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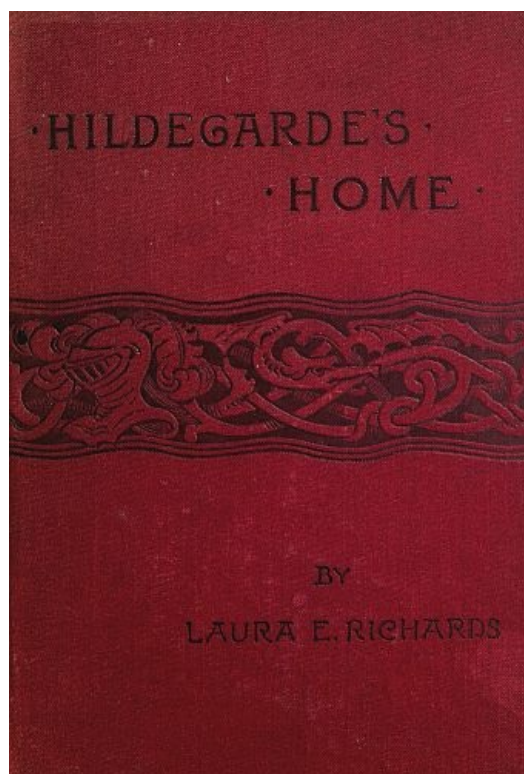
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HILDEGARDE'S HOME



HILDEGARDE AND THE CHINA POTS.
—*Frontispiece.*

HILDEGARDE'S HOME

BY

LAURA E. RICHARDS

AUTHOR OF "QUEEN HILDEGARDE," "HILDEGARDE'S HOLIDAY," "CAPTAIN JANUARY," ETC.

ILLUSTRATED

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HILDEGARDE'S HOME.

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CHAPTER I.

THE HOME ITSELF.

IT was a pleasant place. The house was a large, low, old-fashioned one, with the modern addition of a deep, wide verandah running across its front. Before it was a circular sweep of lawn, fringed with trees; beside it stood a few noble elms, which bent lovingly above the gambrel roof. There were some flower-beds, rather neglected-looking, under the south windows, and there was a kitchen-garden behind the house. This was all that Hildegarde Grahame had seen so far of her new home, for she had only just arrived. She stood now on the verandah, looking about her with keen, inquiring eyes, a tall, graceful girl, very erect, with a certain proud carriage of the head. Her dress of black and white shepherd's plaid was very simple, but it fitted to perfection, and there was a decided "air" to her little black felt hat.

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Hildegarde's father had died about six months before the time our story opens. He had been very wealthy, but many of his investments had shrunk in value, and the failure of a bank whose cashier had proved dishonest entailed heavy losses upon him; so that, after his death, it was found that the sum remaining for his widow and only child, after all debts were paid, was no very large one. They would have enough to live on, and to live comfortably; but the "big luxuries," as Hildegarde called them, the horses and carriages, the great New York house with its splendid furniture and troops of servants, must go; and go they did, without loss of time. Perhaps neither Hildegarde nor her mother regretted these things much. Mrs. Grahame had been for years an indefatigable worker, giving most of her time to charities; she knew that she should never rest so long as she lived in New York. Hildegarde had been much in the country during the past two years, had learned to love it greatly, and found city life too "cabined, cribbed, confined," to suit her present taste. The dear father had always preferred to live in town; but now that he was gone, they were both glad to go away from the great, bustling, noisy, splendid place. So, when Mrs. Grahame's lawyer told her that an aged relative, who had lately died, had left his country house as a legacy to her, both she and Hildegarde said at once, "Let us go and live there!"

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Accordingly, here they were! or to speak more accurately, here Hildegarde was, for she and auntie (auntie was the black cook; she had been Mrs. Grahame's nurse, and had been cook ever since Hildegarde was a baby) had come by an early train, and were to have everything as comfortable as might be by the time Mrs. Grahame and the little housemaid, who had stayed to help her pack the last trifles, should arrive in the afternoon.

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It was so pleasant on the wide verandah, with the great elms nodding over it, that Hildegarde lingered, until a mellow "Miss Hildy, chile! you comin'?" summoned her in-doors. Auntie had already put on her white jacket and apron, without which she never considered herself dressed, and her muslin turban looked like a snow-drift on an ebony statue. She had opened the door of a large room, and was peering into it, feather duster in hand.

"Spouse this is the parlour!" she said, with a glance of keen observation. "Comicalest parlour ever I see!"

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Hildegarde stepped lightly across the threshold. It was a singular room, but, she thought, a very pleasant one. The carpet on the floor was thick and soft, of some eastern fabric, but so faded that the colours were hardly distinguishable. Against the walls stood many chairs, delicate, spider-legged affairs, with cushions of faded tapestry. The curtains might once have been crimson, when they had any colour. A table in the exact centre of the room was covered with a worked cloth of curious and antique pattern, and on it were some venerable annuals, and "Finden's Tableaux," bound in green morocco. In a dim corner stood the great-grandmother of all pianos. It was hardly larger than a spinnet, and was made of some light-coloured, highly polished wood, cunningly inlaid with ivory and mother-of-pearl. Over the yellow keys was a painting, representing Apollo (attired, to all appearance, like the "old man on a hill," in his grandmother's gown), capering to the sound of his lyre, and followed by nine young ladies in pink and green frocks. The last young lady carried a parasol, showing that the Muses thought as much of their complexions as other people do. At sight of this venerable instrument Hildegarde uttered a cry of delight, and, running across the room, touched a few chords softly. The sound was faint and tinkling, but not unmusical. Auntie sniffed audibly.

