket, and then let the children have it; and they picked blackberries

into it, and stained it horribly. Why, there's Aggie Wright now, with the Rokebys. What *are* they doing? They're hanging over that gate in the most peculiar manner. Let us go and see."

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CHAPTER VI.

ON THE CLIFFS.

"We saw the great ocean ablaze in the
sun,
And heard the deep roar of the waves."

THE gate in question proved to be the level crossing, which had just been closed by the man from the signal-box to allow a train to pass through. Charlotte and Aggie Wright and five of the Rokebys were all standing upon the bars, hanging over the top rail and gazing at the metals with such deep and intense interest that you would have thought they expected a railway accident at the very least, and were looking out for the smash.

"What *is* the matter?" cried Belle and Isobel, racing up to share in whatever excitement might be on hand. "Do you see anything? Is it a cow on the line?"

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"No," said Bertie Rokeby, balancing himself rather insecurely upon the gate post; "we're only waiting for the train to pass. We've put pennies on the rail, and the wheels going over them will flatten them out till they're nearly twice as big. You'd hardly believe what a difference it makes. Would you like to try one? I'd just have time to climb down and put it on before the train comes up. I will in a minute, if you say the word."

"I haven't a penny with me, I'm afraid," answered Isobel, rummaging in her pockets, and turning out several interesting pebbles, a few shells, a mermaid's purse, and the remains of a spider crab. "Stop a moment! No, it's only a button after all, and a horn one, too, that would be smashed to smithereens. If it had been a metal one I'd have tried it."

"I've nothing but a halfpenny," said Belle. "It's all I possess in the world till to-morrow, when I get my pocket-money. But do put it on, Bertie; it would be fun to see how large it makes it."

Bertie climbed over the gate and popped the coin with the others on the rail, much to the agitation of the pointsman, who ran in great anger from the signal-box, shouting to him to get off the line, for the train was coming. He was barely in time, for in another moment the express came whirling by with such a roar and a rattle, and making such a blast of wind as it went, that the children had to shut their eyes and cling on tightly.

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"You'll get into trouble here if you get over them bars when I've shut 'em," grunted the pointsman surlily, opening the gates to admit a waiting cart from the other side. "I'll take your name next time as you tries it on, and report you to the inspector, and you'll get charged with trespassing on the company's property."

"Oh, bother!" cried Bertie; "I wasn't doing any harm. I can take jolly good care of myself, so don't you worry about me." And he rushed impatiently after the others, who were already picking up their pennies from the rail.

"It's crushed them ever so flat!" exclaimed Aggie Wright, triumphantly holding up a dented copper which seemed to be several sizes too large.

"You can scarcely see which is heads and which is tails," said Arnold Rokeby.

"Just look at my halfpenny," said Belle; "it's twice as big as it was before."

"Why, so it is! Any one would take it for a penny if they didn't look at it closely. Come along. They want to shut the gates again for a luggage train, and we shall have to clear out. We're all going to the Pixies' Steps. Are you two coming with us?"

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"No, I think not," replied Belle. "It's too hot to walk so far. Isobel and I just want to stroll about."

"Then good-bye. We're off.—Come along, Cecil. For goodness' sake don't go grubbing in the hedge now after caterpillars. Even if it *is* a woolly bear, you'll find plenty more another day.—Here, Arnold, you young monkey, give me my cap." And the Rokebys tore away up the road with a characteristic energy that even the blazing August heat could not quench.

"If we go behind Hunt's farm," said Isobel, "we can turn up the path to the churchyard, and get on to the cliffs just over the quay. It's a short cut, and much nicer than the road."

[79] So they crossed the line again by the footbridge, passing the station, where the porter, overcome with the heat, was having a comfortable snooze on his hand-barrow; then, facing towards the sea, they climbed the steep track which zigzagged up the face of the cliff to the old church. The door was open, and the children stole inside for a minute and stood quietly gazing round the nave. It was cool and shady there, with the rich glow from the stained-glass windows falling in checkered rays of blue and crimson and orange upon the twisted pillars and the carved oak pews. The choir was practising in the chancel, and as they sang, the sun, slanting through the diamond panes of the south transept, made a very halo of glory round the head of the ancient, time-worn monument of St. Alcuin, the Saxon abbot, below. Crosier and mitre had long ago been chipped away by the ruthless hands of Cromwell's soldiers, but they had spared the face, and the light shone full on the closed eyes and the calm, sleeping mouth. Isobel moved a little nearer, trying to spell out the half-effaced letters of the inscription. She knew the story of how the pagan Norsemen had sacked the abbey, and had murdered the abbot on the steps of the altar, where he had remained alone to pray when his monks had fled to safety; but the words were in Latin, and she could not read them.

"For all the saints who from their labours rest," chanted the choir softly, the music of their voices mingling strangely with the shouts of the children at play which rose up from the beach below.

"He looks as though he were resting," thought Isobel; "not dead—only just sleeping until he was wanted again. I suppose he's one of the 'saints in light' now. What a long, long time it is since he lived here! I wonder if he knows they built a church and called it St. Alcuin's after him."

[80] "Here's the verger coming," whispered Belle, pulling at her hand. "I think we'd better go."

"Let us sit down; shall we?" said Isobel, when they were out in the glare of the sunshine once more on the broad flagged path which led from the church door to the steps looking down on to the sea.

"Not here, though," replied Belle; "I don't like gravestones—they make me feel horrid and creepy."

"Under the lich-gate, then," suggested Isobel. "It'll be cooler, for it's in the shade, and there's a seat, too."

"What a simply broiling day!" said Belle, settling herself as luxuriously as possible in the corner, and pulling off her hat to fan her hot face. "I don't like such heat as this; it takes my hair out of curl," tenderly twisting one of her flaxen ringlets into its proper orthodox droop.

"It's jolly here. We get a little wind, and we can watch everything all round," said Isobel, sitting with her chin in her hands, and gazing over the water to where the herring fleet was tacking back to the harbour.

[81] The children could scarcely have chosen a sweeter spot to rest. Below them lay the sea, a broad flat expanse of blue, getting a little hazy gray on the horizon, and with a greenish ripple where it neared the rocks, upon which its waves were always dashing with a dull, booming sound.

[82] The old town, with its red roofs and poppy-filled gardens, made such a spot of brightness against the blue sea that it suggested the brilliant colouring of a foreign port, all the more so in contrast to the gray tower of the church behind and the wind-swept yew trees which had somehow managed to survive the winter storms. The grass had been mown in the churchyard, and filled the air with a fragrant scent of hay; a big bumble-bee buzzed noisily over a bed of wild thyme under the wall, and a swallow was feeding a row of young ones upon the ridged roof of the sexton's cottage. In the great stretch of blue above, the little fleecy clouds formed themselves into snowy mountains with valleys and lakes between, a kind of dream country in purest white, and Isobel wondered whether, if one could sail straight on to the very verge of the distance where sea and sky seemed to meet, one could slip altogether over the invisible line that bounds the horizon, and find oneself floating in that cloudland region.

"It's like the edge of heaven," she thought. "I think the saints must live there, and the cherubim and seraphim much farther and higher up—right in the blue part. One could never see *them*; but perhaps sometimes on a day like this the saints might come back a little way out of the light and nearer to the earth where they used to live, and if one looked very hard one might manage to catch a glimpse of them just where the sun's shining on that white piece."

"O blest communion! fellowship divine!
We feebly struggle; they in glory shine!"

came wafted through the open church door, the sound of the singing, rather far off and subdued, seeming to join in harmony with the lap of the waves, the hum of the bees, the cries of the sea-gulls, the twittering of the swallows, and all the other glad voices of nature. It looked such a beautiful, joyful, delightful, glorious world that Isobel sat very quietly for a time just drinking in the sweet air and the sunshine, and feeling, without exactly knowing why, that it was good to be there.

"Are you asleep?" said Belle at last, in an injured tone; "you haven't spoken to me for at least five minutes. I'm sure it must be getting near tea-time. Let us go now."

"All right," said Isobel, recalling herself with a start—she had almost forgotten Belle's existence

[83] for the moment. "It's so nice on these steps, one feels as if one were up above everything. It's like being on the roof of the world. Perhaps that was why St. Alcuin and the monks built the abbey here; it seems so very near to the sky."

"What a queer girl you are sometimes!" said Belle, looking at her curiously; "I believe you're fond of old churches and musty-fusty monuments. Come along. We'll buy some sweets or some pears as we go home."

[84] It was a change indeed from the cliff top to the bustle and noise of the little town below. Most of the fish-stalls were empty in the market, for the stock of herrings and mackerel had been sold off earlier in the day; but a travelling bazaar was in full swing, and exhibited a bewildering display of toys, tea-cups, mugs, tin cans, looking-glasses, corkscrews, and many other wonderful and miscellaneous articles, any of which might be bought for the sum of one penny. The main street, narrow and twisting, ran steeply uphill, the high gabled houses crowding each other as if they were trying to peep over one another's shoulders; from the side alleys came the mingled odours of sea-weed and frying fish, and a persistent peddler hawking brooms shouted himself hoarse in his efforts to sell his wares. Under the wide archway at the corner by the market stood a tiny fruit-shop, where piles of plums and early apples, bunches of sweet peas and dahlias, baskets of tomatoes, lettuces, broad beans, cauliflowers, and cabbages, were set forth to tempt customers.

"There are the most delicious-looking pears," said Belle, peeping through the small square panes of the window, "and so cheap. I shall go in and get some."

"Yes, love, six for a penny," said the woman, a motherly-looking soul, as Belle entered the shop and inquired the price. "They're fine and ripe now, and won't do you no harm. A pen'orth, did you say?" And picking out six of the best pears, she put them into a paper bag and handed them to Belle, who, turning to leave the shop, laid down on the counter the coin which she had placed that afternoon on the railway line.

The woman did not look at it particularly, but naturally supposing from the size that it was a penny, she swept it carelessly into the till.

"Belle! Belle!" whispered Isobel, catching her friend hastily by the arm as she went out through the door, "do you know what you've done? You paid her your big halfpenny instead of a penny."

"Oh, did I?" said Belle, flushing. "I didn't notice. I never looked at it."

"What a good thing I saw the mistake! Give her a proper penny, and get the halfpenny back."

[85] Belle fumbled in her pocket in vain.

"I don't believe I have another penny, after all," she said at last. "I thought I had several. I must have lost them while we were up on the cliffs, I suppose."

[86] "What *are* we to do?" exclaimed Isobel anxiously. "We can't take the pears when we haven't paid for them properly; it would be stealing."

"I'll bring her another halfpenny to-morrow," suggested Belle.

"But suppose before that she looks at the money and finds out; she'll think we have been trying to cheat her."

"Perhaps she won't remember who gave it to her."

"Oh! but that wouldn't make it any better," said Isobel. "Look here; let us take back the bag, and tell her we paid the wrong money, and ask her to give us only half the pears."

"Very well," answered Belle. "You go in, will you? I don't like to."

Isobel seized the parcel, and quickly re-entered the shop.

"I'm ever so sorry," she said breathlessly, "but we find we've made such a dreadful mistake. We meant to give you a penny, and it wasn't a penny at all—only a halfpenny squashed out flat on the railway line; so, please, will you take back half the pears, because we neither of us have a proper penny in our pockets."

The woman laughed.

"I didn't think to notice what you give me," she said. "But you're an honest little girl to come and tell me. No, I won't take back none of the pears. You're welcome to them, I'm sure."

"It was very nice of her," said Belle sweetly, peeling the juicy fruit slowly with her penknife as they turned away down the street. "So stupid of me to make such a mistake! Have another, darling; they're quite delicious, though they are so small."

Isobel walked along rather silent and preoccupied. Though she would not allow it to herself, down at the bottom of her heart there was the uncomfortable suspicion that Belle had known all the time, and had meant to give the wrong coin.

"She *couldn't!*" thought Isobel. "She *must* have made a mistake, and thought she really had a penny in her pocket. Yet at the level crossing she certainly said the halfpenny was all she had until she got her weekly money to-morrow. Perhaps she forgot. Oh dear! I know she didn't mean

to cheat or tell stories—I'm sure she wouldn't for the world—but somehow I *wish* it hadn't happened."

[87]

CHAPTER VII.

THE "STORMY PETREL."

"A boat, a boat is the toy for me,
To rollick about in on river and sea,
To be a child of the breeze and the gale,
And like a wild bird on the deep to sail—
This is the life for me."

[88] **T**HE United Sea Urchins' Recreation Society usually met every morning upon the strip of green common underneath the cliffs which they had appropriated to their own use, and were prepared to hold against all comers. The Rokebys, who were enthusiastic bathers, had a tent upon the shore, and spent nearly half the morning in the sea, where they could float, swim on their backs, tread water, and even turn head over heels, much to the envy of the Wrights, who made valiant efforts to emulate these wonderful feats, and nearly drowned themselves in the attempt. The two little Barringtons were solemnly bathed each day by their mother in a specially-constructed roofless tent, which was fixed upon four poles over a hole previously dug in the sand, and filled by the advancing tide. Here they were obliged to sit for ten minutes in the water, with the sun pouring down upon them till the small tent resembled a vapour bath, after which they were massaged according to the treatment recommended by a certain Heidelberg doctor in whom Mrs. Barrington had great faith, and whose methods she insisted upon carrying out to the letter, in spite of Ruth's indignant remonstrances and Edna's wails.

"Ruth says bathing's no fun at all," confided Isobel to her mother; "and I shouldn't think it is, if you can't splash about in the sea and enjoy yourself. Mrs. Barrington won't let them try to swim, and they just have to sit in a puddle inside the tent, while she flings cans of sea-water down their backs. Edna says the hot sun makes the skin peel off her, and she can't bear the rubbing afterwards. Her clothes fridge her, too; they always wear thick woollen under-things even in this blazing weather, their mother's so afraid of them taking a chill."

"Poor children!" said Mrs. Stewart; "I certainly think they have rather a bad time. It must be very hard to be brought up by rule, and to have so many experiments tried upon you."

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"Ruth says she has one comfort, though," continued Isobel: "they're allowed to speak English all the time during the holidays. At home they have a German governess, and they talk French one day, and German the next, and English only on Sundays. Ruth hates languages. She won't speak a word to mademoiselle, but she says the Wrights simply talk cat-French—it's half of it English words—although they're so conceited about it, and generally say something out very loud if they think anybody is passing, even if it's only *Il fait beau aujourd'hui*, or *Comment vous portez-vous?* The Rokebys poke terrible fun at them; they've made up a gibberish language of their own, and they talk it hard whenever the Wrights let off French. It makes Charlotte and Aggie quite savage, because they know they're talking about them, only they can't understand a word."

"What's the club going to do to-day?" asked Bertie Rokeby one morning, looking somewhat damp and moist after his swim. ("He never *will* dry himself properly," said Mrs. Rokeby; "he just gets into his clothes as he is, and he's sitting down on the old boat just where the sun has melted the pitch, and it will be sure to stick to his trousers.")

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"Don't know," said Harold Wright, lolling comfortably in the shade of a rock, with his head on his rolled-up jacket; "too hot to race round with the thermometer over 70°. I shall stay where I am, with a book."

"Get up, you fat porpoise! You'll grow too lazy to walk. Unless you mean to stop and swat at Greek like old Arthur."

"No, thanks," laughed Harold. "I'm not in for a scholarship yet, thank goodness! I'm just going to kick my heels here. The *dolce far niente*, you know."

"Let us go down to the quay," suggested Charlie Chester, "and watch the boats come in. It's stunning to see them packing all the herrings into barrels, and flinging the mackerel about. Some

of the men are ever so decent: they let you help to haul in the ropes, and take you on board sometimes."

"Shall we go too?" said Belle, who, with her arm as usual round Isobel's waist, stood among the group of children; "it's rather fun down by the quay, if you don't get *too* near the fish.—Are you coming, Aggie?"

"Yes, if Charlotte and mademoiselle will go too.—Mam'zelle, voulez-vous aller avec nous à voir le fish-market?"

Mademoiselle shivered slightly, as if Aggie's French set her teeth on edge.

[91] "Qu'est-ce que c'est, chère enfant, cette 'feesh markeet'?" she replied.

"I don't know whether I can quite explain it in French," replied Aggie; but seeing the Rokebys come up, she made a desperate effort to sustain her character as a linguist. "C'est l'endroit où on vend le poisson, vous savez."

Unfortunately she pronounced *poisson* like the English "poison," and mademoiselle held up her dainty little hands with a shriek of horror.

"Vere zey sell ze poison! Non, mon enfant! You sall nevaire take me zere! Madame Wright, see not permit zat you go! C'est impossible!"

"It's all right, mademoiselle," said Arthur, taking his nose for a moment out of his dictionary. "Aggie only meant *poisson*. The mater'll let the kids go, if you want to take 'em."

"Come along, mademoiselle, do!" said Charlie Chester cordially. "Venez avec moi! That's about all the French I can talk, because at school we only learn to write exercises about pens and ink and paper, and the gardener's son, and lending your knife to the uncle of the baker; a jolly silly you'd be if you did, too! You'd never get it back. Suivez-moi! And come and see the *poisson*. You'll enjoy it if you do."

[92] "I'm sure she wouldn't," said Charlotte Wright, who liked to keep her governess to herself. "We haven't time, either—we must do our translation before dinner; and Joyce and Eric can't go unless we're there to look after them."

"All right; don't, then! We shan't grieve," retorted Charlie. "We'll go with the Rokebys."

But the Rokebys, though ready, as a rule, to go anywhere and everywhere, on this particular occasion were due at the railway station to meet a cousin who was arriving that morning; so it ended in only Belle and Isobel, with Charlie and Hilda Chester, setting off for the old town. The quay was a busy, bustling scene. The herring-fleet had just come in, and it was quite a wonderful sight to watch the fish, with their shining iridescent colours, leaping by hundreds inside the holds. They were flung out upon the jetty, and packed at once into barrels, an operation which seemed to demand much noise and shouting on the part of the fishermen in the boats, and to call for a good deal of forcible language from their partners on shore. The small fry and cuttle-fish were thrown overboard for the sea-gulls, that hovered round with loud cries, waiting to pounce upon the tempting morsels, while the great flat skate and dog-fish were put aside separately.

[93] "They're second-rate stuff, you see," explained Charlie Chester, who, with his hands in his pockets and his most seaman-like gait, went strolling jauntily up and down the harbour, inspecting the cargoes, trying the strength of the cables, peeping into the barrels with the knowing air of a connoisseur of fish, and generally putting himself where he was decidedly not wanted.

"They only pack the herrings, and they salt and dry the others in the sun. You can see them dangling outside their cottage doors all over the town, and smell them too, I should say. When they're quite hard they hammer them out flat, and send them to Whitechapel for the Jews to buy—at least that's what the mate of the *Penelope* told me the other day."

"They eat them themselves too," said Hilda. "I went inside a cottage one day, and they were frying some for dinner. The woman gave me a taste, but it was perfectly horrid, and I couldn't swallow it. I had to rush outside round the corner and spit it out."

[94] "You disgusting girl!" said Belle, picking her way daintily between the barrels; "I wonder you could touch it, to begin with! Why, here are the women coming with the cockles. What a haul they've had! There's old Biddy at the head of them."

"So she is!" cried Charlie; "her basket looks almost bursting!—Hullo, Biddy!—"

'In Dublin's fair city,
Where girls are so pretty,
There once lived a maiden named Molly Malon
She wheeled a wheelbarrow
Through streets wide and narrow,
Singing, "Cockles and mussels alive, alive-O!"'

Change it into Biddy, and there you are! I've an eye for an 'illigant colleen' when I see her!"

"Sure, ye're at yer jokes agin, Masther Charlie," laughed Biddy; "colleen, indade, and me turned sixty only the other day! If it weren't for the kreel on me back, I'd be afther yez."

"I'd like to see you catch me," cried Charlie, as he jumped on a heap of barrels, bringing the whole pile with a crash to the ground, greatly to the wrath of the owner, who expressed his views with so much vigour that the children judged it discreet to adjourn farther on along the quay.

They strolled past the storehouse, and round the corner to where a flight of green slimy steps led down to the water. There was an iron ring here in the sea wall, and tied to it by a short cable was the jolliest pleasure boat imaginable, newly painted in white and blue, with her name, the Stormy *Petrel*, in gilt letters on the prow, her sail furled, and a pair of sculls lying ready along her seats.

"She's a smart craft," said Charlie, reaching down to the painter, and pulling the boat up to the steps. "I vote we get inside her, and try what she feels like."

"Will they let us?" asked Isobel.

"We won't ask them," laughed Charlie. "It's all right; we shan't do any harm. They can turn us out if they want her. Come along." And he held out his hand.

It was such a tempting proposal that it simply was not in human nature to resist, and the three little girls hopped briskly into the boat, Belle and Isobel settling themselves in the bows, and Hilda taking a seat in the stern.

"It almost feels as if we were really sailing," said Isobel, as the boat danced upon the green water, pulling at its painter as though it were anxious to break away and follow the ebbing tide.

"She'd cut through anything, she's so sharp in the bows," said Charlie, handling the sculls lovingly, and looking out towards the mouth of the harbour, where long white-capped waves flecked the horizon.

"Can't you take us for a row, Charlie?" cried Belle; "it's so jolly on the water."

"Yes, do, Charlie," echoed Hilda; "it would be such fun."

"Do you mean, go for a real sail?" asked Isobel, rather aghast at such a daring proposal.

"Oh, we'd only take her for a turn round the harbour, and be back before any one missed her. It would be an awful lark," said Charlie.

"But not without a boatman!" remonstrated Isobel.

"Why not? I know all about sailing," replied Charlie confidently, for, having been occasionally taken yachting by his father, and having picked up a number of nautical terms, which he generally used wrongly, he imagined himself to be a thorough Jack Tar. "Wouldn't you like it? I thought you were fond of the sea."

"So I am," said Isobel; "but I don't think we ought to go without asking. It's not our boat, and the man she belongs to mightn't like us to take her out by ourselves."

"I suppose you're afraid," sneered Charlie; "most girls are dreadful land-lubbers. Hilda's keen enough; and as for Belle, she's half wild to go, I can see."

"I should think I am; and what's more, I mean to!" declared Belle; and settling the dispute as Alexander of old untied the Gordian knot, she took her penknife from her pocket, and leaning over, cut the painter off sharp.

"Now you've done it!" cried Charlie. "Well, we're off, at any rate, so we may as well enjoy ourselves.—Hilda, you must steer while I row. If you watch me feather my oars, you'll see I can manage the thing in ripping style."

There was such a strong ebb tide that Charlie had really no need to row. The boat went skimming over the waves as if she had been a veritable stormy petrel, sending the water churning round her bows. Although all four children felt a trifle guilty, they could not help enjoying the delightful sensation of that swift-rushing motion over the sea. Nearly all Anglo-Saxons have a love for the water: perhaps some spirit of the old vikings still lingers in our blood, and thrills afresh at the splash of the waves, the dash of the salt spray, and the fleck of the foam on our faces. There is a feeling of freedom, a sense of air, and space, and dancing light, and soft, subdued sound that blend into one exhilarating joy, when, with only a plank between us and the racing water, it is as if nature took us in her arms and were about to carry us away from every trammel of civilization, somewhere into that far-off land that lies always just over the horizon—that lost Atlantis which the old navigators sought so carefully, but never found.

Isobel sat in the bows, her hand locked in Belle's. She felt as if they were birds flying through space together, or mermaids who had risen up from the sea-king's palace to take a look at the sun-world above, and were floating along as much a part of the waves as the great trails of bladder-wrack, or the lumps of soft spongy foam that whirled by them. Charlie rested on his sculls and let the boat take her course for a while; she was heading towards the bar, straight out from the cliffs and the harbour to where the heavy breakers, which dashed against the lighthouse, merged into the rollers of the open sea.

"Aren't we going out rather a long way?" said Belle at last. "We've passed the old schooner and the dredger, and we're very nearly at the buoy. We don't want to sail quite to America, though it's

jolly when we skim along like this. If we don't mind we shall be over the bar in a few minutes."

"By jove! so we shall!" cried Charlie. "I didn't notice we'd come so far. We must bring her round.—Get her athwart, Hilda, quick!"

"I suppose if you pull one line it goes one way, and if you pull the other line it goes the other way," said Hilda, whose first experience it was with the tiller, giving such a mighty jerk as an experiment that she swung the boat half round.

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"Easy abaft!" shouted Charlie. "Do you want to capsize us? Turn her to starboard; she's on the port tack. Put up the helm, and make her luff!"

"What *do* you mean?" cried Hilda, utterly bewildered by these nautical directions.

"You little idiot, don't tug so hard! You'll be running us into the buoy. Look here! you can't steer. Just drop these lines. I'd better ship the oars and hoist the sail, and then I can take the tiller myself. There's a stiffish breeze; I can tack her round, you'll see, if I've no one interfering. Now let me get my bearings."

"Are you sure you know how?" asked Belle uneasily.

"Haven't I watched old Jordan do it a hundred times?" declared Charlie. "I'll soon have the canvas up. I say, look out there! The blooming thing's heavier than I thought."

"Oh, do be careful!" entreated Belle, as the sail went up in a very peculiar fashion, and beginning to fill with the breeze sent the boat heeling sharply over.

"She'll be perfectly right if I slack out. The wind's on our beam," replied Charlie; "I must get her a-lee."

[101]

"You're going to upset us!" exclaimed Belle, for the sail was flapping about in such a wild and unsteady manner as seemed to threaten to overturn the little vessel.

"Not if I make this taut," cried Charlie, hauling away with all his strength.—"Hilda, that was a near shave!" as the unmanageable canvas, swelling out suddenly, caught her a blow on the side of her head and nearly swept her from the boat.

Hilda gave a shriek of terror and clung wildly to the gunwale.

"O Charlie!" she cried, "take us back. I don't like sailing. I want to go home."

"Oh! why did we ever come?" shrieked Belle, jumping up in her seat and wringing her hands. "You'll send us to the bottom."

"Sit still, dear," cried Isobel. "You'll upset the boat if you move so quickly.—Charlie, I think you'd better take down that sail and try the sculls again. If you'll let me steer perhaps I could manage better than Hilda, and we could turn out of the current; it's taking us straight to sea. If we can head round towards the quay we might get back."

"All serene," said Charlie, furling his canvas with secret relief. "There ought to be several, really, for this job; it takes more than one to sail a craft properly, and none of you girls know how to help."

He gave Isobel a hand as she moved cautiously into the stern, and settling her with the ropes, he once more took up the oars.

"I shall come too," wailed Belle. "I can't stay alone at this end of the boat. Isobel, it's horrid of you to leave me."

"Sit still," commanded Charlie. "It's you who'll have us over if you jump about like that. We can't all be at one end, I tell you. You must stop where you are."

He made a desperate effort to turn the boat, but his boyish arms were powerless against the strength of the ebbing tide, and they were swept rapidly towards the bar.

"It's no use," said Charlie at last, shipping his sculls; "I can't get her out of this current. We shall just have to drift on till some one sees us and picks us up."

"O Charlie!" cried Hilda, her round chubby face aghast with horror, "shall we float on for days and days without anything to eat, or be shipwrecked on a desert island like Robinson Crusoe, and have to cling to broken masts and spars?"

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"We're all right; don't make such a fuss!" said Charlie, glancing uneasily, however, at the long waves ahead. They were crossing the bar, and the water was rough outside the harbour.

[103]

"I *know* we're going to be drowned!" moaned Belle. "It's your fault, Charlie. You ought never to have brought us."

"Well, I like that!" retorted Charlie, with some heat, "when it was you who first thought of it, and asked me to take you. I suppose you'll be saying I cut the painter next."

"You want to throw the blame on me!" declared Belle.

"No, I don't; but there's such a thing as fair play."

"O Charlie, it doesn't matter whose fault it was now," said Isobel. "I suppose in a way it's all our faults for getting in, to begin with. Couldn't we somehow raise a signal of distress? Suppose you tie my handkerchief to the scull, and hoist it up like a flag. Some ship might notice it."

"Not a bad idea," said Charlie, who by this time wished himself well out of the scrape. "You've a head on your shoulders, though I did call you a land-lubber."

Between them they managed to tie on the handkerchief and hoist the oar, and as their improvised flag fluttered in the wind they hoped desperately that it might bring some friendly vessel to their aid.

They had quite cleared the harbour by now; the sea was rough, and the current still carried them on fast. Isobel sat with her arm round poor little Hilda, who clung to her very closely, watching the water with a white, frightened face, though she was too plucky to cry. Belle, who had completely lost self-control, was huddled down in the bows, shaking with hysterical sobs, and uttering shrieks every time the boat struck a bigger wave than usual.

"I wonder no one in the harbour noticed us set off," said Isobel after a time, when the land seemed to be growing more and more distant behind them.

"They were busy packing the herrings," replied Charlie, "and you see we started from round the corner. Our only chance now is meeting some boat coming from Ferndale. I say! do you think that's a sail over there?"

"It is!" cried Isobel. "Let us hold the flag up higher, and we'll call 'Help!' as loud as we can. Sound carries so far over water, perhaps they might hear us."

[104]

"Ahoy there!" yelled Charlie, with the full strength of his lungs. "Boat ahoy!" And Hilda and Isobel joining in, they contrived amongst them to raise a considerably lusty shout.

To their intense relief it seemed to be heard, as the ship tacked round, and bearing down upon them, very soon came up alongside.

"Well, of all sights as ever I clapped eyes on! Four bairns adrift in an open craft! I thought summat was up when I see'd your flag, and then you hollered.—Easy there, Jim. Take the little 'un on first. Mind that lad! He'll be overboard!—Whisht, honey! don't take on so. You'll soon be safe back with your ma.—Now, missy, give me your hand. Ay, you've been up to some fine games here, I'll wager, as you never did ought. But there! Bairns will be bairns, and I should know, for I've reared seven."

"Mr. Binks!" cried Isobel, to whom the ruddy cheeks, the bushy eyebrows, and the good-natured conversational voice of her friend of the railway train were quite unmistakable.

[106]

"Why, it's little missy as were comin' to Silversands!" responded the old man. "To think as I should 'a met you again like this! I felt as if somethin' sent me out this mornin' over and above callin' at Ferndale for a load of coals, which would 'a done to-morrow just as well. It's the workin's of Providence as we come on this tack, or you might 'a been right out to sea, and, ten to one, upset in that narrer bit of a boat."

It certainly felt far safer in Mr. Binks's broad-bottomed fishing-smack, though they had to sit amongst the coals and submit to be rather searchingly and embarrassingly catechised as to how they came to be in such a perilous situation. Their plight had been noticed at last from the harbour, where the owner of the boat, missing his craft, had raised a hue-and-cry, and there was quite a little crowd gathered to meet them on the jetty when they landed, a crowd which expressed its satisfaction at their timely rescue, or its disapproval of their escapade, according to individual temperament.

"Praise the saints ye're not drowned entirety!" cried Bidy, giving Charlie a smacking kiss, much to his disgust. "And it's ould Bidy Mulligan as saw the peril ye was in, and asked St. Pathrick and the Blessed Virgin to keep an eye on yez. Holy St. Bridget! but ye're a broth of a boy, afther all."

"I'm main set to give you a jolly good hidin'," growled the owner of the boat, greeting Charlie with a somewhat different reception, and fingering a piece of rope-end as if he were much tempted to put his threat into execution. "Don't you never let me catch you on this quay again, meddlin' with other folk's property, if you want to keep your skin on you."

"He really was most dreadfully angry," Isobel told her mother in the graphic account which she gave afterwards of the adventure. "But Charlie said how very sorry we were. He took the whole blame to himself, though it wasn't all his fault by any means, and he offered to pay for having borrowed the boat. Then the man said he spoke up like a gentleman, and he wouldn't take his money from him; and Mr. Binks said bairns would be bairns, and it was a mercy we hadn't gone to the bottom; and the man shook hands with Charlie, and said he was a plucky little chap, with a good notion of handling a sail, and he'd take him out some time and show him how to do it properly. And Mr. Binks said I'd never been to see him yet, and I told him you'd sprained your ankle and couldn't walk, but it was getting better nicely, and you'd soon be able to; and he said, would we write and give him warning when we'd made up our minds, and his missis should bake a cranberry cake on purpose, and if we came early, he'd row us over to see the balk. I said we should be very pleased, because you'd promised before that you'd go. So you will, won't you, mother?"

[107] "I shall be only too glad to have an opportunity of thanking him," said Mrs. Stewart. "I feel I owe him a big debt of gratitude to-day. Perhaps in the meantime we can think of some pretty little present to take with us that would please him and his wife, as a slight return for his kindness. You would have time to embroider a tea-cosy if I were to help you."

"That would be lovely," said Isobel. "And then they could use it every day at tea-time. We could work a teapot on one side and a big 'B' on the other for Binks. I'm sure they'd like that. May I go and buy the materials this afternoon? I brought my thimble with me and my new scissors in the green silk bag. I feel as if I should like to begin and make it at once."

[108] CHAPTER VIII.

CROSS-PURPOSES.

"Though a truth to outward seeming,
Yet a truth it may not prove."

ALTHOUGH Mrs. Stewart had now been more than ten days at Silversands she had not yet received any reply to the letter which she had dispatched with so many heart-burnings on the evening of her arrival.

[109] "Does he mean to ignore it altogether?" she asked herself. "Will he never forgive? Can he allow his grandchild, the only kith and kin that is left to him, to be within a few miles and not wish at least to see her? Does he still think me the scheming adventuress that he called me in the first heat of his anger, and imagine I am plotting to get hold of his money? I would not touch one penny of it for myself, but I think it is only right and fair that Isobel should be sent to a really good school. It would be such a small expense to him out of his large income, and it is simply impossible for me to manage it. I have done my best for her so far, but she is so quick and bright that she will very soon be growing beyond my teaching. He will surely realize that for the credit of his own name something ought to be done. Perhaps he may be ill or away, and has not been able to attend to my letter. I must have patience for a little longer, and wait and see whether he will not send me an answer."

The waiting seemed very long and tedious to poor Mrs. Stewart as she lay through those hot summer days on the hard horsehair sofa of the small back sitting-room at No. 4 Marine Terrace. As the lonely hours passed away, the lines of trouble deepened in her forehead, and she stitched so many cares into the winter night-dresses she was beguiling the time by making that every gusset and hem seemed a reminder of some anxious thought for the future.

In the meantime Isobel remained sublimely unconscious of her mother's hopes and fears. To her the visit to Silversands was nothing but the most glorious holiday she had spent in her life, and her jolly times with the Sea Urchins, and especially the delight of her friendship with Belle, made the days fly only too fast. The latter was still as clinging and affectionate as ever, and would scarcely allow Isobel out of her sight.

[110] "I'd rather be with you, darling, than with any one else," she declared enthusiastically. "I used to think I liked Winnie Rokeby, but she was very unkind once or twice, and told such nasty tales about me, actually trying to make out I was selfish, just because I wanted her to do one or two little things for me that *you* don't mind doing in the least. She splashed sea-water all over my best white silk dress too, and I'm sure it was on purpose, and she said my hair looked exactly like sticks of barley-sugar." And Belle tossed back her curls as if indignant yet at the remembrance.

"She really *is* fond of me," said Isobel to her mother. "And it's so nice of her, because, you see, although she doesn't care for Winnie Rokeby, she might have had Aggie Wright or Ruth Barrington for her special friend; she knows them both at home, and goes to all their parties. Charlotte Wright says it's too hot to last, but that's just because Aggie was jealous that Belle didn't ask her to go to tea the day I went; and Letty Rokeby says we're bound to have a quarrel sooner or later, but I'm sure we shan't, for there never seems anything to quarrel about, and I couldn't imagine being out of friends with Belle."

[111] On the afternoon following Isobel's adventure in the *Stormy Petrel*, any one seated in the front windows of Marine Terrace might have been interested in the movements of an elderly gentleman, who for the last ten minutes had been slowly pacing up and down the broad gravel path in front. He was a very stately old gentleman, with iron-gray hair and a long, drooping moustache; he held himself erect, too, as if he were at parade, and he had that air of quiet dignity and command which is habitual to those who are accustomed to seeing their orders promptly obeyed. Whether he was merely enjoying the fresh air and scenery, or whether he was waiting for somebody, it was difficult to tell, since he now lighted a cigar in a leisurely fashion, and cast

an anxious, quick look towards the houses, and, frowning slightly, would walk away, then come back again as if he were drawn by some magnet towards the spot, and must return there even against his will.

[113] He was just passing the garden of No. 4 when the front door opened, and Belle, who had been
[112] spending an hour with Isobel, sauntered down the path, and closing the gate behind her, seated herself upon one of the benches which the Town Council had put up that summer on the gravel walk in front of Marine Terrace, as a kind of earnest of the promenade which they hoped might follow in course of time. She spread out her pretty pink muslin dress carefully upon the seat, rearranged her hat to her satisfaction, and slowly fastened the buttons of her long kid gloves. It was too early to go home yet, she thought, for her mother was out with friends, and their tea-time was not until five o'clock, so she sat watching the sea and the fishing-boats, and drawing elaborate circles with her parasol in the gravel at her feet. She was quite unaware that she was being very keenly observed by the old gentleman, who, having followed her, walked past once or twice with an undecided air, and finally settled himself upon the opposite end of the bench where she was sitting.

"That's certainly the address she gave me," he muttered to himself, "and it might possibly be the child. She tallies a little with the description; she's fair, and not bad-looking, though I don't see a trace of the Stewarts in her face. As for resembling my Isobel—well, of course, that was only a scheme on the mother's part to try and arouse my interest in her. What the letter said is true enough, all the same: if she's my grandchild it isn't right that she should be brought up in penury, and I suppose I must send her to school, or provide in some way for her. I can't say I'm much taken with her looks. She's too dressed-up for my taste. Where did her mother find the money to buy those fal-lals? It doesn't accord with the lack of means she complained of. I wonder if I could manage to ask her name without giving myself away."

He took a newspaper from his pocket, and spreading it out, pretended to read, stealing occasional glances in Belle's direction, and racking his brains for a suitable method of opening a conversation. Belle, who was beginning to be rather tired of her occupation, and was half thinking of moving farther on or going home, became suddenly conscious that she seemed to be arousing an unusual degree of interest in her companion at the other end of the bench. Constantly petted and admired by her mother's friends, she was accustomed to receive a good deal of attention, and it struck her that a short chat with this distinguished-looking stranger might beguile her monotony until tea-time. She therefore let her fluffy curls fall round her face in the way that an artist had once painted them, and began to cast coy looks from under her long lashes in his direction, hoping that he might speak to her; both of which methods she usually found very engaging with elderly gentlemen, who generally asked her whose little girl she was, and ended by saying she was a charming child, and they wished they owned her, or some other remark equally flattering and gratifying.

[114] In this case however, her pretty ways did not seem to have their due effect; either the old gentleman was really shy himself, or he found a difficulty in starting, for though he cleared his throat several times, as if he were on the very point of speaking, he seemed to change his mind, and kept silence. Somewhat disappointed, Belle nevertheless was not easily baffled, and after having sighed, coughed, opened and shut her parasol, taken off her gloves and put them on again, thereby exhibiting the small turquoise ring that was her greatest delight, and finally even got up a sneeze, all without any result, she at last pulled off her bracelet, and in refastening it managed with considerable skill to let it drop on the ground and roll almost to her companion's feet. It was but natural that he should pick it up and hand it to her.

"Oh, thank you so much!" exclaimed Belle, in what some one had once called her "Parisian" manner. "It was so careless of me to drop it, and I wouldn't have lost it for the world. Things so easily roll away on the shore, don't they?"

"I suppose they do," replied the colonel. "It certainly isn't wise to send your trinkets spinning about the sands."

[115] "I value that one, too," said Belle, shaking her curls, "because, you see, it was a present. A friend of mother's gave it to me on my last birthday. He was going to choose a book at first—he always sent me books before, the most terrible ones: Shakespeare, and Lamb's 'Essays,' and Ruskin, and stupid things like that, which I shan't ever care to read, even when I'm grown up—so this birthday I asked him if he would give me something really nice; and he laughed, and brought me this dear little bangle, and said he expected it would suit Miss Curly-locks better than solid reading."

"Ugh!" grunted her new acquaintance, with so ambiguous an expression that Belle could not make out whether he sympathized or not; but as he put down his paper, and seemed quite ready to listen to her, she went on.

[116] "It's very nice at Silversands. Mother and I have been here nearly a fortnight. We think the air's bracing, and the lodgings are really not bad for a little place like this. One doesn't expect a hotel."

"Are you staying in Marine Terrace?"

[117] "Yes; it's the nicest part, because you get the view of the sea. I don't like the rooms near the station at all. Mother looked at some of them first, but there were such dreadfully vulgar children stopping there. 'This won't do, Belle,' she said. 'I couldn't have you in the same house with people

of that sort."

[116] "Is your name Belle?"

"Yes, Isabelle Stuart; but it's generally shortened to Belle. Mother says a pet name somehow seems to suit me better. Last winter I went to a party dressed all in blue, and everybody called me 'Little Bluebell,' and asked if I came from fairyland."

She paused here, thinking the old gentleman might take the opportunity to put in a compliment; but he did not rise to the occasion, so she continued,—

"Other people asked if I were one of the bluebells of Scotland; but we're not Scotch, although our name's Stuart. My father was English. I can't remember him properly, I was so little when he died, but mother always says I'm his very image."

"Rubbish!" growled the colonel suddenly.

"Why!" exclaimed Belle, in astonishment, "how can you tell? You didn't know him? He was very tall and fair, mother says, and *so* handsome. She cries when I talk about him, so I don't like to speak of him very often."

"What is she doing for you in the way of lessons? Is it all parties and trinkets, or do you ever do anything useful?" asked her companion.

[117] "Of course I have lessons," replied Belle with dignity, feeling rather hurt at his tone. "I learn French, and drawing, and music, and dancing, and a great many other things."

"And which do you like best?"

"I don't know. I'm not very fond of history or geography, but mother hopes I'll get on with music. It's so useful to be able to play well, you see, when one comes out. I think I like the dancing lessons most; we learn such delightful fancy steps. Some of us did a skirt dance at the cavalry bazaar last winter, and I was the Queen of the Butterflies. I had a white dress lined with yellow and turquoise, and I shook it out like this when I danced, to show the colours. People clapped ever so much, and it was such a success we had to do it over again, in aid of the hospital. Our mistress wants to get up a flower dance for the exhibition *fête* next winter, and she promised I should be the Rose Queen, but mother says perhaps I may go to school before then."