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"Reckon my kittle makes a better music 'an that!" she said; and then, relenting, she added, "might ha' been pooty once, I dassay. That's a pooty picture, anyhow, over the mankel-piece."

Hildegarde looked up, and saw a coloured print of a lady in the costume of the First Empire, with golden ringlets, large blue eyes, particularly round rosy cheeks, and the most amiable simper in the world. Beneath was the inscription, "Madame Récamier, Napoleon's first love."

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"Oh!" cried Hildegarde, half-laughing, half-indignant, "how ridiculous! She wasn't, you know! and she never looked like that, any more than I do. But see, auntie! see this great picture of General Washington, in his fine scarlet coat. I am sure you must admire that! Why!—it cannot be—yes, it is! it is done in worsted-work. Fine cross-stitch, every atom of it. Oh! it makes my eyes ache to think of it."

Auntie nodded approvingly. "That's what I call work!" she said. "That's what young ladies used to do when I was a gal. Don't see no sech work nowadays, only just a passel o' flowers and crooked lines, and calls it embr'idery."

"Oh! you ungrateful old auntie," cried Hildegarde, "when I marked your towels so beautifully last week. Here! since you are so fond of cross-stitch, take this dreadful yellow sofa-pillow, with pink roses worked on it. It will just fit your own beloved rocking-chair, with the creak in it, and you may have it for your very own."

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The pillow flew across the room, and auntie, catching it, disappeared with a chuckle, while Hildegarde resumed her examination of the quaint old parlour. The "cross-stitch" was everywhere: on the deep, comfortable old sofa, where one leaned against a stag-hunt, and had a huntsman blowing his horn on either arm; on the chairs, where one might sit on baskets of flowers, dishes of fruit, or cherubs' heads, as one's fancy dictated; on the long fender-stool, where an appalling line of dragons, faintly red, on a ground that had been blue, gaped open-mouthed, as if waiting to catch an unwary foot.

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"Oh! their *poor* eyes!" cried Hildegarde. "How *could* their mothers let them?" She passed her hand compassionately over the fine lines of the stag-hunt. "Were they girls, do you suppose?" she went on, talking to herself, as she was fond of doing. "Girls like me, or slender old spinsters, like the chairs and the piano? Mamma must have known some of them when she was a child; she said she had once made a visit here. I must ask her all about them. Uncle Aytoun! what a pity he isn't alive, to show us about his house! But if he were alive, we should not be here at all. So nice of you to leave the house to mamma, dear sir, just as if you had been her real uncle, instead of her father's cousin. You must have been a very nice old gentleman. I like old gentlemen." The girl paused, and presently gave an inquiring sniff. "What is it?" she said meditatively. "Not exactly mould, for it is dry; not must, for it is sweet. The smell of this particular room, for it, suits it exactly. It is"—she sniffed again—"it is as if some Aytoun ladies before the flood had made *pot-pourri*, and it had somehow kept dry. Let us examine this matter!" She tiptoed about the room, and, going round the corner of the great chimney, found a cupboard snugly tucked in beside it. She opened it, with a delightful thrill of curiosity. Hildegarde did love cupboards! Of course, there might be nothing at all—but there was something! On the very first shelf stood a row of china pots, carefully covered, and from these pots came the faint, peculiar perfume which seemed so to form part of the faded charm of the room. The pots were of delicate white porcelain, one with gold sprigs on it, one with blue flowers, and one with pink. "Belonging to three Aytoun sisters!" said Hildegarde. "Of course! dear things! If they had only written their names on the jars!" She lifted the gold-sprigged jar with reverent hands. Lo, and behold! On the cover was pasted a neat label, which said, "Hester's recipe, June, 18—." She examined the other two jars eagerly. They bore similar legends, with the names "Agatha" and "Barbara." On all the writing was in minute but strongly marked characters; the three hands were different, yet there was a marked resemblance. Hildegarde stood almost abashed, as if she had found herself in presence of the three ladies themselves. "The question is"—she murmured apologetically—and then she stooped and sniffed carefully, critically, at the three jars in turn. "There is no doubt about it!" she said at last. "Hester's recipe is the best, for it has outlived the others, and given its character to the whole room. Poor Miss Agatha and Miss Barbara! How disappointed they would be!" As she closed the cupboard softly and turned away, it almost seemed—almost, but not quite, for though Hildegarde had a lively imagination, she was not at all superstitious—as though she heard a faint sigh, and saw the shadowy forms of the three Aytoun sisters turning away sadly

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from the cupboard where their treasure was kept. The shadow was her own, the sigh was that of an evening breeze as it stole in between the faded curtains; but Hildegarde had a very pretty little romance made up by the time she reached the other side of the long room, and when she softly closed the door, it was not without a whispered "good evening!" to the three ladies whom she left in possession.