"Time you did, too—high time—and to a school where they put something in the girls' heads," remarked the colonel, almost as if he were thinking aloud. "It ought to be history and geography, instead of Bluebells and Rose Queens. I don't approve of capering about on a stage in fancy dress."

[118] Belle was much offended. The conversation had not turned out nearly so interesting as she expected. Instead of being appreciated, she had an uneasy sensation that the old gentleman was making fun of her; and as this was not at all to her taste, she thought it time to beat a retreat; so, noticing the Wrights approaching in the distance, she rose and put up her parasol.

"I see some of my friends," she said, in what she hoped was rather a chilling manner, "and I must go and speak to them."

And to show her displeasure, she marched off without deigning even to say good-bye. Colonel Stewart sat watching her as she walked away, with a somewhat peculiar expression on his face.

"Worse than I could ever have imagined!" he groaned. "Vain, shallow, and empty-headed, caring for nothing but pleasure and showing herself off in public places decked out like a ballet dancer! She's pretty enough in a superficial kind of way—the sort of beauty you get in a doll, with neither mind nor soul behind it. *She* worthy of the name, indeed! Oh, my poor boy! Is this the child on whom you had set such high hopes? And is this little French fashion-plate really and truly the last of the Stewarts?"

[119]

CHAPTER IX.

SILVERSANDS TOWER.

"Say, what deeds of ancient
valour
Do thy ruined walls recall?"

FOUR o'clock on the next afternoon found Belle tapping at the door of the little back sitting-room in No. 4 with a very important face.

"Why, what's the matter?" she exclaimed, as she entered in response to Mrs. Stewart's "Come in," for Isobel was sitting in the big armchair propped up with cushions, looking as limp as a rag and as white as a small ghost.

"It's only one of her bad headaches," replied Mrs. Stewart; "I think it must be the heat. She ought not to have played cricket this morning in the blazing sun.—No, Isobel, you mustn't try to get up. Belle may sit here and talk to you for a few minutes, but I'm afraid I can't ask her to stay long."

[120] "I'm *so* sorry!" said Belle, sitting down on the arm of the big chair and squeezing her friend's hand. "I've brought an invitation. It's mother's birthday on Saturday, and she's going to give a picnic at Silversands Tower, and ask all the Sea Urchins. Won't it be splendid fun? You simply *must* be better by then. It will be quite a large party: Mr. Chester and a good many other grown-up people are coming.—Mother wonders if your foot will be well enough, Mrs. Stewart? She would be so pleased to see you, if you don't mind so many children."

"Thank you, dear; but I can scarcely manage to hobble on to the beach at present," replied Mrs. Stewart, "so I fear it is out of the question for me, much as I should have enjoyed it. Isobel, of course, will be only too delighted to accept. I believe the very thought of it is chasing away her headache."

[122] "We're to drive there on two coaches," said Belle, "and have tea in the ruins, and afterwards we can play games or ramble about in the woods. There'll be twelve grown-up people and twenty children. We didn't invite the Wrights' baby, because mother said it was too young, and she really couldn't stand it. She's asked all the Rokebys, even Cecil, though he *is* rather a handful sometimes; but Mr. Rokeby's coming, I expect, and he'll keep him in order. The Wrights are [121] bringing an aunt who's just arrived back from a visit to Paris. I'm afraid we shall scarcely get them to talk English. And Mrs. Barrington hasn't decided yet whether she'll let Ruth and Edna go—she says it depends upon how they do their health exercises; but they're going to try and get their father to persuade her. Well, I mustn't stay now if your head aches, but I'm very glad you can come; I think we shall have a glorious time, and I *do* hope Saturday will be fine."

Not one of the numerous members of the Sea Urchins' Club could have been more anxious for a brilliant day than Isobel. She tapped the glass in the hall with much solicitude, and even paid a visit to her friend the coastguard to inquire his opinion as to the state of the weather; and having carefully examined a threatening bank of clouds through his telescope, and ascertained that the objectionable little sailor was peeping from his barometer, she came home in rather low spirits, in spite of his assurances that "if it did splash a bit, it wouldn't be nowt." Luckily her fears proved groundless. Saturday turned out everything that could be desired in the way of sun and breeze, and two o'clock found a very excited group of children gathered outside Marine Terrace, where two yellow coaches, hired specially from Ferndale for the occasion, were in waiting to drive the party to the Tower.

Barton, Mrs. Stuart's maid, was busy packing the insides with baskets of tea-cups and hampers of provisions, and some of the smaller boys had already climbed to the top with a view of securing the box-seats, whence they were speedily evicted by the younger guard, who had his own notions about reserving the best places, and who, having already had a scuffle with Arnold Rokeby on the subject of the unauthorized blowing of his horn, was disposed to resent undue interference with his privileges. There were quite enough older people to keep the children in order, which seemed a fortunate thing, to judge from the effervescing nature of their spirits. Mrs. Stuart had invited several of her friends, among the number an athletic young curate named Mr. Browne, who tucked both Arnold and Bertie Rokeby easily under one arm, and held them there as in a vice, while he dangled Charlie Chester in mid-air with the other hand—a feat of prowess which so excited their admiration that they clung to him like burrs for the rest of the afternoon. The Wrights had turned up in full force, with the aunt and mademoiselle, and were commenting upon the horses and the general arrangements in their best English-French; while even the little [123] Barringtons had been allowed, after all, to join the fun, though at the last moment, much to Ruth's disgust, their mother had decided to accompany them, to see that they did not race about in the sun or eat indigestible delicacies.

It took a long time to settle all the guests in their seats, and to stow away the lively members of the party where they could not get into mischief, yet would not interfere with the comfort of their more sober-minded elders, was as difficult a problem as the well-known puzzle of the fox, the goose, and the bag of corn; but eventually things were arranged to everybody's satisfaction. Bertie Rokeby, who had announced his intention of taking the journey hanging on to the leather strap at the back beside the guard, was safely wedged between his long-suffering mother and the jovial curate; while Charlie Chester had been allowed to screw into a spare six inches of box-seat next to the driver, who held out a half-promise that he might hold the reins going uphill. The whole company seemed in the gayest of spirits and the most sociable of moods. Mr. Chester, who was something of a wag, kept both coaches in a roar with his jokes, and a fashionably-dressed young lady in pince-nez, who had looked rather unapproachable at first, proved to have her [124] pockets overflowing with chocolates, which she distributed with a liberal hand, and was voted by the boys in consequence a "regular out-and-outer."

The last comers being at length seated, and the last forgotten basket put inside, the guards blew their horns, the drivers whipped up, and the two coaches set off with a dash, to the admiration of all the visitors in Marine Terrace, and the rejoicing of a small crowd of barefooted boys from the town, who had assembled to watch the start, and who ran diligently for nearly half

a mile behind them shouting, "A 'alfpenny! Give us a 'alfpenny!" with irritating monotony, and eluding the skilful lashes of the coachmen's long whips with considerable agility. It was not a very great distance to the Tower, and the children thought the drive far too short, and were quite loath, indeed, to come down when the horses stopped before the gray old gateway, and the guards, who had been rivalling one another in solos on the horn, joined in a farewell duet to the appropriate air of "Meet me again in the evening."

[125] The ruined castle made a charming spot for an out-door party. Situated at the foot of a tall wooded hill called the Scar, its battered walls faced the long valley to the north, up which in the olden days a strict watch must have been kept for Border raiders. The ancient turreted keep, with its tiny loophole windows, was still standing, half covered with ivy, the hairy stems of which were as thick as small trees, and a narrow winding staircase led on to the battlements, from whence you might see, on the one hand, the green slopes of the woods, and on the other the yellow cliffs which bounded the blue waters of the bay. Inside the keep was a large square courtyard, where in times gone by the neighbouring farmers would often drive their cattle for safety when the gleam of the Scottish pikes and the smoke of burning roofs were seen to northward. The heavy portcullis hung yet in the gateway, and though the drawbridge was long ago gone, and the moat was dry, the fragments of an outer wall and a portion of a barbican remained to show how powerful a protection was needed in the days when might was right, and each man must guard his goods by the strength of his own hand. The courtyard now was covered with short green grass spangled with daisies, where a pair of tame ravens were solemnly hopping about, while the ivy was the home of innumerable jackdaws that flapped away at the approach of strangers, uttering their funny spoilt "caw," as if indignant at having their haunts disturbed.

[126] Visitors were admitted to the castle by an old woman, who looked almost as ancient as the ruin itself, and who insisted upon giving a full account of the dimensions, situation, and history of the place, which she had learnt from the guide-book, and which she repeated in a high, sing-song voice, without any pauses or stops, as if she were saying a lesson. She followed the various members of the party for some time, trying to make them keep together and listen to her explanations; but as they much preferred to explore on their own account, she was obliged to subside at last to her little kitchen under the archway, and employ herself in the more practical business of boiling the water for tea. All the guests were very soon distributed about the ruins, some admiring the view from the battlements, some peering into the darkness of the dungeons, and others trying to re-people the guardroom and the banqueting-hall with knights and dames of old, and to imagine the clink of armour and the clash of swords in the courtyard below. The Rokeby boys were imperilling their limbs by a climb after jackdaws' nests, oblivious of the fact that it was long past the season for eggs, and the young birds, already in glossy black plumage, were flying round as if in mockery at their efforts. Austin Wright, after a vain attempt to establish an acquaintance with the ravens, had been seen racing as if for his life with the pair in hot pursuit of his small bare legs; while Charlie Chester, in an essay to investigate the interior of the well, very nearly fell to the bottom, being only saved by the tail of his jacket, which luckily caught on a prickly bramble bush, and held him suspended over the dark gulf till he was rescued by his indignant father.

[128] In the meantime tea had been spread in the courtyard. Two great hissing urns were carried from the kitchen and placed upon the grass, and both grown-ups and children, abandoning the study of mediæval history or the pursuit of jackdaws, collected together to discuss sandwiches, cakes, and jam puffs, in spite of Mr. Chester's laughing protestations that such modern luxuries were out of place, and an ox roasted whole or a red deer pasty would have been a more appropriate feast for the occasion. Even the ravens came hopping round at the sight of the cups and plates, and waxed quite friendly on the strength of sundry pieces of bun and bread and butter, which they snapped up with voracious bills, growing too forward, indeed, as the meal progressed, for they stole the curate's tartlet, which he had laid down in an unguarded moment on the grass, and shamelessly snatched Bertie Rokeby's sponge-cake out of his very hand.

[127] "I'm sure the Wrights enjoyed themselves," Isobel told her mother afterwards. "Harold had seven rice buns and ten victoria biscuits, and Charlotte and Aggie ate a whole plateful of cheese-cakes between them. Belle says they always have the most enormous appetites, and at her last party Eric took four helpings of turkey; he just gulped it down, and kept handing up his plate while the others were eating their first serving, and after that he tasted every different dish on the table. It's a great trial for the Wrights to go to parties at the Barringtons; they never get half enough supper, though they have the most delightful magic lanterns and conjurers. Ruth and Edna were scarcely allowed to eat anything at tea. Mrs. Barrington picked all the raisins out of Edna's bun, and made Ruth put back the jam tart she'd just taken. She said if they were really hungry they might eat some plasmon biscuits she had brought with her, but they mustn't touch pastry; and Ruth was so savage, she filled her pocket with queen-cakes when her mother wasn't looking—she said she didn't mean to come away without having tasted anything nice after all."

[130] If the Barringtons were obliged to rise with unsatisfied appetites, the same certainly could not be said of the other guests; the piles of good things disappeared with much rapidity, and at last even the insatiable Eric Wright declined another bun. It was at this point that Mrs. Stuart produced a special basket, which she had reserved for a final surprise, and raising the lid, disclosed a row of marvellous little cakes, each made in the exact form of a sea urchin, with spines of white sugar, and the inside filled with vanilla cream.

"It's a delicate compliment to the Sea Urchins' Club," she said. "It was my own idea. I sent to my confectioner at home, and asked him what he could manage in the matter. I think he has

carried it out very well. The cakes look so natural, you could almost imagine they had been fished out of the water."

Quite a howl of delight went up from the young guests, who had never seen such appropriate confectionery before, and the basket was handed round by Belle amid a chorus of thanks, the United Sea Urchins consuming their own effigies with much appreciation, even Ruth and Edna, at the special request of Mrs. Stuart, being allowed for once to share the treat, though only on the distinct understanding that they submitted peaceably to a dose of Gregory's powder if the unwonted dainties disagreed with them.

[132] Tea being over, the party broke up to amuse itself in various ways, most of the children playing at hide-and-seek among the crumbling walls, or chasing each other up the winding staircase, while a few more adventurous spirits took the opportunity of exploring the dungeons with a candle. It was deliciously creepy down there; you could still see the iron stanchions by which the wretched prisoners had been chained to the wall, and the little hole through which their daily portions of food had been handed in to them, and could imagine, if you were fond of recalling the past, how from their beds of straw they would watch the light fading from the tiny barred window, and shiver as they heard the rats gnawing at the stout oak door, or felt a toad crawl over their feet in the murky darkness. Some of the grown-ups had been busy marking out bounds in the courtyard, and soon enlisted every one in an exciting game of prisoner's base. Mr. Chester and the curate made the most successful captains, directing the proceedings with great spirit, and sometimes by a bold dash rescuing the more important of their prisoners, and Bertie Rokeby covered himself with glory by quietly walking to the "prison" while the opposite side was occupied in a hardly-contested struggle, and unsuspectedly freeing all the captives one by one. [131] It was warm work, however, on a hot August day, and after a time the Wrights, never good runners, subsided, panting, on to a piece of ruined wall, and even the enthusiastic curate, who had pulled off his coat, and was prosecuting the game in his shirt sleeves, began to show signs of flagging zeal.

"I'm done up!" cried Mr. Chester at last, flinging himself under the shade of a small elder tree near the banqueting-hall. "I haven't a leg left to stand on, and I'm hoarse with shouting orders. You'd better give in, and do something quiet. I don't want to see another boy or girl for the space of the next half-hour, so scoot, all of you, anywhere, and leave Mr. Browne and myself to enjoy a smoke in peace."

CHAPTER X.

WILD MAIDENHAIR.

"On our other side is the straight-up rock,
And a path is kept 'twixt the gorge and
it
By boulder stones, where lichens mock
The marks on a moth, and small ferns fit
Their teeth to the polished block."

[133] **S**OMEWHAT hot and tired with their exertions, the children dispersed in small groups to lounge about or amuse themselves in any way they happened to feel inclined. As there was still plenty of time before the coaches returned at seven o'clock, Belle and Isobel, together with four of the Rokebys, decided to stroll up the Scar, from the top of which they expected to obtain a very good view of the distant moorland, together with a wide stretch of sea. A narrow path led steeply by a series of steps through the wood, a delightful, cool, shady place, with soft moss spreading like a green carpet underfoot, and closely-interlacing boughs shutting out the sunlight overhead. Trails of late honeysuckle still hung in sweet-scented festoons from the undergrowth, and an occasional squirrel might be seen whisking his bushy tail round the bole of an oak tree in a quest for early acorns. There was an interesting little pool, too, where a number of young frogs were practising swimming; and the children thought they saw an otter, but they could not be quite sure, for it scurried off so quickly up the bank that they had not the chance to get more than a glimpse of it. The hazel bushes were covered with nuts, a few of which already contained kernels, and clumps of ferns grew luxuriantly under the shadow of the trees.

Pleasant as it was in the wood, it was even more enjoyable when they reached the top of the hill, and seating themselves upon a thick patch of heather, looked down the other side of the Scar over the rich undulating silvan slope, where among great round boulders they caught the glint of a stream, and heard in the distance the rushing noise of a waterfall. At the foot of the incline, in a narrow valley between the Scar and the cliffs which bounded the sea, rose the gray-brown stone roof of a quaint old Elizabethan house. The richly-carved timbers, the wide mullioned windows,

[134] and the ornamental gables were singularly fine, and told of the time when those who built put an artistic pride into their work, and thought no detail too unimportant to be well carried out. The south side was covered with a glorious purple clematis, which hung in rich masses round the pillars of a veranda below, and even from the distance the flaming scarlet of the Scotch nasturtium clothing the porch arrested the eyes by its brilliant contrast with the delicate tea-roses that framed the windows.

"What a splendid place!" cried Belle, glancing beyond the twisted chimneys to where the smooth green lawns and gay beds of a garden peeped from between the trees of the shrubbery. "Just look at the beautiful conservatories and greenhouses, and such stables! There's a tennis lawn on the other side of the flagstaff, and a carriage drive leading down towards the road. It's the nicest house I've seen anywhere about Silversands. I wonder to whom it belongs, and what it's called."

[135] "It's the Chase, and belongs to Colonel Smith, I believe," said Cecil. "There's a huge 'S' on the gates, at any rate, and one day when we were passing I saw an old buffer going in with a gun, and Arthur Wright said he was sure it was Colonel Smith, who has all the shooting on the common. Lucky chap! If it were mine, wouldn't I have a glorious time! I'd keep ever so many ferrets and dogs in those stables, and go rabbiting every day in the year."

"I'd have a very fast pony that could fly like the wind," said Winnie, "and I'd gallop all over the moors and the shore with my hair streaming out behind in ringlets like the picture of Diana Vernon on the landing at home."

"You'd very soon fall off," remarked Bertie unsympathetically, "seeing you can't even stick on to a donkey on the sands. The little brown one threw you twice this morning."

"That was because the saddle kept slipping," said Winnie indignantly. "And that particular donkey has a trick of lying down suddenly, too, when it's tired. It wants to get rid of you—I know it does—because it rolls if you don't tumble off. It did the same with Charlie Chester the other day, and shot him straight over its head; then it got up and flew back to the Parade before he could catch it. The pony would be quite a different thing, I can tell you, and I'd soon learn to ride it. What would you do, Belle, if you owned the Chase?"

[136] "I'd give the most wonderful parties," said Belle, "and invite all kinds of distinguished people—dukes and duchesses, you know, and members of Parliament, and admirals, and generals, and perhaps even the Prince and Princess of Wales; and I'd send to Paris for my hats, and have my clothes made by the Court dressmaker."

"I'd give a cricket match on that lawn," said Isobel, "and ask all the Sea Urchins to tea. We'd have loads of lovely fruit from those gardens and greenhouses, and when we were tired of cricket we could get up sports, and let off fireworks in the evening just when it was growing dark. That's what I'd like to do if I lived there."

"Pity you don't," exclaimed Bertie; "we'd all come. But what's the use of talking when you know you'll never have the chance. I say, suppose we go down the wood on this side and try to find the waterfall? It must be rather a decent-sized one to make such a thundering noise."

[137] The others jumped up very readily at the suggestion, and leaving the path, they slid through the steep wood, and climbing a high wall, found themselves at the rocky bed of a stream, which rushed swiftly along under the overhanging trees, forming little foaming cascades as it went. At one point the water, dashing between two steep crags, descended in a sheer fall of about thirty feet, emptying itself at the bottom into a wide and deep pool overhung by several fine mountain ashes, the scarlet berries of which made a bright spot of colour against the silvery green of the foliage behind. The Rokebys instantly rushed at these, and began tearing off quite large branches, breaking the boughs in a ruthless fashion that went to Isobel's heart, for she always had been taught to pick things carefully and judiciously, so as not to spoil the beauty of tree or plant.

"It's grand stuff," said Cecil, descending to the ground with a crash, and switching at the ferns by the water's edge with his stick as he spoke. "I've got a perfect armful. Hullo! what's that all down the side of this overhanging rock? It's actually maidenhair fern growing wild in the open air! I'm going to have some. We'll plant it in pots, and take it home."

It was indeed the true maidenhair, flourishing on the damp crag under the spray of the waterfall as luxuriantly as though it had been in a conservatory, its delicate fronds showing in large clumps wherever it could obtain a hold on the rocky surface. I grieve to say that the Rokebys simply threw themselves upon it, pulling it up by the roots, and destroying as much as they gathered by trampling it in their frantic haste.

[138] "O Cecil!" cried Isobel, in an agony, "you're spoiling the ferns. They looked so lovely growing there by the waterfall. Please don't take them all. Haven't you got enough now?"

"But he hasn't given *me* any yet," protested Belle. "And I must have some."

"One doesn't often get the chance to find maidenhair," declared Cecil, "so I shall make the most of it, you bet.—Here, Belle, you may have this piece. Catch! If I climb a little higher I can reach that splendid clump under the tree. I'll take that to the mater."

"I think, on the whole, you will not, my boy," said a dry voice from the bank behind; and looking

round, the children, to their horror and astonishment, saw the tall figure of an elderly gentleman who had stolen upon the scene unawares. He spoke quite calmly, but there was a twitch about his mouth and a gleam in his gray eye which suggested the quiet before a thunderstorm, and he stood watching the group in much the same way as a detective might have done who had made a sudden successful capture of youthful burglars red-handed in the act of committing a felony.

[140] "May I ask," he observed, with withering politeness, "by whose invitation you have entered my grounds, and by whose permission you have been destroying my trees and uprooting my ferns? I was under the impression that this was my private property, but you evidently consider you are entitled not only to annex my possessions, but to exercise a cheap generosity by presenting them to others. I shall be obliged if you will kindly offer me some explanation."

Cecil was so absolutely transfixed with amazement that for a moment he remained with his mouth wide open, staring at the newcomer as though the latter had dropped from the skies. The Rokebys were not well-trained children; they did not possess either the moral courage or the good manners which Charlie Chester, madcap though he might be, would undoubtedly have displayed in the same situation, and instead of meeting the matter bravely and making the best apology he could, Cecil flung down the ferns, and without a word of excuse took to his heels and ran back up the wood at the top of his speed, closely followed by Winnie, Bertie, and Arnold.

Belle for an instant wavered, but recognizing the old gentleman as the same whose acquaintance she had cultivated on the beach with such unsatisfactory results, she decided that discretion was the better part of valour, and turning away, vanished through the trees like a little white shadow.

Isobel, the only one of the six who stood her ground, was left to bear the whole brunt of the matter alone. She looked at the broken branches of mountain ash and the damaged ferns which the Rokebys had dropped in the panic of their flight, and which surrounded her like so much guilty evidence of the deed, then screwing up her courage, she faced the outraged owner in a kind of desperation.

"I'm *very* sorry," she began, twisting and untwisting her thin little hands, and colouring up to the roots of her hair with the effort she was making. "We oughtn't to have come. But, indeed, we didn't know it was your ground; we thought it was only just part of the Scar. And I don't believe the others would have taken the ferns if they'd thought for a moment, because they would have known maidenhair doesn't grow wild out of doors like bracken or hart's-tongue."

"But it *was* wild," said the colonel—"that's the unfortunate part of it. It wouldn't have distressed me if I could have replaced it from the conservatory. This happens to be one of the few spots in the British Isles where *Adiantum Capillus-Veneris* is found in an undoubtedly native situation."

[141] "Oh, then that's worse than ever!" cried Isobel, with consternation. "I know how very, very rare it is, because mother and I once found a little piece in a cave in Cornwall."

"Did you? Are you sure it was an absolutely genuine specimen and not naturalized?" asked Colonel Stewart, with keen interest.

"No; it was quite wild, for it was in a very out-of-the-way place by the seashore."

"I hope you didn't take it?"

"Oh no! we didn't even pick a frond; and mother made me promise never to tell any one where it grew, she was so afraid some one might root it up."

"A sensible woman!" exclaimed the colonel. "Pity there aren't more like her! Why people should want to grub up every rare and beautiful thing they find in the country to plant in their miserable town gardens, I can't imagine. It's downright murder. The poor things die directly in the smoke. Look at these splendid roots that have been growing here since I was a boy! I would rather they had destroyed every flower in my garden than have worked such wanton havoc in the spot I value most in all my grounds."

[142] "It's most unfortunate we came this particular walk," said Isobel, almost crying with regret. "You see, the Rokebys aren't used to the country, so they don't seem to think about spoiling things. I believe I could manage to plant these roots again; they're not very bad, and if I tucked them well into the crevices of the rock I really fancy they'd grow."

She picked up some of the ferns as she spoke, and began carefully to replace them in the little ledges on the side of the rock, moistening the roots first in the stream, and scraping up some soil with a thin piece of shale which she made serve the purpose of a trowel.

"They haven't taken quite all," she said. "That beautiful clump up there hasn't even been touched, and it may spread. I wish I could put back the mountain ash. I simply can't tell you how sorry I am we ever came."

The colonel smiled.

"I don't blame *you*," he said. "It was those young heathens who ran away. Their methods of studying botany were certainly of a rather rough-and-ready description. I should have thought better of them if they had stayed to apologize. Your friend with the light curls, whom, by-the-bye, I have met before, seemed also unwilling to enter into any explanations. In fact, to put it plainly, she left you in the lurch."

[143] "I think she was frightened," said Isobel, wondering what possible excuse she could frame for Belle's conduct. "You came so—so very suddenly. There! I've put all the ferns back. They're rather broken, I'm afraid; but there are plenty of new fronds ready to come up, so I hope you'll find that, after all, we haven't quite spoiled everything."

"Think I'm not so much hurt as I imagined?" said the colonel, with a twinkle in his eye.

"Oh, I didn't mean that!" replied Isobel quickly. "I know we've done a great deal of harm. Please don't think I wanted to make out we hadn't."

"All right; you've done your best to repair the damage, so that's an end of the matter."

"I ought to be going now," continued Isobel. "The Rokebys and Belle will be wondering what has become of me, and the coaches were to start at seven o'clock. It must be after six now."

"Exactly half-past six," said Colonel Stewart, consulting his watch. "If you follow that footpath it will take you through a side gate and straight up the hillside; I expect you will find the others waiting for you on the top of the Scar. Good-bye. Give my compliments to your friends, and tell them to learn to enjoy the country without spoiling it for other people; and the next time they get into a tight place to show a little pluck, and not to run off like a set of cowardly young curs."

[144] CHAPTER XI.

THE ISLAND.

"Oh! had we some bright little isle of our
own,
In a blue summer ocean, far off and
alone."

[145] **T**HOUGH the United Sea Urchins were still very faithful to their cricket ground under the cliffs, the older and more daring spirits were always ready to ramble farther afield in quest of new scenes and adventures. Every day seemed to bring with it some fresh delight, whether it were a shrimping expedition among the green sea-weedy pools of the rocks on the far shore, or a cockle gathering on the gleaming banks left by the ebb-tide, where the breath of the salt wind on their faces or the feel of the wet, oozing sand under their bare feet was a joy to be garnered up and held in memory. Sometimes it was a scramble over the moors, between thickets of golden gorse and stretches of heather so deep and long that to lie in it was to bury oneself like a bee in a bed of purple fragrance, or a hard climb would take them to the summit of some neighbouring hill, where, watching the sun sink from a primrose sky into a pearly, shimmering sea, they would all grow a little silent and quiet, even the roughest spirits restrained in spite of themselves by the sight of that indescribable majesty and calm which marks the parting of the day. It is hours such as these—glad, exhilarating, glorious hours, when the world seems as young as ourselves, and merely to live and breathe is a delight—that lay up in our hearts a store of sunshine to be drawn upon in after life as from a treasure-house of the mind, and to brighten dark days to come with the rapture of the remembrance.

[146] It was, perhaps, somewhat against her natural tastes that Belle found herself included in the many and various excursions of the Sea Urchins. She was no country lover, and the stir of a promenade in a fashionable watering-place gave her more pleasure than the dash of waves or the scent of wild flowers. She did not enjoy splashing her pretty clothes with sea-water among the rocks, or tearing them in search of blackberries on the hedgerows; and it was only her love of society, and a dislike of being left behind, which induced her to follow where the others led. The rough walks and hard scrambles were often a real trial to her, though with Isobel to tow her up steep hills, help her across stiles, disentangle her laces from insistent brambles, jump her over pools, and take her hand in dangerous spots, she managed to keep up fairly well. Isobel, to whom these excursions were the topmost summit of bliss, and who was apt to measure others' standards by her own, never suspected for a moment that Belle was beginning to grow tired of it, and received an occasional outburst of petulance or fretful complaint with such amazement that the latter would, for very shame, desist, and for a time the friendship continued to remain at high-water mark. That Belle was selfish and exacting never once crossed Isobel's mind, and though she could not help frequently detecting in her certain little meannesses, exaggeration, or even occasional wanderings from the truth, there always seemed to be some exonerating circumstance which would in a measure either clear her from blame or give her the benefit of a doubt. It is often so difficult to find fault with those for whom we care very dearly: we are ready to make excuses, condone their mistakes, overlook their shortcomings, anything but allow to ourselves the unfortunate and yet unmistakable fact that our idol has feet of clay; and so Isobel went on from day to day blinding her eyes with her adoration for her namesake, and investing

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Belle with a halo of virtues and attractions which certainly did not exist except in her own imagination.

Apart from Belle, I think that among the various members of the Sea Urchins' Club Isobel found the Chesters the most congenial. They had all the dash and daring of the Rokebys without the over-boisterous manners which characterized that rough-and-tumble family, whose friendship at times was apt to prove a trifle wearing. Little Hilda had taken a great affection for Isobel, and Charlie, since the adventure in the *Stormy Petrel*, was disposed to consider her in the light of a chum, and to cultivate her acquaintance. As knowing Isobel meant including Belle, the four children therefore might often be found in each other's company, and it was at Charlie's suggestion that they determined one afternoon to pay a visit to a certain small island which lay a short distance along the coast, at the other side of the rocky headland that jutted out at the far side of the bay.

"I've not been close to," said Charlie, "but you can see it very well from the top of the Scar. It looks a regular Robinson Crusoe desert island kind of a place, just given up to sea-gulls and rabbits. I don't believe a soul ever goes there."

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"It would be grand if we were the first to set foot on it," said Isobel. "It would be our own island, and we'd claim it in the name of the club, like travellers do in Central Africa when they run up the Union Jack, and then mark the place pink on the map, to show it's a British possession."

"And then all the others could be settlers," added Hilda, "and we'd light a fire and cook fish and have *such* fun!"

"It would be exactly like the coral island in 'The Young Pioneers,'" said Belle. "Perhaps I might become the queen, like the mysterious white lady they found living among the natives, and have a throne made out of sand and shells, and wear a garland of flowers for a crown."

"Oh, we won't go in for nonsense like that!" declared Charlie, who was not romantic, and, moreover, enjoyed squashing Belle on occasion. "But we might build a hut there, and rig up a sort of camp, and then, if the whole lot of us came, we could have a regular ripping time. It's worth while going to see, at any rate."

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Armed with a mariner's compass, a tin pail full of biscuits, Isobel's botanical case for specimens, and a stout stick apiece, the four friends set out on their pioneering expedition with all the enthusiasm of a band of explorers penetrating into the heart of an unknown continent, or a Roman legion bent on the conquest of some distant Albion. As the geography books determine an island to be "a piece of land surrounded by water," the particular spot in question could only claim to justify its name at high tide, since at low water it was joined to the mainland, and by scrambling over the rocks and jumping a few channels which the sea had left behind, any one could reach it quite easily dry shod. The children marched sturdily along over the wet sands, with a pause here and there to dive after a particularly interesting crab, or to float a jelly-fish left stranded by the tide, in the deeper water. Charlie, however, would not allow many digressions, and hurried them as fast as possible towards the object of their journey. The island, on a nearer view, proved to be a bare, craggy spot, about half a mile in length by a quarter in breadth, bounded by steep cliffs which supported a rocky plateau covered with short rough grass and sea pinks, and honeycombed in every direction with rabbit burrows. It seemed the haunt of innumerable gulls, guillemots, and puffins, for whole flocks of them flew away, wheeling overhead in wide circles, and uttering loud, piercing cries in protest at the invasion of their rocky stronghold.

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"We'd better do the thing thoroughly. Suppose we start from this big rock and walk right round the island," suggested Isobel. "I have a piece of paper and a pencil in my pocket, and I'll draw a map of it as we go along, and we'll give names to all the capes and bays and headlands."

"Stunning!" agreed Charlie. "This rock can be 'Point Set-Off,' and we can take it in turns to christen the other places. I don't believe the island itself has a name; we shall each have to suggest something, and then put it to the vote. I'm for 'Craggy Holme' myself, but we won't decide anything yet until we have been completely over it."

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Thrilled with the excitement of the occasion, the pioneers started on their tour of inspection, noting with approval that the pools at the foot of the cliff were full of sea anemones, star-fishes, hermit crabs, periwinkles, whelks, pink sea-weed, and a wealth of desirable treasures; that the brambles which grew on the slopes above were already covered with fast ripening blackberries; that there were flukes quite seven inches long in the narrow channel on the north shore; and that the sands beyond showed a perfect harvest of cockles and other shells. They had gone perhaps halfway round the coast, and were on the south side, facing the open sea, when suddenly, turning a corner, they found themselves in a spot which made them stand still and look at one another with little gasps of delight. Surely it was the ideal place for a camp. They were in a small creek between two great overhanging crags, where brambles and wood vetch hung down in delightful tangled masses, the fine white sand under their feet alternated with soft green turf, spangled with tiny sea-flowers, and there was quite a bank of small delicate shells left by the high spring tides. Close under the rocks lay the wreck of a schooner, driven ashore by winter storms, and stranded upon the shingle, the broken spars and a fragment of the hull lying half buried in the silvery sand, surrounded by a forest of sea-weed and drift-wood.

"Why, it just beats 'The Swiss Family Robinson' or 'The Boy Explorers' hollow!" said Charlie,

turning to his companions with something of the look that Christopher Columbus may have worn when he stepped with his followers on to the shores of the New World. "Here's the very place we were hoping for! We'd soon get that old trail tilted out of the sand; she only needs propping against the cliff, and she'd make a regular Uncle Tom's cabin. With the Wrights and the Rokebys to help, we'd haul her up in a jiffy. Some of these spars and planks would do for seats and tables, and we could light fires with the drift-wood. It's a camp almost ready made for us, I declare."

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"And look!" cried Hilda, pointing to a sand-bank which lay at the mouth of the creek; "the tide seems to have thrown up a great many things down there." And she hurried to the water's edge, where the drifting current had lodged a variety of miscellaneous articles—walking-sticks, tin cans, a child's boat, a straw hat, several baskets, glass bottles, and even a lady's parasol, all lying tangled among the sea-weed, washed across the bay no doubt from the beach at Ferndale. "I've fished out a little horse and cart, and there's something here that looks like the remains of a gentleman's top hat. We can use the tins for the cabin. They'll do for flower-pots. O Charlie! aren't you glad we came?"

"It's quite romantic," said Belle, sitting down on a spar, and twisting some pink bindweed round her hat. "We could have tea here, and get up a dance on the sands afterwards. I've found such a pretty pencil-case among the drift-wood. I mean to keep it."

"I don't think any one else has discovered the island," said Isobel. "So we've quite a right to take possession, haven't we?"

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"It's the very thing we want, and we'll annex it at once," said Charlie; and drawing the empty shell of a sea urchin from his pocket, he slipped it on to the top of a stick, which he planted firmly in the sand as an ensign; then climbing on to the summit of a rock close by, he waved his handkerchief to north, south, east, and west, exclaiming, "We hereby take solemn possession of this island in the name of the United Sea Urchins' Recreation Society, and are prepared to hold the same in legal right against all comers. If any one has just cause or impediment to offer why the said society should not occupy this territory in peace and prosperity, let him speak now, or hereafter for ever hold his peace. Rule, Britannia! God save the King!"

With a burst of cheers the others unanimously declared themselves witnesses to the deed, and decided that possession being nine-tenths of the law, the island, for the time at any rate, was undoubtedly their own, and until any one appeared to dispute their claim they would make what they pleased of it.

"To-morrow we'll rig out a real pioneer party of settlers, and come with hammers and nails and axes and all the rest of it," said Charlie. "Then we can put up a flag and decide on names and everything. We haven't time to explore the top now, though it looks jolly upon those cliffs; we must get back before the tide turns. It's a ripping place, but it would be no joke, all the same, to be surrounded and have to spend the night here."

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The Sea Urchins took to the idea of a camp on a desert island with the greatest enthusiasm, and next day the elder portion of them started off with any tools which they could buy, beg, or borrow, anxious to set to work at once upon the task of constructing a dwelling from the wreck of the old schooner. By fastening a rope to the hull, they contrived to tug it out of the sand and tilt it on end against a rock; then with the aid of the broken planks which were lying near they propped it up securely and repaired any damaged or broken pieces, so that it made the most successful hut, a kind of combination of a Viking's hall with a pirate's cave or an Indian wigwam. The face of the cliff which formed the wall on one side was full of ledges and crevices which served admirably for cupboards, a few nails driven into the boards answered for hat pegs, and it was no difficult matter to put up shelves from odd pieces of drift-wood.

It was amazing how the work brought out the varying capacities of the settlers. To every one's surprise, Arthur Wright developed a perfect genius for carpentry. He had borrowed a few tools from a friendly joiner in the town, and constructed quite a tidy little table, forming the legs from broken masts; and he managed to make a door for the fortress of the best portions of three rotten planks, fastening it on with hinges cut from an old leather strap, and even putting a latch which would open with a string pulled from the outside.

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While the boys did the harder part of the work, the girls contented themselves with the more feminine element of artistic decoration. They thatched the roof elaborately with masses of brown bladder-wrack sea-weed, tying it securely with pieces of cord; they fixed a row of twenty-one sea urchins, with the spines on, over the door as a coat of arms, one to represent each member of the club; and pink and white fan shells were nailed alternately round the window, with yellow periwinkles wedged between. A little garden was carefully laid out, a wall being made of stones and sand, and a path of fine gravel leading up to the door. Green sea-weed was put down to represent grass, the most wonderful arrangements in the way of cockles, mussels, and limpets took the place of flower-beds, and a few sea-pinks and harebells planted in tins rescued from the sand-bank adorned the window-sill. Inside, a fireplace had been built with stones at the rocky end, a hole being made in the roof to let out the smoke, and seats were dug from the sand sufficient to accommodate the whole party. A tin kettle and a frying-pan, purchased by subscription, constituted the cooking utensils of the camp, and the members waxed so eager over the domestic arrangements of their hut that they spent all their pennies at the cheap stalls in the market on tin mugs and plates and other articles likely to be of service to the community. Eric Wright denied himself toffee or caramels for three whole days—a heroic effort on his part—that he might contribute a certain gorgeous scarlet tea-tray on which he had set his young affections;

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[157] the Rokebys clubbed together to buy muslin for window curtains; Belle presented a looking-glass as a suitable offering; and Mrs. Barrington, who was always generous when it was not a question of diet, allowed Ruth and Edna to purchase a dozen pewter teaspoons, a bright blue enamelled teapot, and a bread-and-butter plate with a picture of the Promenade at Ferndale upon it. The sand-bank was rummaged for anything that would come in handy, and though it did not yield such wonderful treasures as the wrecked ship generally contains in desert-island stories, they found several empty bottles, an old lantern, a dripping-tin, a wooden spoon, and a battered bird-cage, all of which they decided might come in useful in course of time and were carefully put by in a safe place among the rocks.

Isobel, who toiled away at the camp with untiring zeal, had drawn and painted a very nice map of the island on a sheet of cardboard, all the various places being neatly marked, and had nailed it on the wall inside. After a good deal of discussion it had been decided to call the domain "Rocky Holme," the crag on the extreme summit was "Point Look-Out," the tall cliff to the north, "Sea-Birds' Cape," while the one on the south was "Welcome Head." The creek where they had established their headquarters was christened by the appropriate name of "Sandy Cove," and the hut bore the more romantic title of "Wavelet Hall." They had fixed a broken mast at the end of the little garden for a flagstaff, and ran up an ensign specially designed and executed for them by Mrs. Stewart, consisting of a large sea urchin cut out of white calico, and stitched upon a ground of turkey-red twill, with the initials "U.S.U.R.S." below; so that, with their colours floating in the breeze and the smoke of their fire rising in a thin white column among the rocks, no band of colonists could have felt that the country was more really and truly their own.

[158] CHAPTER XII.

A FIRST QUARREL.

"The little rift within the lute,
That by-and-by will make the music
mute,
And ever widening slowly silence all."

[159] **I**T had become an almost daily programme for the Sea Urchins to jump across or even to wade through the channel the moment the tide was sufficiently low to enable them to do so with safety, and to establish themselves upon their desert island. The joys of pioneering seemed to have quite put cricket in the shade; the hut had still the charm of novelty, and to fry the flukes which they had themselves speared or to concoct blackberry jam or toffee in an enamelled saucepan over the camp fire was at present their keenest delight. The only regret was that they did not possess a boat in which they could row over to their territory whenever they wished, and the boys had tried to provide a substitute by constructing a raft from some of the old planks left lying about from the schooner, lashing them together with pieces of rope in the orthodox "shipwrecked sailor" fashion, and making paddles out of broken spars. It looked quite a respectable craft—as Charlie Chester said, "most suitable for a desert island"—and they had anticipated having a good deal of fun with it, and being able to take little sea excursions if they could only manage to steer it properly; and Charlie even had ideas of rigging up a sail, and perhaps getting across the bay as far as Ferndale with a favourable wind. Its career, however, was short and brilliant. It was launched with much noise and nautical language by Charlie and the other boys, and started gaily off, greatly to the admiration of the feminine portion of the Sea Urchins, who ran along the shore shouting encouragement. But it had hardly gone more than a hundred yards, and was still in shallow water, when the too enthusiastic efforts of its amateur oarsmen caused it suddenly to turn a somersault, and upset the crew into the briny deep; then floating swiftly away bottom side up, it was caught by the current, much to the regret of its disconsolate builders, who, wet through with their unexpected swim, watched it drift in the direction of Ferndale, where the tide probably carried it over the bar, to wash about as a derelict in the open sea till the water had rotted the ropes that bound the planks.