Shaking off the dream, she ran quickly up the winding stairs, and turned into the pleasant, sunny room which she had selected as the best for her mother's bedchamber. It was more modern-looking than the rest of the house, in spite of its quaint Chinese-patterned chintz hangings and furniture; this was partly owing to a large bow-window which almost filled one side, and through which the evening light streamed in cheerfully. Hildegarde had already unpacked a trunk of "alicumtweezles" (a word not generally known, and meaning small but cherished possessions), and the room was a pleasant litter of down pillows, cologne-bottles, work-implements, photograph cases and odd books. Now she inspected the chairs with a keen and critical eye, pounced upon one, sat down in it, shook her head and tried another. Finding this to her mind, she drew it into the bow-window, half-filled it with a choice assortment of small pillows, and placed a little table beside it, on which she set a fan, a bottle of cologne, a particularly inviting little volume of Wordsworth (Hildegarde had not grown up to Wordsworth yet, but her mother had), a silver bonbonnière full of Marquis chocolate-drops, and a delicate white knitting-basket which was having a little sunset of its own with rose-coloured "Saxony." "There!" said Hildegarde, surveying this composition with unfeigned satisfaction. "If that isn't attractive, I don't know what is. She won't eat the chocolates, of course, bless her! but they give it an air, and I can eat them for her. And now I must put away towels and pillow-cases, which is not so interesting."

At this moment, however, the sound of wheels was heard on the gravel, and tossing the linen on the bed, Hildegarde ran down to welcome her mother.

Mrs. Grahame was very tired, and was glad to come directly up to the pleasant room, and sink down in the comfortable chair which was holding out its stout chintz arms to receive her.

"What a perfect chair!" she said, taking off her bonnet and looking about her. "What a very pleasant room! I know you have given me the best one, you dear child!"

"I hope so!" said Hildegarde. "I meant to, certainly— Oh, no!" she started forward and took the bonnet which Mrs. Grahame was about to lay on the table; "this table is to take things from, dear. I must give you another to put things on."

"I see!" said her mother, surveying the decorated table with amusement. "This is a still-life piece, and a very pretty one. But how can I possibly take anything off it? I should spoil the harmony. The straw-covered cologne-bottle makes just the proper background for the chocolates, and though I should like to wet my handkerchief with it, I do not dare to disturb—"

"Take care!" cried Hildegarde, snatching up the bottle and deluging the handkerchief with its contents. "You might hurt my feelings, Mrs. Grahame, and that would not be pleasant for either of us. And you know it is pretty, *quand même!*"

"It is, my darling, very pretty!" said her mother, "and you are my dear, thoughtful child, as usual. The Wordsworth touch I specially appreciate. He is so restful, with his smooth, brown covers. Your white and gold Shelley, there, would have been altogether too exciting for my tired nerves."

"Oh! I have nothing to say against Mr. W.'s *covers!*" said Hildegarde with cheerful malice. "They are charming covers. And now tell me what kind of journey you had, and how you got through the last agonies, and all about it."

"Why, we got through very well indeed!" said Mrs. Grahame. "Janet was helpful and quick as usual, and Hicks nailed up all the boxes, and took charge of everything that was to be stored or sold. Sad work! but I am glad it is done." She sighed, and Hildegarde sat down on the floor beside her, and leaned her cheek against the beloved mother-hand.

"Dear!" she said, and that was all, for each knew the other's thoughts. It was no light matter, the breaking up of a home where nearly all the young girl's life, and the happiest years of her mother's, had been passed. Every corner in the New York house was filled with memories of the dear and noble man whom they so truly mourned, and it had seemed to them both, though they had not spoken of it, as if in saying good-by to the home which he had loved, they were taking another and a more final farewell of him.

So they sat in silence for a while, the tender pressure of the hand saying more than words could have done; but when Mrs. Grahame spoke at last, it was in her usual cheerful tone.

"So at last everything was ready, and I locked the door, and gave the keys to the faithful Hicks" (Hicks had been the Grahames' butler for several years), "and then Hicks came down to the station with me, and did everything that was possible to secure a comfortable journey for me—and Janet."

"Poor Hicks!" said Hildegarde, smiling. "It must have been very hard for him to say good-by to you—and Janet."

"I think it was!" said Mrs. Grahame. "He asked me, very wistfully, if we should not need some one to take care of the garden, and said he was very fond of out-door work; but I had to tell him

that we should only need a 'chore-man,' to do odds and ends of work, and should not keep a gardener. At this he put on a face like three days of rain, as your Grimm story says, and the train started, and that was all.

"And now tell me, Sweetheart," she added, "what have been your happenings. First of all, how do you like the house?" [29]

"Oh, it's a jewel of a house!" replied Hildegarde with enthusiasm. "You told me it was pleasant, but I had no idea of anything like this. The verandah itself is worth the whole of most houses. Then the parlour! such a wonderful parlour! I am sure you will agree with me that it would be sacrilege to put any of our modern belongings in it. I did give auntie one hideous sofa-pillow, but otherwise I have touched nothing. It is a perfect museum of cross-stitch embroidery, sacred to the memory of Miss Barbara, Miss Agatha, and Miss Hester."

Mrs. Grahame smiled. "How did you discover their names?" she asked. "I was saving them for an after-supper 'tell' for you, and now you have stolen my thunder, you naughty child."

"Not a single growl of it!" cried Hildegarde eagerly. "I am fairly prancing with impatience to hear about them. All I know is their names, which I found written on three bow-pots in the cupboard. I went mousing about, like little Silver-hair, and instead of three porridge-pots, found these. Miss Hester's was the only pot that had any 'sniff' left to speak of; from which I inferred that she was the sprightliest of the three sisters, and perhaps the youngest and prettiest. Now *don't* tell me that she was the eldest, and lackadaisical, and cross-eyed!" [30]

"I will not!" said Mrs. Grahame, laughing. "I will not tell you anything till I have had my tea. I had luncheon at one o'clock, and it is now—"

"Seven!" cried Hildegarde, springing up, and beating her breast. "You are starved, my poor darling, and I am a Jew, Turk, infidel, and heretic; I always was!"