[160] After the raft proved a failure, the boys took to carving miniature yachts out of pieces of drift-wood, and sailing them in a wide pool which was generally left at the mouth of the creek. The girls hemmed the sails, and provided the vessels with flags in the shape of tiny coloured pieces of ribbon stitched on to the masts, and would stand by to cheer the particular bark in which they were interested, as the ladies in olden days encouraged their knights in the tourney. There was great competition between the various boats, and it seemed a matter of the utmost importance whether Charlie Chester's *Water Sprite*, Bertie Rokeby's *Esmeralda*, or Arthur Wright's *Invincible*, should reach the opposite shore in the shortest space of time. Occasionally a good ship would get becalmed in the middle of the pool, in which case its owner would have to wade to the rescue, probably finding it caught in a mass of oar-weed, or even entangled in the floating

tentacles of a huge jelly-fish. The children had made a nice aquarium not far from the hut, and in this they put specimens of every different kind of sea-weed on the island, as well as crabs, anemones, limpets, sea cucumbers, star-fishes, zoophytes, or any other treasures of the deep that they might be lucky enough to collect; while the boys, I regret to say, took a keen delight in securing a couple of hermit crabs, and setting the pugnacious pair to fight in a small arena of sand which they prepared specially for the purpose, somewhat in the same manner as our unregenerate forefathers devoted certain portions of their gardens to the formation of cock-pits.

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Another favourite amusement was to divide into two regiments, each under the leadership of suitable officers, and, armed with pea-shooters, to conduct a series of Volunteer manoeuvres upon the shore. The defending party would throw up ramparts of sand, and duly garrison their stronghold, while the enemy would attack with the ferocious zeal of a band of North American Indians or a gang of Chinese pirates, being greeted by a volley of fire from the pea-shooters, and missiles in the shape of whelks' eggs, the dried air-vessels of the bladder-wrack, little rolled-up balls of slimy green sea-weed, or anything else which could be flung as a projectile without injuring the recipients too severely. Very exciting struggles sometimes took place for the possession of a fortress or the securing of an outpost; and I think the girls were really as keen as the boys in this amateur warfare, Letty and Winnie Rokeby proving deadly shots with their pea-shooters, and Aggie Wright becoming quite an admirable scout.

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Isobel undertook the ambulance department, and made a delightful hospital with beds dug out of sand, and a dispensary fitted with empty bottles collected from the sand-bank. She installed herself here as a Red Cross Sister, with Ruth Barrington for a helper, and was ready to doctor the combatants, who were carried in suffering from various imaginary wounds, the sole flaw in her arrangements being that the invalids insisted upon getting well too quickly, and leaving their pills and potions to rush back and rejoin the fray.

The only one of the Sea Urchins who did not thoroughly enjoy the charms of the desert island was Belle. She was not suited for camp life, and though she tolerated the tea-parties when she brought her own china cup with her, she took no interest in the boat-sailing, and frankly disliked the manoeuvres. She would not have come at all, only she found it so dull to remain behind, as her mother was mostly occupied in reading, writing letters, or entertaining friends, and not inclined to devote much attention to her little daughter. Poor Belle was expected to find her own amusements, and having no resources in herself, she sought the society of the other children in preference to being alone, though she grumbled incessantly at the boyish games, and longed for a different sphere, where pretty frocks and trinkets would have a better chance of due appreciation. Towards Isobel the fever-heat of her first affection had cooled down considerably, and she had begun to treat her friend with a rather patronizing authority, ordering her about in a way which would have provoked any one with a less sweet temper to the verge of rebellion. She had quarrelled more than once with the Wrights and the Rokebys, since those outspoken families had given her their frank opinion of her behaviour on several occasions, and as it was not a flattering one, she had been far from pleased. So long as Belle's pretty pleading manners secured for her the best of everything she was a charming companion, but she could prove both pettish and peevish when she considered herself neglected. Her light, pleasure-loving nature depended for its happiness on continual attention and admiration, and if she could not have these she was as miserable as a butterfly in a shower of rain.

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One afternoon the question of the possession of a certain basket, supposed to be common property among the settlers, resulted in a war of words between Belle and Letty and Winnie Rokeby—a quarrel which waxed so fast and furious that Isobel, who fought her friend's battles through thick and thin, was obliged to interfere (not without an uneasy consciousness that the Rokebys had right on their side), persuaded Letty to relinquish the disputed treasure, and bore Belle away up the hill to soothe her ruffled feelings by picking blackberries. Micky, the little pet dog, followed close at their heels. As a rule he preferred the society of Mrs. Stuart, and rarely accompanied the children on their rambles, but to-day they had brought him with them to the island.

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"It *is* my basket," grumbled Belle, threading her way daintily between the brambles with a careful regard for her flowered delaine dress. "Mrs. Barrington lent it to me first. The Rokebys are so selfish, they want to keep everything to themselves. I don't know whether they or the Wrights are worse. It's such a pretty one, too—quite the nicest we have at the hut."

"Never mind," said Isobel hastily, anxious to dismiss the subject. "Let us fill it with blackberries. There are such heaps here, and such big ones."

It was indeed a harvest for those who liked to gather. Brambles grew everywhere. Long clinging sprays, some still in blossom and some covered with the ripe fruit, trailed in profusion over the rocks, their reddening leaves giving a hint of the coming autumn, for it was late August now, and already there was a touch of September crispness in the air. It was delightful on the headland, with sea and sky spread all around, the sea-gulls flapping idly below just on the verge of the waves, and banks of fragrant wild thyme under their feet, growing in patches between the great craggy boulders, which looked as though they had been piled up by some giant at play. The picking went on steadily for a while, though it was a little unequal, as Belle had a tender consideration for her spotless fingers, and gathered about one berry to Isobel's dozen.

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"We shall soon have the basket full," said Isobel. "Hold it for a moment, Belle, please, while I get to the other side of this rock; there are some still finer ones over here."

[169] conduct had reached a climax for which no excuse could be made. The latter, who considered herself both hurt in her feelings and offended in her dignity, scrambled down to the shore, and calling Micky to her heels, set off promptly for home.

"Hullo, Belle!" cried Bertie Rokeby, catching at her dress as she hurried past the hut. "Look out, can't you! Don't you see that you're trampling all over the shells that I've just laid out to sort on the sand? What's the row? You look like a regular tragedy queen—Lady Macbeth in the murder scene, or Juliet about to stab herself!"

"Let me go," said Belle crossly, trying to pull herself free. "What horrid, rough things you boys are! Why can't you leave me alone, I should like to know?"

"Humpty-Dumpty! We *are* in a jolly wax," said Bertie. "You're as bad as a cat with her back up. All the same, I don't want my shells smashed, so please to mind where you're stepping."

"Bother your shells!" said Belle. "You shouldn't leave them lying about in people's way. There! you've torn a slit in my dress. I knew you would! Let me go, Bertie Rokeby, you mean coward!" And jerking her skirt with an effort from his grasp, she started at a run along the beach, and fled as fast as she could in the direction of Silversands.

[170] She had reached the southern point of the island, where they generally crossed the channel, and was hurrying on, not looking particularly where she was going, her eyes half blinded with self-pitying tears, when, turning the headland sharply, she ran full tilt against her quondam acquaintance of the Parade, who was walking leisurely along the sands with a cigar in his mouth and a breechloader under his arm. The collision was so sudden and unexpected that Belle sat down swiftly in a pool of slimy green sea-weed, while the gun, knocked by the impact from its owner's grasp, struck the rock violently, and discharged both barrels into the air. The colonel, who had been almost upset with the shock, recovered his balance as by a miracle, and hastened to ascertain the extent of the mishap; but finding no harm done, he picked up his gun and surveyed Belle with considerable disfavour.

"You might have caused a very nasty accident, young lady," he said. "It's a mercy the charge didn't land in either your leg or mine. Why don't you look where you're going?"

Belle raised herself carefully from the pool, glancing with much concern at the large green stains which had reduced her dress to a wreck, and at the moist condition of her silk stockings.

[171] "How could I know any one was round the corner?" she replied, somewhat sulkily. "I wonder what my mother would have said if you'd killed me. I'm not sure if my leg isn't shot through, after all."

"Let me look," said the colonel quietly. "No, that's not a wound, though you've grazed it a little, very likely in falling. There's no real damage, and I think you're more frightened than hurt."

"My dress is spoilt," said Belle, determined to have a grievance. "These green stains will never wash out of it. It's really too bad."

"Be thankful it's only your dress, and not your skin," said the owner of the Chase, with scant sympathy. "What are you doing here, so far away from the Parade? You had better go home to your mother, and tell her to take more care of you, and not let you wander about alone to get into mischief."

"I was going home as fast as I could," retorted Belle, not too politely, for she disliked the old gentleman extremely, and wished he would not interfere with her. "And I think my mother knows how to take care of me without any one telling her, thank you."

[172] "I have no doubt she imagines she does," replied Colonel Stewart, rather bitterly. "I can't say I admire the result. I should certainly wish to teach you better manners if I had any share in your bringing up."

"I'm glad you haven't," said Belle smartly; and catching Micky in her arms, she put an abrupt end to the conversation by running away again at the top of her speed over the shallows towards the mainland.

"He's perfectly horrid!" she said to herself. "This is the third place I've met him, and each time he has been more disagreeable than the last. I can't imagine why, but I somehow feel as if he had taken quite a dislike to me."

[173] CHAPTER XIII.

READING THE RUNES.

"Words from the long far-away

[174] I SOBEL descended from the headland in the lowest of spirits. To have quarrelled with Belle, even in a just cause, was a disaster such as she had never contemplated, and for a moment she was half inclined to run after her friend and seek a reconciliation at any cost. Her pride, however, intervened; she felt that Belle had really been very rude and unreasonable, while her treatment of Micky was quite unpardonable. She strolled along, therefore, in the direction of the hut instead, trying to wink the tears out of her eyes, and to make up her mind that she did not care. All the Sea Urchins were rushing off to investigate some mysterious black object which they could see bobbing about in the water, and which they hoped might prove to be a porpoise. They called to her to join them, but even the prospect of capturing a sea monster had for the moment no charms, so she shook her head and volunteered instead to stay in the hut and get tea ready for their return. She filled the kettle from a little spring of fresh water, which always ran pure and clear in a small rivulet down the side of the cliff, threw some more drift-wood and dry sea-weed on the fire which the boys had already lighted, then set out the tea things, and taking a piece of chalk, began to amuse herself by drawing upon the wall of the hut the curious letters which she had copied from the stone. She was so absorbed in her occupation that she did not notice a tall figure, who stooped to enter the low doorway, and paused in some astonishment at the scene before him.

"Hullo!" said a voice. "Am I addressing Miss Robinson Crusoe, or is this the outpost of a military occupation? I see a flag flying which is certainly not the Union Jack, and as a late colonel in his Majesty's forces, and a Justice of the Peace, I feel bound to protect our shores from a possible invasion."

[175] Isobel turned round hastily. She recognized the newcomer at once as the owner of the maidenhair fern and the beautiful grounds into which she had so unwittingly trespassed, and noticing his gun, concluded that he must without doubt be the Colonel Smith of whom Cecil Rokeby had spoken, and whom she had also heard mentioned by Mrs. Jackson as a keen sportsman and a magistrate of some consequence in the neighbourhood.

"I'm not Miss Robinson Crusoe," she replied, laughing, "and it's not a military occupation either."

"Perhaps I am in a prehistoric dwelling, then, watching a descendant of the ancient Britons conducting her primitive cooking operations. Or is it an Indian wigwam? I should be interested to know to what tribe it belongs," said the colonel, advancing farther into the hut, and looking with an amused smile at the sand seats, the shelves, the pots, and all the other little arrangements which the children had made.

"No, I'm not an ancient Briton," said Isobel, "and it isn't a wigwam. It's 'Wavelet Hall,' and it belongs to us."

"And who is 'us,' if you will condescend to explain so ambiguous a term?"

"The United Sea Urchins' Recreation Society," said Isobel, rolling out the name with some dignity.

"No doubt it's my crass ignorance," observed the colonel, "but I'm afraid I have never heard of that distinguished order. Will you kindly enlighten me as to its object and scope?"

[176] "Why, you see, we're all staying at Silversands," explained Isobel; "so we made ourselves into a club, that we might have fun together, and called it the 'Sea Urchins.' Then we found this desert island that doesn't belong to anybody, so we took possession of it, and built this hut out of the wreck of the old schooner, and it's ours now."

"Is it?" said the colonel dryly. "I was under the impression that the island belonged to me. It is certainly included among my title-deeds, and as lord of the manor I am also supposed to have the rights of the foreshore."

"I don't quite understand what 'lord of the manor' means," said Isobel; "but does the island really and truly belong to you?"

"Really and truly. I keep it for rabbit shooting exclusively."

"Then," said Isobel apprehensively, "I'm very much afraid that we've been trespassing on your land again."

[177] "Not only trespassing, but squatting," returned the colonel, with a twinkle in his eye. "The case is serious. This island has belonged to me and to my ancestors for generations. I arrive here today to find it occupied by a band of individuals who, I must say" (with a glance out through the door at the barefooted Sea Urchins yelling in the distance as they hauled up the dead porpoise), "bear a very strong resemblance to a gang of pirates. I am frankly informed by one of their number that they claim possession of my property. I find their flag flying and a fortress erected. The question is whether I am at once to declare war and evict these invaders, or to allow them to remain in the position of vassals on payment of a due tribute."

"Oh, please let us stay!" implored Isobel; "we won't do any harm—we won't, indeed. We're all going home in a few weeks, and then you can have the island quite to yourself again."

"Suppose I were to regard you as surety for the good behaviour of the rest of the tribe," said the colonel: "would you undertake that no rare or cherished plants should be uprooted or any damage inflicted during your tenancy?"

"We wouldn't touch anything," declared Isobel, "we've only taken the blackberries because there are so many of them. I know you're thinking of the maidenhair. Oh, please, is it growing? I do so hope it wasn't spoilt."

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"Yes, it's growing. I really don't believe it has suffered very much, after all. I took a look at it this morning, and found the young fronds pushing up as well as if they had never been disturbed."

"I'm *so* glad!" said Isobel, with a sigh of relief; "I've often thought about it since. It's very kind of you to say we may stay here; it would have seemed so hard to turn out after we'd had the trouble of building the hut."

"But what about the rent?" inquired the colonel; "will you be answerable for its proper payment? I may prove as tough a customer as old Shylock, and insist on my pound of flesh."

"We've very little money, I'm afraid," said Isobel timidly; "we spent all the club funds on buying the kettle and the frying-pan—even what we'd saved up for a feast at the end of the holidays. I've only got threepence left myself, though perhaps some of the others may have more."

"I must take it in kind, then—the sort of tribute that is exacted from native chiefs in Central Africa—though you can't bring me pounds of rubber or elephants' tusks here."

"We could pick you blackberries, if you like them," suggested Isobel; "or get you cockles and mussels from the shore. Sometimes the boys spear flukes. They're rather small and muddy, but they're quite nice to eat with bread and butter if you fry them yourself."

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"My consumption of blackberries is limited," replied the colonel, "and there seems slight demand for shell-fish in my kitchen. The flukes might have done; but if they are only edible when you fry them yourself, I'm afraid it's no use, for I don't believe my housekeeper would allow me to try. No! I must think out the question of tribute, and let you know. I won't ask a rack rent, I promise you, and I suppose I could distrain on these tea things and the kettle if it were not paid up. The latter appears to be boiling over at this instant."

"So it is!" cried Isobel, lifting it off in a hurry. "I wonder," she continued shyly, "if you would care to have a cup of tea. I could make it in a moment, if you wouldn't mind drinking it out of a tin mug."

"Miss Robinson Crusoe is very hospitable. I haven't had a picnic for years. The tin mug will recall my early soldiering days. I have bivouacked in places which were not nearly so comfortable as this."

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He took a seat in a sand armchair, and looked on with amusement while Isobel made her preparations. Something in the set of her slim little figure and the fall of her long straight fair hair attracted him, and he caught himself wondering of whom her gray eyes reminded him. He liked the quiet way she went about her business, and her frank, unaffected manners—so different from Belle's self-conscious assurance.

"Why can't the other child wear a plain holland frock?" he thought. "It would look much more suitable for the sands than those absurd trimmed-up costumes. What a pity she hasn't the sense of this one! Well, it's no use; it evidently isn't in her, and I doubt if any amount of training at a good school will make much difference."

Isobel in the meantime having brewed the tea handed it to him upon the scarlet tray.

"I'm sorry we haven't a cream jug," she apologized. "We always bring our milk in medicine bottles. Do you mind sugar out of the packet? I wish I had some cake, but Mrs. Jackson didn't put any in my basket to-day, and I don't like taking the others' without asking them. I hope it's nice," she added anxiously. "I'm so afraid the water's a little smoked."

"Delicious," said the colonel, who would have consumed far more unpalatable viands sooner than hurt her feelings, and who tried to overlook the fact that the tin mug gave the tea a curious flavour, and the bread and butter was of a thickness usually meted out to schoolboys. "But aren't you going to have any yourself?"

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"Not now, thank you. I'd rather wait for the others. I promised to have everything ready for them when they came back."

"I see. You're 'Polly, put the kettle on,' to-day, and 'Sukey, take it off again,' also, as they appear to have 'all run away.' No more, thanks. One cup is as much as is good for me. Why, in the name of all that's mysterious, who has been writing these?"

The colonel jumped up and strode to the other end of the hut, having suddenly caught sight of the quaint letters which Isobel had drawn upon the wall.

"I have," replied Isobel simply.

"Then, my dear Miss Robinson Crusoe, may I ask how you came to be acquainted with runic characters?"

"I don't know what they are," said Isobel. "It's very queer writing, isn't it? I was only copying it for fun."

"Where did you copy it from?"

"It's on a stone at the top of the headland."

"This headland?"

"Yes, just above here, but a little farther on."

"Do you mean to tell me there is a stone bearing letters like that on these cliffs?"

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"Yes; it's a long kind of stone, something like a cross without arms."

"I thought I had walked over every inch of this island, yet I have never noticed it."

"It was quite covered with brambles," said Isobel. "I found it when we were picking blackberries. I had to pull them all away before I could see it."

"If you can leave your domestic cares, I should very much like you to show it to me," said the colonel. "I happen to be particularly interested in such stones."

"I'll go at once," said Isobel, putting the kettle among the ashes, where it could not boil over, and slamming on her hat. "It looks ever so worn and old, but the letters are cut in the stone, like they are on graves."

She led the way up the steep, narrow path which scaled the hill, on to the cliff above, and after a little hunting about, found the brambly spot which had been the scene of her quarrel with Belle.

The owner of the island knelt down and examined the stone intently for some moments.

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"To think that I must have passed this place dozens and dozens of times and never have known of its existence!" he said at last. "I have searched the neighbourhood so often for some record of the Viking period. Strange that it should be found now by the chance discovery of a child!"

"Are they really letters, then?" inquired Isobel. "Is it some foreign language?"

"Yes; they are runes, very old and perfect ones. The runic characters were used by our Teutonic forefathers before they learned the Roman alphabet. This stone shows that long, long ago the Northmen have been here."

"The same Northmen who came in their great ships, and burnt the abbey, and killed St. Alcuin at the altar?" asked Isobel, keenly interested.

"Very likely, or their sons or grandsons."

"Why did they write upon a stone here?"

"It was set up as a monument—just like a grave stone in a churchyard."

"But if the Northmen were pagans, why is there a cross carved on the stone?"

"Many of them settled in this country, and became Christians, and turned farmers instead of sea-robbers."

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"Perhaps the monks went back to the abbey afterwards and taught them," suggested Isobel. "I always thought they must have felt so ashamed of themselves for running away. They couldn't all be saints like St. Alcuin, but they might do their best to make up."

"No doubt they did. They were brave men in those days, who were not afraid to risk their lives. It is possible that a small chapel may have been built here once, though the very memory of it has passed away."

"Is some one buried here, then?"

"Yes. Put into English characters, the inscription runs: '*Ulf suarti risti krus thana aft Fiak sun sin.*' That is to say: '*Black Ulf raised this cross for Fiak his son.*'"

"I wish we knew who they were," said Isobel. "The son must have died first. Perhaps he was killed in battle, and then his father would put up this cross. How very sorry he must have felt!"

"Very," said the colonel sadly—"especially if he were his only son. It is hard to see the green bough taken while the old branch is spared."

"My father died fighting," said Isobel softly. "But his grave is ever so far away in South Africa."

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"And so is my son's. Death reaps his harvest, and hearts are as sore, whether it is the twentieth century or the tenth. Customs change very little. We put up monuments to show the resting-places of those we love, and a thousand years ago Black Ulf raised this cross that Fiak his son should not be forgotten."

"And he's not forgotten," said Isobel, "because we've found it all this long time afterwards. I didn't know what it meant until you told me. I'm so glad I can read it now. I want to tell mother; she likes old monuments, or any kind of old things."

"She has evidently taught you to think and to use your eyes," said the colonel, "or you would not have copied the inscription, and then I might never have discovered the stone."

"What a pity that would have been!" returned Isobel. "I was very lucky to find it. Do you think it makes up a little for the maidenhair?"

"Completely; though, remember, I didn't blame you for that incident. It was your friends—the same young ruffians, I believe, who are racing up the sands now, dragging some carcass behind them."

"Oh! they're coming back for tea," cried Isobel. "And I forgot all about the kettle! I hope it hasn't boiled away. I ought to go. You haven't told me yet, please, what you would like us to bring you instead of rent for the island. I should like to know, so that I can tell the others."

[186] "I'll take this discovery in lieu of all payment," declared the colonel. "You and your companions, the Sea Urchins, are welcome to have free run of the place while you are here. Good-bye, little friend! You always seem to turn up in exceptional circumstances. You and I appear to have a few interests in common, so I hope that some time I may have the pleasure of meeting you again."

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CHAPTER XIV.

A WET DAY.