She ran out to call Janet; when lo, there was Janet just coming up to tell them that tea was ready. She was the prettiest possible Janet, as Scotch as her name, with rosy cheeks and wide, innocent blue eyes, and "lint-white locks," as a Scotch lassie should have. "No wonder," thought Hildegarde, "that Hicks looked like '*drei Tage Regenwetter*' at parting from her." [31]

"Tea is ready, you say, Janet?" cried Hildegarde. "That is good, for we are 'gay and ready,' as you say. Come, my mother! let us go and see what auntie has for us."

Mother and daughter went down arm-in-arm, like two school-girls. They had to pick their way carefully, for the lamps had not been lighted, and there was not daylight enough to shed more than a faint glimmer on the winding stairs; but when they reached the dining-room a very blaze of light greeted them. There were no less than six candles on the table, in six silver candlesticks shaped like Corinthian columns. (Auntie had hidden these candlesticks in her own trunk, with a special eye to this effect.) On the table also was everything good, and hot blueberry cake beside; and behind it stood auntie herself, very erect and looking so solemn that Mrs. Grahame and Hildegarde stopped in the doorway, and stood still for a moment. The black woman raised her head with a gesture of tenderness, not without majesty. [32]

"De Lord bless de house to ye!" she said solemnly. "De Lord send ye good victuals, and plenty of 'em! De Lord grant ye never want for nothin', forever an' ever, give glory, amen!"

And with an answering "amen!" on their lips, Hildegarde and her mother sat down to their first meal in their new home.

CHAPTER II.

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A DISH OF GOSSIP.

THE evening was too lovely to spend in the house, so Mrs. Grahame and Hildegarde went from the tea-table out on the verandah, where some low, comfortable straw chairs were already placed. It was June, and the air was full of the scent of roses, though there were none in sight. There was no moon, but it was hardly missed, so brilliant were the stars, flashing their golden light down through the elm-branches.

They sat for some time, enjoying the quiet beauty of the night. Then—"I think we shall be happy here, dear!" said Hildegarde softly. "It feels like home already." [34]

"I am glad to hear you say that!" replied her mother. "Surely the place itself is charming. I hope, too, that you may find some pleasant companions, of your own age. Yes, I can see you shake your head, even in the dark; and of course we shall be together constantly, my darling; but I still hope you will find some girl friend, since dear Rose (Rose was Hildegarde's bosom friend) cannot be with us this summer. Now tell me, did you find Mrs. Lankton here when you arrived? We don't seem to have come down to details yet."

Hildegarde began to laugh.

"I should think we did find her!" she said. "Your coming put it all out of my head, you see. Well,

when auntie and I drove up, there was this funny little old dame standing in the doorway, looking so like Mrs. Gummidge that I wanted to ask her on the spot if Mr. Peggotty was at home. She began shaking her head and sighing, before we could get out of the wagon. 'Ah, dear me!' she said. 'Dear me! and this is the young lady, I suppose. Ah! yes, indeed! And the housekeeper, I suppose. Well, well! I'm proper glad to see you. Ah, dear, dear!' All this was said in a tone of the deepest dejection, and she kept on shaking her head and sighing. Auntie spoke up pretty smartly, 'I'm de cook!' she said. 'If you'll take dis basket, ma'am, we'll do de lamintations ourselves!' Mrs. Lankton didn't hear the last part of the remark, but she took the basket, and auntie and I jumped out. 'I suppose you are Mrs. Lankton, the care-taker,' I said, as cheerfully as I could. 'Ah, yes, dear!' she said, mournfully. 'I'm Mrs. Lankton, the widow Lankton, housekeeper to Mr. Aytoun as was, and care-taker since his dee-cess. I've took care, Miss Grahame, my dear. There ain't no one could keep things more car'ful nor I have. If I've had trouble, it hasn't made me no less car'ful. Ah, dear me! it's a sorrowful world. Perhaps you'd like to come in.' This seemed to be a new idea to her, though we had been standing with our hands full of bundles, only waiting for her to move. She led the way into the hall. 'This is the hall!' she said sadly; and then she stood shaking her head like a melancholy mandarin. 'I s'pose 'tis!' said auntie, who was quite furious by this time, and saw no fun in it at all. 'And I s'pose dis is a door, and I'll go t'rough it.' And off she founced through the door at the back of the hall, where she found the kitchen for herself, as we could tell by the rattling of pans which followed. 'She's got a temper, ain't she?' said Mrs. Lankton sadly. 'Most coloured people has. There! I had one myself, before 'twas took out of me by trouble. Not that I've got any coloured blood in me, for my father was Nova Scoshy and my mother State of New York. Shall I take you through the house, dear?'"

"Poor Mrs. Lankton!" said Mrs. Grahame, laughing. "She is the very spirit of melancholy. I believe she has really had a good deal of trouble. Well, dear?"

"Well," resumed Hildegarde, "I really could not have her spoil all the fun of going over the house for me; though of course she was great fun herself in a way. So I thanked her, and said I would not give her the trouble, and said I supposed she lived near, and we should often call on her when we wanted extra help. 'So do, dear!' she said, 'so do! I live right handy by, in a brown cottage with a green door, the only brown cottage, *and* the only green door, so you can't mistake me. You've got beautiful neighbours, too,' she added, still in the depths of melancholy. 'Beautiful neighbours! Mis' Loftus lives in the stone house over yonder. Ah, dear me! She and her darter, they don't never set foot to the ground, one year's eend to the other.' 'Dear me!' I said. 'Are they both such invalids?' 'No, dear!' said she, sighing as if she wished they were. 'Carriage folks; great carriage folks. Then there's Colonel Ferrers lives in the brick house across the way. Beautiful man, but set in his ways. Never speaks to a soul, one year's eend to the other, in the way o' talk, that is. Ah! dear me, yes!'"

"It sounds like Alice in Wonderland!" exclaimed Mrs. Grahame. "In that direction lives a Hatter, and in that direction lives a March Hare. Visit either you like! they're both mad."

"Oh, Mamma, it is exactly like it!" cried Hildegarde, clapping her hands. "You clever Mamma! I wonder if Colonel Ferrers has long ears, and if his roof is thatched with fur."

"Hush!" said her mother, laughing. "This will not do. I know Colonel Ferrers, and he is an excellent man, though a trifle singular. Well, dear, how did you part with your melancholy dame?"

"She went away then," said Hildegarde. "Oh, no, she didn't. I forgot! she did insist upon showing me the room where Uncle Aytoun died; and—oh! mamma, it is almost too bad to tell, and yet it was very funny. She said he died like a perfect gentleman, and made a beautiful remains. Then, at last, she said good-night and charged me to send for her if any of us should be ill in the night. 'Comin' strange in,' she said, 'it's likely to disagree with some of you, and in spasms or anything suddint, I'm dretful knowin'.' So she went off at last, and it took me a quarter of an hour to get auntie into a good temper again."

They laughed heartily at Mrs. Lankton's idea of "the parting word of cheer"; and then Hildegarde reminded her mother of the "tell" she had promised her. "I want to know *all* about the three ladies," she said. "They seem more real than Dame Lankton, somehow, for they belong here, and she never could have. So 'come tell me all, my mother, all, all that ever you know!'"

"It is not so very much, after all," replied Mrs. Grahame, after a moment's thought. "I came here once with my father, when I was about ten years old, and stayed two or three days. Miss Hester was already dead; she was the youngest, the beauty of the family, and she was still young when she died. Miss Barbara was the eldest, a tall, slender woman, with a high nose; very kind, but a little stiff and formal. She was the head of the family, and very religious. It was Saturday, I remember, when we came, and she gave me some lovely Chinese ivory toys to play with, which filled the whole horizon for me. But the next morning she took them away, and gave me Baxter's 'Saint's Rest,' which she said I must read all the morning, as I had a cold and could not go to church."

"Poor Mamma!" said Hildegarde.

"Not so poor," said her mother, smiling. "Miss Agatha came to the rescue, and took me up to her room, and let me look in the drawers of a wonderful old cabinet, full of what your dear father used to call 'picknicks and bucknicks.'"

"Oh! I know; I found the cabinet yesterday!" cried Hildegarde in delight. "I had not time to look into it, but it was all drawers; a dark, foreign-looking thing, inlaid with ivory!"

"Yes, that is it," said her mother. "I wonder if the funny things are still in it? Miss Agatha was an invalid, and her room looked as if she lived in it a good deal. She told me Bible stories in her soft, feeble voice, and showed me a very wonderful set of coloured prints illustrating the Old Testament. I remember distinctly that Joseph's coat was striped, red, green, yellow, and blue, like a mattress ticking gone mad, and that the she-bear who came to devour the naughty children was bright pink."

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"Oh! delightful!" cried Hildegarde, laughing. "I must try to find those prints."

"She told me, too, about her sister Hester," Mrs. Grahame went on; "how beautiful she was, and how bright and gay and light-hearted. 'She was the sunshine, my dear, and we are the shadow, Barbara and I,' she said. I remember the very words. And then she showed me a picture, a miniature on ivory, of a lovely girl of sixteen, holding a small harp in her arms. She had large grey eyes, I remember, and long fair curls. Dear me! how it all comes back to me, after the long, long years. I can almost see that miniature now. Why—why, Hilda, it had a little look of you; or, rather, you look like it."

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The girl flushed rosy red. "I am glad," she said softly. "And she died young, you say? Miss Hester, I mean."

"At twenty-two or three," assented her mother. "It was consumption, I believe. Cousin Wealthy Bond once told me that Hester had some sad love affair, but I know nothing more about it. I do know, however, that Uncle Aytoun (he was the only brother, you know, and spent much of his life at sea), I do know that he was desperately in love with dear Cousin Wealthy herself."

"Oh!" cried Hildegarde. "Poor old gentleman! She couldn't, of course; but I am sorry for him."

"He was not old then," said Mrs. Grahame, smiling. "He knew of Cousin Wealthy's own trouble, but he was very much in love, and hoped he could make her forget it. One day—Cousin Wealthy told me this years and years afterward, *à propos* of my own engagement—one day Captain Aytoun came to see her, and as it was a beautiful summer day, she took him out into the garden to see some rare lilies that were just in blossom. He looked at the lilies, but said little; he was a very silent man. Presently he pulled out his card-case, and took from it a visiting-card, on which was engraved his name, 'Robert F. Aytoun.' He wrote something on the card, and handed it to Cousin Wealthy; and she read, 'Robert F. Aytoun's heart is yours.'"

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"Mamma!" cried Hildegarde. "Can it be true? It is *too* funny! But what could she say? Dear Cousin Wealthy!"