"Oft expectation fails, and most oft there
Where most it promises; and oft it hits
Where hope is coldest and despair most
sits."

THE estrangement between Isobel and her friend was of very short duration after all. That same evening they had met on the Parade, and Belle had run up with her former affectionate manner, so completely ignoring the remembrance of any differences between them that Isobel thankfully let the matter slide, only too glad to resume the friendship on the old terms, and hoping that such an unpleasant episode might not occur again. The two had arranged to make an expedition together to the old town on the following day, but the morning proved so very wet that it was impossible for any one to go out of doors.

[188] "It's a perfect deluge of a day," said Isobel, looking hopelessly at the ceaseless drip, drip which descended from the leaden skies. "It doesn't seem as if it ever meant to clear up again. I think it must have rained like this on the first morning of the Flood. It couldn't have been worse, at any rate."

[189] The back sitting-room of a lodging-house does not, as a rule, afford the most brilliant of views, so the scene which met Isobel's eyes was hardly calculated to raise her spirits. The paved yard behind was swimming with water, through which a drenched and disconsolate tabby cat, excluded from the paradise of the kitchen, was attempting to pick its way, shaking its paws at every step. Marine Terrace being a comparatively new row, the back premises were still in a somewhat unfinished condition, and instead of gardens and flower-beds, your eye was greeted by heaps of sand and mortar, bricks and rubbish, not yet carted away by the builders, which, added to piles of empty bottles and old hampers, gave a rather forlorn appearance to the place. After watching pussy's struggles with the elements, and seeing her finally seek refuge in the coal-house, Isobel took a turn to the front door, and stood looking over the Parade, where the rolling mist almost obscured all sight of the sea, and sky and water were of the same dull neutral gray.

[190] "You'd get cold too, missy," she said, "standin' in a full draught, for Polly will leave that back door open, say what I will, and it turns chilly of a wet day. One can have too much fresh air, to my mind. There was a gentleman stayed here last summer, now, just crazy he was on what he called 'hygiene;' bathed regular every morning before breakfast, no matter how the tide might be. I warned him it was a-injuring his health to go in the water on an empty stomach, but he didn't take no notice of what I said, and lay out on damp sand, and sat under open windows, till he ended up with a bad bout of the brown-chitis, with the doctor comin' every day, and me turned sick nurse to poultice him—Emma Jane bein' at home then, or I couldn't have found the time to do it. I've no opinion of these modern health dodges as folks sets such store by now. In my young

days we never so much as thought about drains, and if the pig-sty was at the back door, no one was any the worse for it! I call it right-down interferin' the way these inspectors come round sayin' you mustn't even throw a bucket of potato skins down in your own yard. Nuisance, indeed! It's them as is the nuisance. Their nasty disinfectants smell far worse, to my mind, than a few cabbage leaves. My grandmother lived to ninety-four, and never slept with her bedroom window open in her life, not even on the hottest of summer days, and drew her drinkin' water regular from the churchyard well, which they tell you now is swarmin' with 'microbes,' or whatever they call 'em. I never saw any, though I've let my pail down in it many a time; and it was a deal sweeter and fresher, to my taste, than what you get laid on in lead pipes. Jackson may go in for this new-fangled 'sanitation' if he likes, votin' for all kinds of improvements by the Town Council, which only adds to the rates. I'm an old-fashioned woman, and stick to old-fashioned country ways, and I think draughts is draughts, and gives folks colds and toothaches, call 'em by what high-soundin' names you will."

[191] Judging the weather to be absolutely hopeless, and without the slightest intention of clearing up, Isobel went back to the sitting-room, where Polly had just taken away the breakfast things, and looked round for some means of amusing herself.

"I don't believe the postman has been yet," she said. "What a terrible day for him to go round! I should think he feels as if he ought to come in a boat. Why, there's his rap-tap now. I wonder if there are any letters for us?"

"I don't expect there will be," said Mrs. Stewart; "my correspondence is not generally very large."

"I think I shall go and see, just for something to do," said Isobel; and running into the hall, she returned presently with a letter in her hand.

"It's for you, mother," she said. "The people in the drawing-room had five, and the family in the dining-room had seven and two parcels. Aren't they lucky? There was even one for Polly, but Mrs. Jackson told her to put it in her pocket, and not to read it till she had got the beds made. I'm sure she'll take a peep at it, all the same. I wish some one would write to me. I haven't had even a picture post-card since I came."

[192] The appearance of the letter which had just arrived seemed to cause Mrs. Stewart an unusual amount of agitation. She turned it over in her hand, glanced at Isobel, hesitated a moment, and finally took it unopened to her bedroom, that she might read it in private.

"It is my long-expected reply at last!" she said to herself. "I thought he could surely not fail to send me an answer. I wonder what he has to say. I feel as though I scarcely dare to look."

With trembling fingers she tore open the envelope, and unfolding the sheet of notepaper, read as follows:—

"THE CHASE, SILVERSANDS,
August 24th.

"DEAR MADAM,—I have delayed replying sooner to your communication, as I wished to thoroughly inform myself upon the question which you put before me. Acting on your suggestion, I have, without her knowledge, noted the general disposition, demeanour, and tastes of your daughter, and finding they are of a nature such as would not make a closer intimacy congenial to either of us, I must beg to decline your proffered meeting. As I would wish, however, that my son's child should receive a fitting education, I am about to place to her credit the sum of £200 per annum to defray her expenses at any good school that you may select from a list which will be submitted to you shortly by my solicitor. He has full instructions to conduct all further arrangements, and I should prefer any future communication from you to be only of a business character.—Believe me to remain yours truly
EVERARD
STEWART."

Mrs. Stewart flung down the letter with a cry of indignation.



Mrs. Stewart and Isobel on the moor ([page 203](#)).

[193] "What does he mean?" she asked herself. "Where can he have seen Isobel? To my knowledge she has spoken to nobody except this old Colonel Smith and a few of the townspeople. How can he have 'noted her disposition, demeanour, and tastes'? And if so, what fault can he possibly find with my darling? Is it mere prejudice, and a determination on his part to avoid any reconciliation? If I were not so wretchedly poor, I would not accept one farthing of this money for her. But I must! I must! It is not right that my pride should stand in the way of her education, and for this I must humble myself to take his charity. He is a stern man to have kept up the ill-feeling for so many years. Every line of his letter shows that he is opposed to me still, though he has never seen me in his life; and instead of loving Isobel for her father's sake, he is prepared to hate her for mine. We are so friendless and alone in the world that it seems hard the one relation who I thought might have taken an interest in my child should cast her off thus. Well, it makes her doubly mine, and if she can never know her grandfather's beautiful home, my love must be compensation for what she has lost. My one little ewe lamb is everything to me; and though I would have given her up for the sake of seeing her recognized, it would have nearly broken my heart to part with her."

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She put the letter carefully away, and went down again to the sitting-room, where Isobel was standing by the window, gazing disconsolately at the streaming rain, with just a suspicion of two rain-drops in her eyes, for she did not like to be left alone, and Mrs. Stewart had been long upstairs.

"Never mind, my sweet one," said her mother, stroking the pretty, smooth hair. "It is a disappointing day, but we will manage to enjoy ourselves together, you and I, in spite of rain or any other troubles. Suppose we go through all your collections. You could write the names under the wild flowers you have pressed, arrange the shells in boxes, and float some of the sea-weeds on to pieces of writing-paper."

Isobel cheered up at once at the idea of something definite to do, and the table was very soon spread over with the various treasures she had gathered upon the beach. Silversands was a good place for shells, and she had many rare and beautiful kinds, from pearly cowries to scallops and wentletraps. She sorted them out carefully, putting big, little, and middle-sized ones in separate heaps; she had great ideas of what she would do with them when she was at home again, intending to construct shell boxes, photo frames, and various other knickknacks in imitation of the wonderful things which were sold at the toy-shop near the railway station.

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"If I could make a very nice frame, mother," she said, "I should like to send it to Mrs. Jackson for a Christmas present, to put Emma Jane's photo in. I believe she'd be quite pleased to hang it up in the kitchen with the funeral cards. I might manage a shell box for old Biddy, too. It would scarcely do for a handkerchief box, because I don't believe she ever uses such a thing as a pocket

handkerchief, but I dare say she would like it to put something in. Do you think the shells would stick on to tin if we made the glue strong enough? I could do a tobacco-box then for Mr. Cass the coastguard, one that he could keep in the parlour for best."

"I'm afraid you will have to collect more shells if you intend to make so many presents," said Mrs. Stewart. "I think, however, that we might manufacture some pretty pin-cushions out of these large fan shells by boring holes in the ends, fastening them together with bows of ribbon, and gluing a small velvet cushion in between."

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"That would be delightful!" cried Isobel, "and something quite different to give people. I'm afraid they're rather tired of my needle books and stamp cases. I wish we could think of anything to do with the sea-weed."

"We're going to float them on to pieces of paper, and when they are dry we will paste them in a large scrap album, and find out their names from a book which I think I can borrow from the Free Library at home."

"I don't quite know how to float them."

"You must watch me do this one, and then you will be able to manage the rest. First I'm going to fill this basin with clean water, and put this pretty pink piece to float in it. Now, you see, I am slipping this sheet of notepaper underneath, and drawing it very carefully and gently from the water, so that the sea-weed remains spreads out upon the paper. I shall pin the sheet by its four corners on to this board, and when it is dry you'll find that the sea-weed has stuck to the paper as firmly as if it had been glued. It's not really difficult, but it needs a little skill to lift the sheet from the water without disarranging your sea-weed."

"This one's lovely," said Isobel. "I must try to do the green piece next. How jolly they'll look when they are all nicely pasted into a book! I wonder if it will be difficult to find out the names? It's rather hard to tell our flowers, isn't it?"

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"Sometimes; but I think we are improving in our botany. How many different kinds have we pressed since we came here?"

"Forty; I counted them yesterday. And we have fifty-seven at home. We shall soon have the drawer quite full. Do you think I might look at the scabious that I put under your big box last night?"

"I'm afraid you will spoil it if you peep at it too soon. When I was a little girl my brother and I used sometimes to amuse ourselves by putting specimens to press under the leaves of an old folding-table, and pledging each other not to look at them for a year. It was rather hard sometimes to keep our vows, but the flowers were most beautifully dried when we took them out again. Some day we will start a collection of pressed ferns; they are really easier to do than wild flowers, because they keep their colour, while the pretty blue of harebells or speedwells always seems to fade away."

"I've done three sea-weeds already," said Isobel, successfully arranging a delicate piece of pink coralline with the point of a hat pin. "I'm afraid this next white one will be very difficult, it's so thick."

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"You can't float that. It's a zoophyte, not a real sea-weed; and, indeed, not a vegetable at all, but the very lowest form of animal life. You must hang it up to dry, like you do the long pieces of oar-weed. We'll try to get the messy work done this morning, so that we can clear the table for Polly to lay dinner, and in the afternoon I thought you might finish your tea-cosy for Mr. Binks. There is not much to be done to it now, and then I can make it up for you."

"Oh, that would be nice! When can we go and see him?"

"I believe my foot will be strong enough by Thursday, so you shall write a letter to him after dinner, and say so."

"How jolly! I'm longing to see the White Coppice, and the balk, and Mrs. Binks. I hope she won't forget to bake the cranberry cake. I shall have to write a very neat letter. I want to copy out the runic inscription, too, on to a fresh piece of paper."

"Yes, do, dear. If my ankle bears me safely as far as the White Coppice, I shall certainly venture to the island afterwards, and take a sketch of the stone. It's a most interesting discovery."

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"Colonel Smith said he was going to have it raised up," said Isobel; "half of it, you see, is buried in the ground. He wasn't sure whether he would leave it where it is, or take it to his house. He's so dreadfully afraid, if he lets it stay on the island, that horrid cheap trippers might come some time and carve their names on it. He says the brambles growing over it have kept it safe so far. I wish you knew him, mother, he's so kind. Belle says she doesn't like him at all, but I do."

"I think it's very good of him to let you have the run of his island; it has made a most delightful playground, and you and the Sea Urchins will have spent an ideal holiday."

"We have indeed. I'm so glad we came to Silversands. I wish we could come every year, and always have the island to play on. It would be something to look forward to through the winter."

"I'm afraid that isn't possible, dear," said Mrs. Stewart regretfully, thinking of what might have been if the hopes which prompted her visit had been fulfilled. "I doubt if we shall ever return

here again. But we will have other happy times together; there are many sweet spots in the world where we shall be able to enjoy ourselves, and I have plans for the future which I will tell you about by-and-by."

"I've had quite a jolly day in spite of the rain," declared Isobel that evening, when, the deluge having ceased at last, the setting sun broke through the thick banks of clouds, and flooding the sea with a golden glory, brought out all the cooped-up visitors for an airing upon the Parade.

[200] "I haven't!" said Belle. "It was perfectly detestable. I had absolutely nothing to do except throw balls for Micky, and even he got tired of that. Mother said we made her head ache, and she went to lie down. It's never any fun talking to Barton, she's so stupid; so I sat and watched the streaming rain through the window, and wished we'd never come to Silversands. I think a wet day in lodgings is just about the horridest thing in the world, and I simply can't imagine how you can have enjoyed it."

[201] CHAPTER XV.

TEA WITH MR. BINKS.

"At many a statelier home we've had good
cheer,
But ne'er a kinder welcome found than
here."

THE tea-cosy, when finished, was a thing of beauty, and Isobel packed it up in sheets of white tissue paper with much pride and satisfaction. Both the steaming teapot on the one side and the ecclesiastical-looking "B" on the other had given her a great deal of trouble, and she was not sorry that they were completed.

"Going to have tea with that vulgar old man we met in the train!" exclaimed Belle, raising her eyebrows in astonishment when Isobel told her of their plans. "You really do the *funniest* things! I thought him dreadful. I suppose, since he asked you, you couldn't get out of it, but I'm sorry for you to have to go. I shouldn't have been able to come to the island in any case to-morrow, because mother wants to take me to see the Oppenheims."

[202] "Who are they?" asked Isobel.

"Oh, they're a family mother knows in London. They're ever so rich. They've taken a lovely furnished house near the woods, with a tennis-court and a huge garden. They're to arrive this evening, and they're bringing their motor car and their chauffeur with them. The Wilsons and the Bardsleys are coming by the same train. Blanche Oppenheim is six months older than I am, and mother says she's sure I shall like her. It will be nice to have some more friends here; Silversands is getting rather dull. There's so little to do in such a quiet place. There never seems to be anything going on."

Isobel thought there had been a great deal going on of the kind of fun she enjoyed, though it might not be altogether to Belle's taste, and even her friend's depreciation of poor Mr. Binks could not spoil the pleasure with which she anticipated her visit to the White Coppice. She was full of eagerness to start on Thursday afternoon, and was ready fully half an hour too soon, though her mother assured her they could not with decency arrive before four o'clock.

[203] The White Coppice lay opposite to Silversands, at the other side of a narrow peninsula, and you could either reach it by going five miles round by the road, or by walking two miles across the hills. Mrs. Stewart and Isobel naturally preferred the short cut, and leaving the little town behind them, were soon on the bare wind-swept heights, following a track which led over the heather-clad moor. It seemed no-man's land here, given up to the grouse and plovers, though now and then they passed a rough sheep-fold, and once a whitewashed farmstead, the thatched roof of which was bound down with ropes to resist the autumn storms, and the few trees that sheltered the doorway, all pointing their struggling branches in the same direction, served to show how strong was the force of the prevailing wind. From the crest of the hill they could see the sea on either hand, and at the far end of the promontory could catch a glimpse of the pier at Ferndale, where a steamer was landing its cargo of excursionists to swell the already large crowd of cheap trippers, who seemed to swarm like ants upon the shore.

[204] "I'm glad we're not staying there," said Isobel, who had been taken for an afternoon by Mrs. Chester in company with Charlie and Hilda; and though she had laughed at the niggers and the pierrots, and enjoyed watching the Punch and Judy and the acrobats on the shore, and had put pennies into the peep-shows on the pier, had returned thankfully from the crowded promenade and streets full of holiday-makers to the peace and quiet of Silversands.

"It's rather amusing just for a day, but the people are even noisier than those we met in the train; they were throwing confetti all about the sands, and shouting to one another at the top of their voices. I like a place where we can go walks and pick flowers, and not meet anybody else. We shouldn't have found a desert island at Ferndale."

"You certainly wouldn't," said Mrs. Stewart. "If 'Rocky Holme' were there it would be covered with swings and gingerbeer stalls, and your little hut might probably have been turned into an oyster room or a penny show. It is delightful to find a spot that is still unspoilt. Luckily the trippers don't appear to go far afield; they seem quite content with the attractions of the pier and band, and have not yet invaded these beautiful moors. How quickly we seem to have come across! We're quite close to the sea again now, and I believe that gray old farmhouse nestling among the trees below will prove to be the end of our journey."

[205] The White Coppice was so called because it stood on the borders of a birch wood that lay in a gorge between the hills. It was protected by a bold cliff from the strong north and west winds, sheltered by a slightly lower crag from the east, and open only towards the south, where the garden sloped down to a sandy cove and a narrow creek that made a natural harbour for Mr. Binks's boat, which was generally moored to a small jetty under the wall. It was an ancient stone farmhouse, with large mullioned windows and hospitable, ever-open door, over which two tamarisk bushes had been trained into a rustic porch. The garden was gay with such hardy flowers as would flourish so near to the sea, growing in patches between the rows of potatoes and beans, and interspersed here and there with the figureheads of vessels, while at the end was a summer-house, evidently made from an upturned boat, and covered thickly with traveller's joy. Here Mr. Binks appeared to be taking an afternoon nap while awaiting the arrival of his visitors, but at the click of the opening gate he sprang up with a start, and advanced to meet them with brawny, outstretched hand.

"I'm reet glad to see you, I am!" he exclaimed cordially. "It's royal weather, too, though a trifle hotter nor suits me.—Missis!" (bawling through the doorway), "where iver are you a-gone? Here's company come, and waitin' for you!"

[206] Mrs. Binks could not have been very far away, for she bustled into the front garden in a moment, her round, rosy, apple face smiling all over with welcome. She was a fine, tall, elderly woman, so stout that her figure reminded you of a large soft pillow tied in the middle. She wore an old-fashioned black silk dress, with a white muslin apron, and a black netted cap with purple ribbons over her smoothly parted gray hair.

"Well, now, I'm *that* pleased!" she declared. "Come in, and set you down. You'll be fair tired out, mum, with your walk over the moor, havin' had a bad foot and all. It's a nasty thing to strain your ankle, it is that.—Come in, missy. Binks has talked a deal about you, he has—thinks you're the very moral of our Harriet's Clara over at Skegness; but, bless you, I don't see no likeness myself. The kettle's just on the boil, and you must take a cup of tea first thing to freshen you up like. It's a good step from Silversands, and a bit close to-day to come so far."

[207] Seated in a corner of the high-backed oak settle, Isobel looked with eager curiosity round the old farm kitchen. Its flagged stone floor, the sliding cupboards in the walls, the great beams of the ceiling covered with hooks from which were suspended flitches of bacon, bunches of dried herbs, strings of onions, and even Mr. Binks's fishing-boots—all were new to her interested gaze, and her quick eyes took in everything from the gun-rack over the dresser to the china dogs on the chimney-piece. The kitchen was so large that half of it seemed to be reserved as a parlour; there was a square of carpet laid down at one end, upon which stood a round table spread with Mrs. Binks's very best china tea-service, and a supply of dainties that would have feasted a dozen visitors at least. The long, low window was filled with scarlet geraniums, between the vivid blossoms of which you could catch a peep of the cove and the water beyond; and just outside hung a cage containing a pair of doves, which kept up an incessant cooing. Mrs. Binks made quite a picture, seated in a tall elbow chair, wielding her big teapot, and she pressed her muffins and currant tea-cakes upon her guests with true north-country hospitality.

"You ought to be sharp set after a two-mile walk," she observed. "Take it through, missy, take it through! You must have 'the bishop' with 'the curate,' as we say in these parts; the top piece is nought but the poor curate, for all the butter runs to the bottom, and that's the bishop! Is your tea as you like it? You must taste our apple jelly, made of our own crabs as grows in the orchard out at back, unless you'd as lief try the damson cheese or the strawberry jam."

[208] Mr. Binks seemed much undecided whether his position as host required him to join the party, or whether his presence in such select company would be an intrusion, and in spite of Mrs. Stewart's kindly-expressed hope that he would occupy his own seat at the table, he finally compromised the matter by carrying his tea to the opposite end of the kitchen, and taking it on the dresser, from whence he fired off remarks every now and then whenever Mrs. Binks, who was a hard talker and monopolized the conversation, gave him a chance to put in a word. It was amusing talk, Isobel thought, all about Mrs. Binks's children and grandchildren, and the many illnesses from which they had suffered, and the medicines they had tried, and the wonderful recoveries they had made, interspersed by offers of more tea and cake and jam, or lamentations over the small appetite of her visitors, whom she seemed to expect to clear the plates like locusts.

"No more, missy? Why, you are soon done! And you haven't tasted my cranberry cake! You must have a bit of it, if you have to put it in your pocket. It's made by a recipe as I got from my great-aunt as lived up in Berwick, and a light hand she had, too, for a cake," laying a generous

slice upon Isobel's plate, and seeming quite hurt by her refusal.