"I remember her very words," said Mrs. Grahame. "'Captain Aytoun, it is not my intention ever to marry; but I esteem your friendship highly, and I thank you for the honour you offer me. Permit me to call your attention to this new variety of ranunculus.' But the poor captain said,—Cousin Wealthy could hardly bring herself to repeat this, for she thought it very shocking,—'Confound the ranunculus!' and strode out of the garden and away. And Cousin Wealthy took the card into the house, and folded it up, and wound pearl-coloured silk on it. It may be in her work-basket now, for she never destroys anything."

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"Oh! that was a most delightful 'tell!'" sighed Hildegarde. "And now go on about Miss Agatha."

"I fear that is all, dear," said her mother. "I remember singing some hymns, which pleased the kind cousin. Then Miss Barbara came home from church; and I rather think her conscience had been pricking her about the 'Saint's Rest,' for she took me down and gave me some delicious jelly of rose leaves, which she said was good for a cold. We had waffles for tea, I remember, and we put cinnamon and sugar on them; I had never tasted the combination before, so I remember it. It was in a glass dish shaped like a pineapple. And after tea Miss Barbara tinkled 'Jerusalem, the Golden' on the piano, and we all sang, and I went to bed at nine o'clock. And that reminds me," said Mrs. Grahame, "that it must now be ten o'clock or after, and 'time for all good little constitutional queens to be in bed.'"

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"Oh! must we go to bed?" sighed Hildegarde. "It is so very particularly lovely here. Well, I suppose we should have to go some time. Good-night, dear stars! good-night, all beautiful things that I know are there, though I cannot see you!"

Hildegarde helped her mother to lock up the house, and then, after a parting word and caress, she took her candle and went to the room she had chosen for her own. It opened out of her mother's dressing-room, so that by setting the doors ajar, they could talk to each other when so minded; and it had a dressing-room of its own on the other side, from which a flight of narrow, corkscrew stairs descended to the ground floor. These stairs had attracted Hildegarde particularly. It seemed very pleasant and important to have a staircase of one's own, which no one else could use. It is true that it was very dark, very crooked and steep, but that was no matter. The bedroom itself was large and airy; a little bare, perhaps, but Hildegarde did not mind that. The white paint was very fresh and clean, and set off the few pieces of dark old mahogany furniture well,—a fine bureau, with the goddess Aurora careering in brass across the front of the top drawer; a comfortable sofa, with cushions of the prettiest pale green chintz, with rosebuds scattered over it; a round table; a few spider-legged chairs; and a nondescript piece of furniture, half dressing-table, half chest of drawers, which was almost as mysteriously promising as the inlaid cabinet in Miss Agatha's room. The bed was large and solemn-looking, with carved posts topped by pineapples. The floor was bare, save for a square of ancient Turkey carpet in the middle. Hildegarde held the candle above her head, and surveyed her new quarters with

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satisfaction.

"Nice room!" she said, nodding her head. "The sort of room I have been thinking of ever since I outgrew flounces, and bows on the chairs. Dear papa! When I was at the height of the flounce fever, he begged me to have a frock and trousers made for the grand piano, as he was sure it must wound my sensibilities to see it so bare. Dear papa! He would like this room, too. It is a little strange-garrety to-night, but wait till I get the Penates out to-morrow!"

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She nodded again, and then, putting on her wrapper, proceeded to brush out her long, fair hair. It was beautiful hair; and as it fell in shining waves from the brush, Hildegarde began to think again of the dead Hester, who had had fair hair, too, and whom her mother had thought she resembled a little. She hoped that this might have been Hester's room. Indeed, she had chosen it partly with this idea, though chiefly because she wished to be near her mother. It certainly was not Miss Agatha's room, for that was on the other side of the passage. Her mother's room had been Miss Barbara's, she was quite sure, for "B" was embroidered on the faded cover of the dressing-table. Another large room was too rigid in its aspect to have been anything but a spare room or a death chamber, and Mr. Aytoun's own room, where he had died like a gentleman and become a "beautiful remains," was on the ground floor. Therefore, it was very plain, this must have been Hester's room. Here she had lived her life, a girl like herself, thought Hildegarde, and had been gay and light-hearted, the sunshine of the house; and then she had suffered, and faded away and died. It was with a solemn feeling that the young girl climbed up into the great bed, and laid her head where that other fair head had lain. Who could tell what was coming to her, too, in this room? And could she make sunshine for her mother, who had lost the great bright light which had warmed and cheered her during so many years? Then her thoughts turned to that other light which had never failed this dear mother; and so, with a murmured "My times be in thy hand!" Hildegarde fell asleep.

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CHAPTER III.

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MORNING HOURS.

"The year's at the spring,
And day's at the morn:
Morning's at seven;
The hill-side's dew-pearled:
The lark's on the wing;
The snail's on the thorn;
God's in his heaven—
All's right with the world!"

THESE seemed the most natural words to sing, as Hildegarde looked out of her window next morning; and sing them she did, with all her heart, as she threw open the shutters and let the glad June sunlight stream into the room. All sad thoughts were gone with the night, and now there seemed nothing but joy in the world.

"Where art thou, tub of my heart?" cried the girl; and she dived under the bed, and pulled out the third reason for her choosing this room. Her mother, she knew, would not change for anything the comfortable "sitz," the friend of many years; so Hildegarde felt at full liberty to enjoy this great white porcelain tub, shallow, three feet across, with red and blue fishes swimming all over it. She did not know that Captain Robert Aytoun had brought it in the hold of his ship all the way from Singapore, for his little Hester, but she did know that it was the most delightful tub she had ever dreamed of; and as she splashed the crystal water about, she almost ceased, for the first time, to regret the blue river which had been her daily bathing-place the summer before. Very fresh and sweet she looked, when at last the long locks were braided in one great smooth braid, and the pretty grey gingham put on and smoothed down. She nodded cheerfully to her image in the glass. It was, as dear Cousin Wealthy said, a privilege to be good-looking, and Hildegarde was simply and honestly glad of her beauty.