[209] "You mustn't make her ill, Mrs. Binks," laughed Mrs. Stewart, "though she fully appreciates your kindness.—Isobel, would you like to open the parcel we brought with us?"

"You worked this for us, honey? Well, I never did!" cried Mrs. Binks, touching the gorgeous tea-cosy gingerly, as if she feared her stout fingers might soil its beauty.—"Peter, come hither and look at this.—Use it for tea every day? Nay! that would be a sin and a shame. It's a sight too pretty to use. I'll put it in the parlour, alongside of the cup Binks won at last show for the black heifer. You shall see for yourself, missy, how nice it'll stand on the sideboard, on top of a daisy mat as Harriet crocheted when she was down with a bad leg."

[210] Mrs. Binks opened a door at the farther side of the kitchen, and proudly led the way into her best sitting-room. It was a close little room, with a mouldy smell as if the chimney were stopped up and the window never opened. One end of it was entirely filled by a glass-backed mahogany sideboard; a large gilt mirror hung over the fireplace, carefully swathed in white muslin to keep off the flies; the walls were adorned with photographs of the Binks family and its many ramifications, taken in their best clothes, which did not appear to sit easily upon them, to judge by the stiff unrest of their attitudes; and opposite the door hung a wonderful German oleograph depicting a scene that might either have been a sunrise on the Alps or an eruption of Vesuvius, according to the individual fancy of the spectator. The square table was covered with a magenta cloth, in the centre of which stood a glass shade containing wax fruit, while several gorgeously bound volumes of poems and sermons were placed at regular intervals each upon a separate green wool-work mat.

It was so hot and airless in there that Isobel was quite glad when Mr. Binks suggested they should adjourn to the garden, that he might show her the figureheads which stood among the flower-beds like a row of wooden statues. Each one was the record of some good ship gone to pieces upon that treacherous coast, and as he walked along pointing them out with his stick, the old man gave the histories of the wrecks, at many of which he had played an active part in saving the lives of the crews.

[211] "That there's the *Arizona*—her with the broken nose; smashed up like matchwood she was, on the cliffs beyond Ferndale, and the captain drowned and the second mate. That there's the *Neptune*. The trident's gone, but you can see the beard and the wreath. She went down of a sudden on a sunken rock, and never a man left to tell as how it happened. This un's the *Admiral Seymour*, wrecked outside Silversands Bay; but we had the lifeboat out, and took all off safe. And this here's the *Polly Jones*, a coastin' steamer from Liverpool, as went clean in two amongst them crags by the lighthouse, and her cargo of oranges washed up along the shore next day till the beach turned yellow with 'em."

"You know a great deal about ships," said Isobel, to whom her host's reminiscences were as thrilling as a story-book.

"I should that. I've been sailin' for the best part of fifty year—leastways when I wasn't farmin'. I've not forgot as I promised to row you over to the balk. If your ma's willin', we'd best make a start now, whilst the tide's handy. It's worth your while to go; you'd not see such a sight again, maybe, in a far day's journey."

[212] Mrs. Binks declined to join the expedition, so only Mrs. Stewart and Isobel stepped into the boat which Mr. Binks rowed over the bay with swift and steady strokes. Their destination was a narrow spit of land about a quarter of a mile distant, where the crumbling remains of an old abbey rose gray among the surrounding rocks. Long years ago the monks had fashioned the balk to catch their fish, and it still stood, a survival of ancient days and ancient ways, close under the ruined wall of the disused chapel. It consisted of a circle of stout oak staves, driven into the sand, so as to enclose a space of about forty yards in diameter, the staves being connected by twisted withes, so that the whole resembled a gigantic basket. It was filled by the high tide, and the retreating water, running through the meshes, left the fish behind as in a trap, when they were very easily caught with the hands and collected in creels.

"You wouldn't see more than a couple like it in all England," said Mr. Binks. "They calls it poachin' now, and no one mayn't make a fresh one; but this here's left, and goes with the White Coppice, and I've rented the two for a matter of forty year."

[213] He drew up the boat under the old abbey wall, and helping his guests to land, led them down the beach to the enclosure, where the wet sand was covered with leaping shining fish, some gasping their last in the sunshine, and some seeking the temporary shelter of a deeper pool in the middle. Bob, Mr. Binks's grandson, was busy collecting them and putting them into large baskets, assisted by a clever little Irish terrier, which ran hither and thither catching the fish in its mouth, and carrying them to its master like a retriever, much to Isobel's amusement, for she had certainly never seen a dog go fishing before.

It was a pretty sight, and a much easier way, Isobel thought, of earning your living than venturing out with nets and lines; and she resolved to tell the Sea Urchins about it, so that they might make a small balk for themselves on their desert island, if the colonel would allow them. She and her mother wandered round the old abbey, while Mr. Binks was engaged in giving some directions to Bob; but there was nothing to be seen except a few tumble-down walls and a fragment of what might once have been part of an east window. They were lifting away the thick ivy which had covered a corner stone, when, looking up, Isobel suddenly caught sight of a

familiar figure coming towards them across the rough broken flags of the transept.

"O mother," she whispered, "it's Colonel Smith!" and advancing rather shyly a step or two, she met him with a beaming face.

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"Why, it's my little friend again!" cried the colonel. "Hunting for more antiquities? I wish you would find them. This is surely your mother" (raising his hat).—"Your daughter will, no doubt, have told you, madam, what an interesting discovery she made on my island. I feel I am very much indebted to her."

"She was equally delighted," replied Mrs. Stewart. "She has talked continually about this wonderful stone and its runic inscription. I am hoping to be able to take a sketch of it before we leave. I hear there is carving on the lower portion, as well as the runes."

"So there is, but it's half hidden by the soil. I'm taking some of my men to-morrow to dig it out of the ground and raise it up, and am sending for a photographer to take several views of it. It is of special value to me, owing to the particular Norse dialect employed, which is similar to that on several monuments in the Isle of Man, and shows that the same race of invaders must have swept across the north, and probably penetrated as far as Ireland."

"I have seen runic crosses in Ireland," said Mrs. Stewart. "There's a beautifully ornamented one near Ballymoran, though the carving is more like Celtic than Teutonic work—those strange interlacing animals which you find in ancient Erse manuscripts. I am very interested in old Celtic remains, and have a good many sketches of them at home."

[215]

"You couldn't take up a more fascinating study," said the colonel eagerly. "It's a very wide field, and one that has not been too much explored. I've done a little in that way myself, and I am collecting materials for a book on the subject of Celtic and runic crosses, but it needs both time and patience to sort one's knowledge. It's worth the trouble, though, for the sake of the pleasure one gets out of it."

"I am sure it is," replied Mrs. Stewart, with ready sympathy. "To love such things is a kind of 'better part' that cannot be taken away from us, however much the uninitiated may laugh at our enthusiasm."

"You're right," said the colonel. "We can afford to let them laugh. We antiquarians have the best of it, after all. I should have liked to have seen your picture of the Irish cross. I wish I could sketch. You are fortunate to have that talent at your disposal; it's a great help in such work, and one which I sadly lack. Why, here's Binks!—Do you want anything, Peter?"

"No, sir," answered Mr. Binks, touching his cap. "Only to say as how the tide's runnin' out fast, and we ought to be startin' back now, or I'll have to carry the boat down the sands; she's only in a foot of water as it is."

[216]

"We must indeed go," said Mrs. Stewart, consulting her watch. "It's time we were walking home again.—Thank you" (turning to the colonel) "for your kindness to my little girl and her companions in allowing them to play on your island. I hope they are careful and do no damage there."

"Not in the least. There's nothing to hurt. Good-evening, madam. It has given me great pleasure to meet one with whom I have such a congenial subject in common. You must come, by all means, and sketch the stone, and I wish you every success in your study of both Celtic and runic antiquities."

"What an interesting old gentleman!" said Mrs. Stewart, when, having bid many farewells to Mr. and Mrs. Binks, she and Isobel at last turned their steps homeward over the moors. "It was, as he said, quite a pleasure to meet. I suppose there's a freemasonry between antiquarians. I should like to have a copy of his book when it's published. I wonder if he would find my sketches of the Irish crosses useful. I think I must venture to send them to him when I return home. We don't know his address, but no doubt Colonel Smith, Silversands, would find him. We've had a delightful afternoon, Isobel, and not the least part of it, to me, has been to make the acquaintance of your friend of the desert island."

[217]

CHAPTER XVI.

BELLE'S NEW FRIEND.

"How soon the bitter follows on the
sweet!
Could I not chain your fancy's flying
feet?
Could I not hold your soul to make you

ISOBEL found Belle on the Parade next morning in the midst of quite a group of fashionable strangers. She was wearing one of her smartest frocks, and was hanging affectionately on the arm of a girl slightly taller than herself, a showy-looking child, with hazel eyes and a high colour, dressed in a very fantastic costume of red and white, with a scarlet fez on her thick frizzy brown hair, and a tall silver-knobbed cane, ornamented with ribbons, in her hand. Belle appeared to find her company so entrancing that at first she did not notice Isobel, and it was only when the latter spoke to her that she seemed to realize her presence, and said "Good-morning."

[218] "We're just off to the island," said Isobel. "Charlie has got a fresh coil of rope, and the boys are going to try and make a new raft. The Rokebys are bringing some eggs, and we mean to fry pancakes and toss them, as if it were Shrove Tuesday. Are you coming?"

"Well, not this morning, I think," replied Belle. "I've promised Blanche to show her the old town. She doesn't know Silversands at all."

"Would she like to go with us to the hut?" suggested Isobel, looking towards the newcomer, who stood playing with the loops of ribbon on her cane, and humming a tune to herself in a jaunty, self-confident manner.

"Oh, I don't think so," replied Belle. "It's too far. She hasn't seen the beach or the quay yet. We're going now to buy fruit in the market, and then we shall have a stroll round the shops. You can take Micky with you to the island if you like. I'll put on his leash, so that he won't follow me."

"No, thanks; I should be afraid of losing him," replied Isobel. "I'd really rather not. Shall I see you this afternoon?"

[219] "Blanche has asked me to play tennis in their garden," said Belle, drawing Isobel aside. "But I shall be home about six, because the Oppenheims dine at seven, and Blanche always has to dress. I'll come for a walk then, if you'll call for me. I must go now; the others are waiting."

Isobel went away with a rather blank feeling of disappointment. She had grown so accustomed to Belle that it seemed quite strange to be without her, and the morning passed slowly, in spite of the pancakes which she helped Letty and Winnie to mix and toss over the fire. She felt she was only giving half her attention to the raft that the boys kept calling her to admire, and that her thoughts were continually with Belle, trying to imagine what she was doing, and wondering if she were enjoying herself. Mrs. Stewart had found the walk to the White Coppice such a strain on her weak ankle that she would not dare to venture any great exertion for several days, so her intended expedition to the island to sketch the runic cross had perforce to be put off. She and Isobel carried their tea to the beach close by that afternoon, and drank it under the shade of a rock; but though it was pleasant sitting close to the lapping waves, and Mrs. Stewart had brought a new book to read aloud, Isobel's mind would wander away to the garden near the woods where Belle was playing tennis, and she would recall herself with a start, realizing that she had not taken in a single word of the story.

[220] She went round, according to her promise, soon after six o'clock, to find Mrs. Stuart and her friend deep in patterns of dress materials, price lists, catalogues, and copies of the *Queen*, and other ladies' newspapers.

"The Oppenheims are giving a garden-party next Tuesday," explained Belle. "They have a great many friends staying in the neighbourhood who will drive over. They've asked me, and I haven't a thing fit to go in. My white silk's too short, the pink crape's quite crushed, the blue muslin won't look nice after it's washed, and my merino's hardly smart enough. I must have a new dress somehow."

"I don't generally like you in ready-made clothes, Belle," said Mrs. Stuart, "but really this embroidered silk in the advertisement looks very pretty, and Peter Robinson's is a good shop. I think I shall risk it. There will be just time, if I catch this post. Would you rather have the blue or the pink?"

[221] "The blue," said Belle promptly, "because of my best hat. You'd better write for some more forget-me-nots at the same time; the ones in the front are rather dashed. I can wear my blue chain and the turquoise bracelet, and I have a pair of long white gloves not touched yet. But oh, mother, my parasol! It's dreadfully bleached with the sun. Do, please, send for another. There's a picture of one here with little frills all round, just what I want."

Belle's mind was so absorbed by the arrangement of her costume for the coming party that, until the letters were written and finally dispatched to the post, she could give no attention to Isobel, and in the short walk which they took afterwards on the beach her whole conversation was of the Oppenheims and the delightful afternoon she had spent at their house.

"Blanche has five bracelets," she confided, "and four rings, and a dressing-case full of locketts and chains and brooches. She took me upstairs and showed them to me. She's brought her pony with her, and some morning she's promised to borrow her sister's riding-skirt for me, and the coachman is to take us on to the common to ride in turns. Won't it be glorious? She's *such* an amusing girl! She knows all the latest songs, and you should just hear her take people off: it

makes you die with laughing. She's been a year at a jolly school near London, where the girls are taken to *matinéés* at the theatre, and have a splendid time. I mean to ask mother to send me there. It's dreadfully expensive, but I know she wouldn't mind that."

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"We missed you at the island to-day," said Isobel. "The pancakes were delicious. We ate them with sugar and lemons."

"Did you?" said Belle inattentively. "Perhaps I may come to-morrow, if I have time."

"To-morrow's the cricket match at the old playground," said Isobel. "We always have it on Saturday, you know. Had you forgotten?"

"I suppose I had," replied Belle. "I'll bring Blanche, if she cares about coming. I don't know whether she plays cricket."

On Saturday morning Isobel called early at No. 12, only to find that Belle had already gone to the Oppenheims, and would not return until lunch.

"I'm sorry she's not in, dear," said Mrs. Stuart kindly, noticing Isobel's look of disappointment; "but she expects to see you in the afternoon, I'm sure. She told me she would be meeting all her friends upon the shore, so some of the others will no doubt know what has been arranged, if you ask them. I believe I saw the Rokebys pass a moment ago; you could soon overtake them if you were to run."

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The matches on the small green common which had been their first playground were still an institution of the Sea Urchins' Club, and Isobel looked forward to them with considerable pleasure. She had not sufficient strength of arm to gain credit as a batsman, but she was a splendid fielder, and Charlie declared that no one made a better long-stop. This afternoon both boys and girls had assembled in full force punctually at the appointed time, and the game was nearly halfway through before Belle and her new friend came sauntering leisurely up to the pitch.

"Oh! we don't want to play, thank you," said Belle, "only to look on. Please don't stop on our account. We're just going to sit down and watch you."

The pair retired to the old boat, where they settled themselves under the shade of Blanche's parasol, and, to judge from their giggling mirth, found great entertainment in making merry at the expense of the others. Isobel, who was fielding, had not a chance to speak to Belle until the opposite side was out, but Arthur Wright having sent a catch at last, she was free until her own innings. She ran up with her accustomed eagerness, expecting her friend to kiss her as usual, and to make room for her upon the boat. To-day, however, Belle did nothing of the sort.

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"That you, Isobel?" she said carelessly. "I should think you're hot. I don't know how you can tear about so. Blanche said your legs looked like a pair of compasses when you flew after the ball."

"Aren't you going to play?" asked Isobel. "We want one more on each side."

"No, thanks. I hate racing up and down in the sun. It takes one's hair out of curl."

"Oh, I don't think it would," replied Isobel.

"People with rats' tails can't judge," said Blanche, twisting one of Belle's light locks and her own dark ones together as she spoke, and looking at the combination with a critical eye. "If my brother were here, he'd be in fits over this cricket. I never saw such a game. That big boy holds his bat in the most clumsy way."

"He's a very good player," said Isobel. "He gets more runs than anybody else, and it's terribly hard to put him out."

"Jermyn would bowl him first ball!" returned Blanche scornfully. "Perhaps you've never seen Eton boys play? I always go to Lord's to watch the match with Harrow: it's as different from this as a first-class theatre is from a troupe of niggers."

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"Why, but this is only a children's mixed team," said Isobel. "Of course some of the little ones scarcely know how to play at all. We just send them very easy balls, and let them try.—You're surely not going, Belle. Tea will be ready in a quarter of an hour. Mrs. Rokeby's boiling the kettle on a spirit lamp over by the rocks."

"We don't want any, thank you," said Belle, rising from the boat and brushing some sand off her dress. "Mrs. Oppenheim is going to take us to tea at the new café. I hear they've capital ices and a band. The Wilsons were telling me about it yesterday. They say you meet everybody there from four to five o'clock."

"Shall I see you on the Parade this evening?" called Isobel, as Belle strolled away in the direction of Silversands, her arm closely locked in Blanche's.

"I don't think so," replied Belle, without turning her head, and saying something in a whisper to Blanche, which evidently caused the latter much amusement, for she broke into a suppressed peal of laughter, and glancing round at Isobel, went along shaking her shoulders with mirth.

Isobel stood looking after the retreating couple with a lump in her throat and a curious sick sensation in her heart. She could not yet quite realize that Belle did not desire her

[226] companionship—only that somehow Blanche had carried off her friend, and that everything was completely spoilt. Between Blanche and herself she recognized there was an instinctive hostility. Blanche had been so openly rude, and had treated both her and the Sea Urchins with such evident contempt, that Isobel, not usually a quarrelsome child, had felt all her spirit rise up within her in passionate indignation.

"Why does she come here to make fun of us?" she asked herself hotly. "We had such jolly times before. None of the others were ever nasty like this—not even Aggie Wright or Hugh Rokeby. Why can't she keep with her own family? And why, oh, why does Belle seem to like her so much?"

[227] Next day being Sunday, Isobel only saw her friend at a distance in church, Mrs. Stewart, who had a suspicion of what was happening, suggesting that they should pass the afternoon with their books on the cliffs, thinking it would be better to leave Belle severely alone, and give no opportunity for a meeting. On this account she spent Monday in Ferndale, asking Hilda Chester to accompany them, and taking the two children to hear the band play on the pier, and to an entertainment afterwards in the pavilion. The Rokebys came on Tuesday morning, inviting Isobel to join them in a boating excursion, from which they did not return until late in the evening, so that for the first time since the beginning of their acquaintance the namesakes had not spoken to each other for three whole days. Isobel had borne the separation as well as she could, but she longed to see Belle again with the full force of her loving nature. She invented many excuses for the conduct of the latter, who, she thought, was no doubt regretting her coldness, and would be as delighted as ever to meet. If only she could get Belle to herself, without Blanche, all would surely be right between them, and the friendship as warm as it had been before.

"May I ask her to tea, mother?" she begged, with so wistful a look in her gray eyes, and such a suspicious little quiver at the corners of her mouth, that Mrs. Stewart consented, somewhat against her better judgment.

Finding Belle on the cricket-ground next morning, Isobel broached the subject of the invitation at once.

"To-day?" said Belle. "I'm going to the Oppenheims'. I haven't told you yet about their garden-party. It was *such* a swell affair! They had waiters from the Belle Vue Hotel at Ferndale, and the Grenadier band from the pier. I never saw lovelier dresses in my life. My blue silk came just in time, and it really looked very nice, and the parasol is sweet. You can't think how much I enjoyed myself."

[228] "Would to-morrow do?" suggested Isobel, "if you can't come to-day?"

"To tea? At your lodgings?" replied Belle, with a rather blank expression on her face.

"Yes, unless we carry the cups out on to the shore and have a picnic. Perhaps that would be nicer."

"Mother wants to take me to call on the Wilsons to-morrow."

"Then Friday or Saturday? It doesn't matter which to us."

"Really," said Belle, looking rather embarrassed, "I expect I shall be going to the Oppenheims both days. Blanche likes me to make up the set at tennis, and it's so cool and nice in the garden under the trees. There she is now, coming along the beach and beckoning to me. I wonder what she wants. I think I shall have to go and see." And Belle ran quickly off, as if glad to find an excuse for getting away; and meeting the Oppenheims, she turned back with them towards the Parade.

[229] Left alone, Isobel felt as though some great shock had passed over her. She saw only too plainly that Belle did not want to come—did not care for her society or value her friendship; and the bitterness of the knowledge seemed almost greater than she could bear. She walked slowly to the cliff, and climbing part of the way up, sat down in a sheltered nook, hidden from sight of the beach; then putting her head on her hands, she let loose the flood-gates of her grief. God help us when we first find out that those we care for no longer respond to our love. The wound may heal, but it leaves a scar, and remains one of those silent milestones of the soul to which we look back in after years as having marked an epoch in our inner lives. At the time it appears as if all our affection had been wasted; but it is not so, for the very fact of loving even an unworthy object increases our power to love, and enlarges the heart, lifting us above self, and, as bread cast upon the waters, will return to us after many days in a greater capacity for sympathy with others, and a widening of our spiritual growth.

[230] To Isobel it seemed as if the whole world had somehow changed. She had had few companions of her own age, and this was her first essay at friendship. Those who enjoy very keenly suffer, alas! in like proportion, and hers was not a disposition to take things lightly. She stayed for a long, long time upon the cliffs, fighting a hard battle before she could get her tears under sufficient control to walk home along the shore, as she did not care to face any of the Sea Urchins with streaming eyes. Perhaps a touch of pride came to her aid. She would, at any rate, not let Belle know how greatly she cared, and when they met again she would behave as if she too were not anxious about the acquaintance. So much she felt she owed to her own self-respect, and she meant to carry it out, whatever it cost her.