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"Now," she said, when the room was "picked up," and everything aëtable hung up to air, "the question is, Go out first and arrange the Penates after breakfast, or arrange the Penates now and go out later?" One more glance from the window decided the matter. "They must wait, poor dears! After all, it is more respectful to take them out when the room is made up than when it is having its sheet and pillow-case party, like this."

She went down her own staircase with a proud sense of possession, and opening the door at its foot, found herself in a little covered porch, from which a flagged walk led toward the back of the house. Here was a pleasant sort of yard, partly covered with broad flags, with a grassy space beyond. Here were clothes-lines, well, and woodshed; and here was auntie, standing at her kitchen door, and looking well satisfied with her new quarters.

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"What a pleasant yard, auntie!" said Hildegarde. "This is your own domain, isn't it?"

"Reckon 'tis!" replied the good woman, smiling. "Jes' suits me, dis does. I kin have some chickens here, and do my washin' out-doors, and spread out some, 'stead o' bein' cooped up like a

old hen myself."

A high wall surrounded auntie's domain, and Hildegarde looked round it wonderingly.

"Oh! there is a door," she said. "I thought mamma said there was a garden. That must be it, beyond there. Call me when breakfast is ready, please, auntie." Passing through the door, she closed it after her, and entered—another world. A dim, green world, wholly different from the golden, sunny one she had just left; a damp world, where the dew lay heavy on shrubs and borders, and dripped like rain from the long, pendent branches of the trees. The paths were damp, and covered with fine green moss. Great hedges of box grew on either side, untrimmed, rising as high as the girl's head; and as she walked between them their cool glossy leaves brushed against her cheek. Here and there was a neglected flower-bed, where a few pallid rosebuds looked sadly out, and pinks flung themselves headlong over the border, as if trying to reach the sunlight; but for the most part the box and the great elms and locusts had it their own way. Hildegarde had never seen such locust-trees! They were as tall as the elms, their trunks scarred and rough with the frosts of many winters. No birds sang in their green, whispering depths; the silence of the place was heavy, weighted down with memories of vanished things. [55]

"I have no right to come here!" said Hildegarde to herself. "I am sure they would not like it." Something white glimmered between the bending boughs of box which interlaced across her path. She half expected to see a shadowy form confront her and wave her back; but, pushing on, she saw a neglected summer-house, entirely covered with the wild clematis called virgin's-bower. She peeped in, but did not venture across the threshold, because it looked as if there might be spiders in it. Through the opposite door, however, she caught a glimpse of a very different prospect, a flash of yellow sunlight, a sunny meadow stretching up and away. Skirting the summer-house carefully, she came upon a stone wall, the boundary of the garden, beyond which the broad meadow lay full in the sunlight. Sitting on this wall, Hildegarde felt as if half of her were in one world, and half in the other; for the dark box and the drooping elm-branches came to the very edge of the wall, while all beyond was rioting in morning and sunshine. [56]

"The new world and the old one,
The green world and the gold one!"

she murmured, and smiled to find herself dropping into poetry, like Silas Wegg.

At this moment a faint sound fell on her ear, a far-away voice, which belonged wholly to the golden world, and had nothing whatever to do with the green. "Hi-ya! Miss Hildy chile!" the mellow African voice came floating down through the trees with an imperious summons; and Hildegarde jumped down from her stone perch, and came out of her dream, and went in to breakfast. [58]

"And what is to be done, Mammina?" asked Hildegarde, when the "eggs and the ham and the strawberry jam" were things of the past, and they were out on the piazza again. "Do you realise, by the way, that we shall live chiefly on this piazza?"

"It is certainly a most delightful place," said Mrs. Grahame. "And I do realise that while it would be quite out of the question to change anything in Miss Barbara's sacred parlour, it is not exactly the place to be cosy in. But, dear child, I shall have to be in my own room a good deal, as this arranging of your dear father's papers will be my chief work through the summer, probably."

"Oh, of course! and I shall be in my room a good deal, for there is sewing, and all that German I am going to read, and—oh, and quantities of things to do! But still we shall live here a great deal, I am sure. It is just a great pleasant room, with one side of it taken off. And it is very quiet, with the strip of lawn, and the ledge beyond. One cannot see the road, except just a bit through the gate. Sometimes you can bring your writing down here, and I can grub in the flower-bed and disturb you." [59]

"Thank you!" said her mother, laughing. "The prospect is singularly attractive. But, dear, you asked me a few minutes ago what was to be done. I thought it would be pleasant if we took out our various little belongings, and disposed them here and there."

"Just what I was longing to do!" cried Hildegarde. "All my precious alicumtweezles are crying out from the trunk, and waiting for me. But don't you want me to see the butcher for you, love, or let auntie tell me what she is going to make for dessert, or perform any other sacred after-breakfast rites?"