"I wouldn't break my heart, darling," said Mrs. Stewart, who, seeing Isobel's red eyes, soon discovered the trouble, and offered what comfort she could. "Belle isn't worth grieving for. I was

afraid of this from the first, but you were so taken with her that it seemed of no use to warn you. I don't think she was ever half what you believed her to be, and she has proved herself a very fickle friend. Never mind. We shall be going home soon, and you will have other interests to turn your thoughts. We shall see little more of her at Silversands, and the best thing we can do is to forget her as speedily as we can."

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CHAPTER XVII.

THE CHASE.

"Tones that I once used to know
Thrill in those accents of thine,
Eyes that I loved long ago
Gaze 'neath your lashes at mine."

EXCEPT by Isobel, Belle was scarcely missed at the desert island, where the Sea Urchins had so many interesting schemes on hand that they did not trouble to spare a thought to one who had not taken the pains to make herself a general favourite. For the last few days all the children had been absorbed in the construction of another hut upon the opposite end of the island. It was built with loose stones, after the fashion of an Irish cabin, and they intended to roof it, when it was finished, with planks covered with pieces of turf. This new building was to surpass even the old one in beauty and ingenuity. It was to consist of several rooms, and both boys and girls toiled away at it with an ardour which would have caused the ordinary British workman to open his eyes in amazement.

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Isobel worked as hard as any one, carrying stones, and mixing a crumbly kind of mortar made out of sand and crushed limpets, which Charlie fondly imagined would resemble the famous cement with which mediæval castles were built, and would defy the combined effects of time and weather. Since Belle's desertion she had been much with the Chesters. Hilda, though several years younger than herself, was a dear little companion, and Charlie was a staunch friend, standing up for her when necessary against the Rokeby boys, whose teasing was sometimes apt to get beyond all bounds of endurance. On the following Friday the whole party were busy upon the shore, collecting a fresh supply of shell-fish for their architecture, when Isobel, who had left the others that she might carry her load of periwinkles to the already large heap under the rocks, spied her friend the colonel in the distance, and flinging down her basket, hurried along the beach to greet him.

"Well met, Miss Robinson Crusoe!" cried the colonel. "I was just on the point of going up the cliff to take another look at the old stone. I'm like a child with a new toy. I find I can't tear myself away from it, and I want to keep going back to read the runes again, and to see that it is safe and uninjured. Will you come with me to keep me company?"

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Isobel was nothing loath—she much enjoyed a chat with the owner of the island; and they sat for a long time on a large boulder near the cross, while he wrote the runic alphabet for her on a leaf torn from his pocket-book.

"Now I should at least be able to make out the words of another inscription if I found it," she said triumphantly, "even if I didn't know what it meant. I shall copy these, and then write my name in runes inside all my books. I think they're ever so much prettier than modern letters."

"With the slight disadvantage that very few people can decipher them," laughed the colonel. "You might as well sign your autograph in Sanscrit. How fast the tide is rising! I think we should warn your playfellows that they ought to be running home. I'm always afraid lest they should be caught on these sands."

He rose as he spoke, and walked to the verge of the cliff, where he could command a view of the shore below, just in time to see the last of the children hustled by Charlotte Wright (whose sensible practical head never forgot the state of the tide) up the beach at the Silversands side of the channel, which was already beginning to fill so quickly as to render any further crossing impossible.

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"Oh, look! What shall we do?" cried Isobel, in some alarm. "We're quite cut off. We can't possibly get through that deep water even if we try to wade. We shall have to stay on the island all night."

"And sleep in the hut like true pioneers?" said the colonel. "It would certainly be a new experience. No, little Miss Crusoe, I don't think we are driven to such a desperate extremity as that yet. I left my boat at the other side of the headland, and my man is only waiting my signal to row round. I will take you across with me to the Chase, and land you in safety."

Mounting to the top of the hill, he waved his handkerchief, and a small row-boat which had been anchored in the bay put off immediately in their direction.

"It's not nearly so romantic as if we had been obliged to spend a lonely night shivering in the hut," said the colonel. "We've missed rather an interesting adventure, but it's much more comfortable, after all. By-the-bye, will your mother feel anxious if she sees the other children return without you?"

[235] "She's gone to Ferndale this afternoon to buy some more paints and drawing paper," replied Isobel. "You can't get sketching materials in Silversands. She won't be home until seven o'clock, because there isn't a train earlier. I shall have to take tea alone."

"Better have it with me," suggested her friend. "I feel I owe some return for the hospitality you exercised in the hut. I haven't forgotten the nice cup of tea you made. You must see my flowers, and I can send you home afterwards in the dog-cart."

"That *would* be nice!" cried Isobel, her joy at the prospect showing itself in her beaming face. "We saw your garden from the top of the Scar that day we went into your grounds, and I thought it looked *lovely*."

"Well, I believe I have as good a show as most people in the neighbourhood," admitted the colonel; "but you shall judge for yourself. Here we are at the landing-place. Take care! Give me your hand, and I will help you out."

[236] The Chase appeared to have a private wooden jetty of its own, which led on to a strip of shingly beach, at the other side of which an iron gate admitted them into a small plantation of fir trees, and through a shrubbery into the garden. Isobel could not restrain a cry of pleasure at the sight of the flowers, which were now in the prime of their early autumn glory, and she did not know whether to admire more the little beds, gay with bright blossoms, which dotted the smoothly mown lawns, or the splendid herbaceous borders behind, full of dahlias, sunflowers, gladioli, hollyhocks, torch lilies, tall bell-flowers, and other beautiful plants.

"I must show you all my treasures," said the colonel, pleased with her appreciation, as he took her to the pond where the pink water-lilies grew, and the bamboo and eucalyptus were flourishing in the open air.

"You don't often find subtropical plants so far north," he explained, with a touch of pride as he pointed them out; "but this is a very sheltered situation, and we protect them with matting during the winter. You should see the irises in the spring and early summer; they are a mass of delicate colour, and thrive so well down by the water's edge."

[237] The rock garden, with its pretty Alpine blossoms; the rosery, where the queen of flowers seemed represented by every variety, from the delicate yellow of the tea to the rich red of the damask; the fountain, where the water flowed from the pouting lips of a chubby cherub, astride on a dolphin, into a basin filled with gold and silver fish; the terraced walk, covered by a fine magnolia; and the summer-house on the wall, containing a fixed telescope through which you could look out over the sea—all were an equal delight to Isobel's wondering eyes, for she had never before been in such beautiful grounds. Nor was the kitchen-garden less of a surprise, with its peaches and apricots hanging on the red brick walls, carefully netted to preserve them from the birds; its beds of tall, feathery asparagus, and its ripe greengages and early apples. The trim neatness of the vegetable borders was enlivened by edgings of hardy annuals, and here and there a mass of sweet peas filled the air with a delicious fragrance, while in a corner stood a row of bee-hives, the buzzing occupants of which seemed busily at work among the scarlet runners. Isobel thought no enchanted palace could rival the greenhouses, gay with geraniums and fuchsias and rare plants, the names of which she did not know, or the vinery with its countless bunches of black grapes hanging from the roof. It was so particularly nice to be taken round by the owner, who could pluck the flowers and fruit as he wished, and so different from the park at home, which was her usual playground, where you might not walk on the grass, and hardly dared to admire the flowers, for fear the policeman should suspect you of wanting to touch them.

[238] "You will be quite tired now, and hungry too, I expect," said her host, as he led the way on to a long glass-roofed veranda in front of the house, where two chairs and a round table spread for tea were awaiting them. "I must show you my horses and dogs afterwards. I have five little collie pups, which I am sure you will like to see, and a brown foal, only a fortnight old. My coachman has some fan-tail pigeons, too, and a hutch of rabbits."

It seemed very strange to Isobel to find herself sitting in the comfortable basket-chair, talking to the colonel while he poured the tea from the silver teapot into the pretty painted cups. She could scarcely believe that only three weeks ago she had trespassed in his grounds, and had almost expected him to send her to prison for the offence, while now she was chatting to him as freely as if she had known him all her life. That her holland frock was not improved by an afternoon's play on the island, that her sand shoes were the worse for wear and her sailor hat was her oldest, and that the wind had blown her long hair into elf locks, did not distress her in the least, though I fear Mrs. Stewart would hardly have considered her in visiting order. Certainly the colonel did not seem to mind, and whatever he may have thought of the appearance of his young guest, her good manners and refined accent had shown him from the first that she was the child of cultured people.

[239] "Mother means to sketch the runic cross on Monday," volunteered Isobel, as the talk turned on

the subject of the island. "She went to Ferndale to-day on purpose to buy a new block; her old one was too small, and not the right shape."

"I shall hope to see her picture," replied the colonel. "I must show you the photos of the stone, which arrived this morning. They are in my study; so, if you really won't have any more tea, we will come indoors and look at them now."

[240] He led the way through an open French window into a large and pleasant drawing-room, which appeared so filled with beautiful cabinets of curiosities, old china, rare pictures and books, that Isobel would have liked to linger and look at them if she had dared to ask; but the colonel strode on into the panelled hall, and passing the wide staircase with its carved balustrade and its statue of Hebe, holding a lamp, at the foot, took her into a long low library at the farther side of the house. It was a cosy room. Its four windows overlooked the rose garden, and had a peep of the cliffs and the sea; a large writing-table strewn with papers stood in a recess; and various padded morocco easy-chairs seemed to invite one to sit down and read the books which almost covered the walls from floor to ceiling. Over the fine stone chimney-piece hung two portraits, the only pictures to be seen—one an enlarged photograph of a handsome young officer in a Guards uniform; the other a small oil painting of a little girl with gray eyes and straight fair hair, parted smoothly in the middle of her forehead, and tied by a ribbon under her ears.

"I only received the prints this morning," said the colonel, taking an envelope from his desk. "There are four views altogether, as you will see; but I think you will like this the best, for it shows the runes so plainly."

He held out the photo of the ancient cross, but Isobel did not notice it. She was standing with parted lips, her eyes fixed in amazement upon the two portraits over the fireplace.

"Why," she cried, in an eager voice, "that's father—my father!"

"Your father, my dear?" said the colonel, astonished in his turn. "Impossible! This is a portrait of my son."

"But it *is* father!" returned Isobel. "It's the same photo which we have at home, only larger. That's the V.C. he won in India, and his Guards uniform. And the other picture is little Aunt Isobel!"

[241] "What do you mean?" asked the colonel hastily. "How could it be your Aunt Isobel?"

"I don't know, but it *is*!" replied Isobel. "I have a tiny painting exactly like it, done on ivory, inside a morocco case. It belonged to father, and he left it to me. She was his only sister, and she died when she was eleven years old—just the same age as I am."

For answer the colonel took Isobel by the shoulders, and holding her beneath the portrait, looked narrowly at her face. The evening sunshine, flooding through the window, fell on the fair hair, and lighted it up with the same golden gleam as that of the child in the picture above; the gray eyes of both seemed to meet him with the same half-wistful, half-trustful gaze.

"The likeness is extraordinary," he murmured. "I wonder I have never noticed it before. Is it possible I could have made so great a mistake? In what regiment was your father?"

"He was in the Fifth Dragoon Guards."

"You have told me he is dead?"

"Yes; he was killed in the Boer war."

"How long ago?"

"Six years on my birthday."

"Was it near Bloemfontein?"

[242] "Yes, in a night skirmish. He is buried there, just where he fell."

"Had he any other relations besides yourself and your mother?"

"Only my grandfather, whom I have never seen."

"And your name?—your name?" cried the colonel, white to the lips with an emotion he could not control.

"Isobel Stewart."

GOOD-BYE.

"We say it for an hour, or for years;
We say it smiling, say it choked with
tears;
We say it coldly, say it with a kiss,
And yet we have no other word than this
—
Good-bye!"

COLONEL STEWART'S very natural mistake in confusing the namesakes, and Isobel's equal error in believing her grandfather to be Colonel Smith, were soon explained. The former, full of relief at this unexpected turn of affairs, paid a visit to Marine Terrace that same evening, and in the interview with his daughter-in-law which followed he begged her pardon frankly and freely for his prejudice and injustice.

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"It seems late in life for a gray-haired old man to turn over a new leaf," he said, "but if you can overlook my misconception and neglect of you in the past, I trust we may prove firm friends in the future. And as for Isobel, she is a granddaughter after my own heart. Will you forget that miserable letter which I wrote (it was intended not for you, as I know you now, but for the mother of that other child), and show your forgiveness by coming to cheer my loneliness at the Chase? Now that we understand each other, I think we need have no fear of disagreements, and our mutual love for the one who is gone and the other who is left will make a bond of sympathy between us."

Isobel's joyful astonishment may be pictured when she discovered that her friend of the island was in very truth her own grandfather, and her happiness when she and her mother removed the next week from Marine Terrace to the Chase can scarcely be described.

"It's just like a fairy tale!" she declared. "I never thought when I sat on the top of the Scar that afternoon, looking down at the lovely house and garden, and saying what I would do if I lived there, that it could ever really come to pass. It's almost too good to be true, and I shouldn't be in the least surprised if it were only a dream after all."

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It soon proved to be no dream, but a most satisfactory reality, when she saw herself installed as her grandfather's favourite companion in the very surroundings which she had so much admired. To Colonel Stewart she filled the vacant place of the little daughter he had lost in former years; and so keen was his pleasure in his newly-found grandchild, that if Isobel had not been of a thoroughly sensible nature I fear she would have run a very great risk of becoming completely spoilt. Her mother's influence and her own naturally unselfish disposition saved her from that, however, and the wholesome discipline of school life afterwards taught her to be able to take her grandfather's kindness without acquiring an undue idea of her own importance. She was very happy at the Chase, and especially delighted when Colonel Stewart made her a formal present of the desert island.

"It shall be yours, to do what you like with," he declared. "I promised to lease it to you when you found the runic cross, and I think you deserve to have it for your own. It shall be one of my presents to you on your eleventh birthday."

That happy event was to take place in the course of a few days, and to celebrate the occasion all the Sea Urchins had been invited to a garden *fête* at the Chase, as a winding up of the club before the various children left Silversands; for it was September now—governesses were returning, schools were reopening, and the holidays were over at last.

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It was a lovely autumn morning when Isobel, with a bright birthday face, looked out of the open window of her pretty bedroom, to see her island shining in the early sunshine against the sea, and the shadows falling over the lawns and gardens of the beautiful spot which was now her home.

"I'm the luckiest girl in the world!" she thought, as she ran down to the breakfast table, to find her plate filled with interesting-looking packages, and the prettiest white pony waiting for her outside the front steps, with a new side-saddle, quite ready for her to learn to ride.

"I want you to be a good horsewoman," said the colonel. "I think you are plucky enough, and when you've had a little practice I hope you'll soon enjoy a canter with me across the moors. The Skye terrier I spoke of will be coming next week; I had to send to Scotland for him, so he could not arrive in time for your birthday, but you will be able to make his acquaintance later."

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To have a pony of her very own had always been one of Isobel's castles in the air, and she spent the morning trying her new favourite in a state of rapture that was only equalled by her joy at receiving her friends in the afternoon. All the Sea Urchins were there, from tall Hugh Rokeby to the youngest Wright; and though they seemed somewhat shy and on their best behaviour at first, their restraint soon wore off at the sight of the splendid cricket pitch, the archery, and the other games which the colonel had prepared for them. After some hesitation it had been decided to include Belle in the invitation, and she appeared with the others dressed in one of her daintiest costumes and her most becoming hat, not in the least abashed by any remembrance of her

former behaviour.

"So you're really living at this splendid place, darling!" she cried, clasping Isobel's arm close in hers, with quite her old clinging manner. "It's *ever* so much nicer than the Oppenheims', and I suppose it will all be yours some day, won't it? The pony is simply a beauty. I'm *so* delighted to come this afternoon! Somehow I haven't seemed to see very much of you lately, though I don't think it has been my fault. You always were my dearest friend, and always will be."

"I am pleased to see all my friends here to-day," replied Isobel quietly, then very gently she drew her arm away.

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She knew Belle's affection now for what it was worth; the old love for her had died that day on the cliff, and however much she might regret the loss, nothing could ever bring it back to her again. Other and truer friendships might follow, but this was as utterly gone as a beautiful iridescent bubble when it has burst.

It was the first time that the Rokebys had met Colonel Stewart since they had uprooted his cherished maidenhair, and with a good deal of blushing and poking at each other they blurted out an apology for their conduct on that occasion.

"We won't speak of it," said the colonel. "You wouldn't do it again, I'm sure, nor shirk the matter afterwards. Certainly" (with a twinkle in his eye) "you vanished like the wind, and I shall expect to have a wonderful exhibition of such running capabilities on the cricket-ground. It's an excellent pitch, and if you don't make a record I shall be surprised."

With both Charlie and Hilda Chester he was more than pleased, and hoped they might be frequent visitors at the Chase if they returned to Silversands, while he extended a hearty and kindly welcome to all the young guests, who echoed Bertie Rokeby's opinion that it was "the most ripping party that ever was given."

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The first half of the afternoon was devoted to cricket, which, I really believe, the colonel enjoyed as much as his visitors; it recalled his old school days, and he had many a tale to tell of matches played fifty years ago on the fields at Eton by boys who had since made their mark in life. Tea was served in the large dining-room, which looked cool with the light falling through the stained-glass window at the end on to the white marble statues which stood in recesses along the walls. It was "a real jolly tea—not one of those affairs where you get nothing but a cucumber sandwich and a square inch of cake, and have to stand about and wait on the girls!" as Bertie Rokeby ungallantly observed, but a sit-down meal of a character substantial enough to satisfy youthful appetites, and lavish in the matter of ripe fruit and cakes. Mrs. Stewart took care that Ruth and Edna Barrington, who, for a wonder, had come unattended, were well looked after, and provided with such few dainties as they permitted themselves to indulge in, being under a solemn pledge to their mother to abstain from all doubtful dishes. There were crackers, although it was not Christmas time, and a pretty box of bon-bons laid beside every plate; but I think the leading glory of the table was the birthday cake, which, according to Charlotte Wright, reminded one of a wedding or a christening, so elaborate were the designs of flowers and birds in white sugar and chocolate on its iced surface, while the letters of Isobel's name were displayed on six little flags in red, white, and blue which adorned the summit.

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After tea came a variety of sports for prizes—archery, quoits, jumping, vaulting, and obstacle races, in the latter of which considerable ingenuity had been shown. It was an amusing sight to watch the boys clumsily trying to thread the requisite number of needles before they might make a start, and toilsomely sorting red and white beans in the little three-divisioned boxes supplied to them, or the girls picking up marbles and disentangling coloured ribbons with eager fingers. The potato races were voted great fun, for it was a difficult matter to run carrying a large and knobby potato balanced upon an egg spoon, and it was almost sure to be dropped just as the triumphant candidate was on the point of tipping it into the box at the end, giving the enemy an opportunity of making up arrears, and of proving the truth of the proverb that the race sometimes goes to the slow and sure instead of to the swift. Three-legged races were popular among the boys, and Bertie Rokeby and Eric Wright, with their respective right and left legs firmly tied together, against Charlie Chester and Arnold Rokeby similarly handicapped, made quite an exciting struggle, the former couple winning in the end, owing to Charlie's undue haste upsetting both himself and his partner. The jumping and vaulting were mostly appreciated by the older children, but both big and little exclaimed with delight when one of the gardeners brought out a famous "Aunt Sally," which he had been very busy making, with a turnip for her head, carved with a penknife into some representation of a human face, over which reposed an ancient bonnet, a shawl being wrapped round her shoulders, and a large pipe placed between her simpering lips. She was tied securely to the top of a post, and the children threw sticks at her, the game being to see who could first knock the pipe from her mouth, a feat which proved to be more difficult than they had at first supposed, and which caused much merriment, the prize being won in the end by Letty Rokeby, whose aim was as true as that of any of the boys.

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The sun had set, and the September twilight was just beginning to deepen into dark, when the young guests were arranged in rows on the terrace steps to witness the final treat—an exhibition of fireworks, which the colonel had sent a special telegram to London to obtain in time. It was a very pretty display of Catherine wheels, Roman candles, rockets, and golden rain, finishing with the Royal Arms in crimson fire; and it made such a splendid close to the day that twenty pairs of hands clapped loudly, and twenty voices joined in ringing cheers, as the little red stars winked themselves out into the darkness. The party was at an end, and an omnibus was in waiting to

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drive the visitors, all unwilling to go, back to their lodgings at Silversands. Isobel kissed Belle with a feeling that it was a last farewell; their ways for the future lay apart; they had different ideals and different hopes in life. Alike in name, they had been so unlike in character as to render any true friendship impossible, though their chance meeting had been fraught with such unforeseen consequences. It was little more than six weeks since Isobel had first arrived at Silversands, yet so much seemed to have happened in the time that, as she stood upon the steps holding her grandfather's hand, she could scarcely realize the strange things which had come to pass.

"Good-bye! good-bye!" sounded on all sides, as the reluctant Sea Urchins at length took their departure. To-morrow most of them would be scattered to their own homes, and the club would be a thing of the past.

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"I shall never forget any of you, never!" said Isobel. "We've had glorious fun together, and it's been the very jolliest holiday I ever remember in my life. I can't tell you how much I've enjoyed your coming here to-day, and I wish every one of you as happy a birthday as mine. Good-bye!"

THE END.

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