Mrs. Grahame shook her head, smiling, and Hildegarde flew upstairs, like an arrow shot from a bow. [60]

In her room stood a huge trunk, already unlocked and unstrapped, and a box whose aspect said plainly that it contained books. All the dresses had been taken out the day before and hung in the roomy closet, pretty, simple gowns, mostly white or grey, for the dear father had disliked "mourning" extremely. Now Hildegarde took out her hats, the broad-brimmed straw with the white daisy wreath, the pretty white shirred mull for best, the black "rough and ready" sailor for common wear. These were laid carefully on a shelf in the closet, and covered with a light cloth to keep them from dust. This done as a matter of duty, the pleasant part began. One after another, a most astonishing array of things were taken from the trunk and laid on the bed, which spread a broad white surface to receive them: a trinket-box of ebony and silver; a plaster cast of the Venus of Milo, another of the Pompeian Psyche, both "treated" in some way that gave them the smooth [61]

lustre of old ivory; a hideous little Indian idol, carved out of dark wood, with eyes of real carbuncle; a doll's tea-set of exquisite blue and white china, brought to Hildegarde from Peking by a wandering uncle, when she was eight years old; a stuffed hawk, confidently asserted by its owner to be the original "jolly gosshawk" of the Scottish ballad, which could "speak and flee"; a Swiss cuckoo clock; several great pink-lipped shells; a butterfly net; a rattlesnake's skin; an exquisite statuette of carved wood, representing Theodoric, King of the Ostrogoths, a copy of the famous bronze statue at Innsbruck; a large assortment of pasteboard boxes, of all sizes and shapes; three or four work-baskets; last of all, some framed photographs and engravings, and a number of polished pieces of wood, which were speedily put together into a bookcase and two or three hanging shelves. On these shelves and on the mantel-piece the various alicumtweezles were arranged and re-arranged, till at length Hildegarde gave a satisfied nod and pronounced them perfect. "But now comes the hard part!" she said. "The pictures! Who shall have the post of honour over the mantel-piece? Come here, dear persons, and let me look at you!" She took up two engravings, both framed in gilt laurel leaves, and studied them attentively. One was the portrait of a man in cavalier dress, strikingly handsome, with dark, piercing eyes and long, curling hair. The expression of the face was melancholy, almost sombre; yet there was a strange fascination in its stern gaze. On the margin was written,—

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"John Grahame of Claverhouse,
"Viscount Dundee."

The other portrait showed an older man, clad in a quaint dress, with a hat that would have been funny on any other head, but seemed not out of place here. The face was not beautiful, but calm and strong, with earnest, thoughtful eyes, and a firm mouth and chin. The legend bore, in curious black-letter, the words,—

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"William of Orange Nassau,
"Hereditary Grand Stadt-holder of the Netherlands."

No one save Hildegarde knew that on the back of this picture, turned upside down in perpetual disgrace and ridicule, was a hideous little photograph of Philip II. of Spain. It was a constant gratification to her to know that it was there, and she occasionally, as now, turned it round and made insulting remarks to it. She hoped the great Oranger liked to know of this humiliation of his country's foe; but William the Silent kept his own counsel, as was always his way.

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And now the question was, Which hero was to have the chief place?

"You are the great one, of course, my saint!" said Hildegarde, gazing into the calm eyes of the majestic Dutchman, "and we all know it. But you see, he is an ancestor, and so many people hate him, poor dear!"

She looked from one to the other, till the fixed gaze of the pictured eyes grew really uncomfortable, and she fancied that she saw a look of impatience in those of the Scottish chieftain. Then she looked again at the space above the mantel-piece, and, after measuring it carefully with her eyes, came to a new resolution.

"You see," she said, taking up a third picture, a beautiful photograph of the Sistine Madonna, "I put *her* in the middle, and you on each side, and then neither of you can say a word."

This arrangement gave great satisfaction; and the other pictures, the Correggio cherubs, Kaulbach's "Lili," the Raphael "violin-player," and "St. Cecilia," were easily disposed of on the various panels, while over the dressing-table, where she could see it from her bed, was a fine print of Murillo's lovely "Guardian Angel."

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Hildegarde drew a long breath of satisfaction as she looked round on her favourites in their new home. "So dear they are!" she said fondly. "I wish Hester could see them. Don't you suppose she had *any* pictures? There are no marks of any on the wall. Well, and now for the books!"

Hammer and screwdriver were brought, and soon the box was opened and the books in their places. Would any girls like to know what Hildegarde's books are? Let us take a glance at them, as they stand in neat rows on the plain, smooth shelves. Those big volumes on the lowest shelf are Scudder's "Butterflies," a highly valued work, full of coloured plates, over which Hildegarde sighs with longing rapture; for, from collecting moths and butterflies for her friend, Bubble Chirk, she has become an ardent collector herself, and in one of the unopened cases downstairs is an oak cabinet with glass-covered drawers, very precious, containing several hundred "specimens."

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Here is "Robin Hood," and Gray's Botany, and Percy's "Reliques," and a set of George Eliot, and one of Charles Kingsley, and the "Ingoldsby Legends," and Aytoun's "Lays of the Scottish Cavaliers," which looks as if it had been read almost to pieces, as indeed it has. (There is a mark laid in at the "Burial March of Dundee," which Hildegarde is learning by heart. This young woman has a habit of keeping a book of poetry open on her dressing-table when she is doing her hair, and learning verses while she brushes out her long locks. It is a pleasant habit, though it does not tend to accelerate the toilet.)

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On the next shelf is "Cranford," also well thumbed, and everything that Mrs. Ewing ever wrote, and "Betty Leicester," and Miss Yonge's historical stories, and the "Tales of a Grandfather," and "Lorna Doone," and the dear old "Days of Bruce," and "Scottish Chiefs," side by side with the "Last of the Barons," and the "Queens of England," and the beloved Homer, in Derby's noble

translation, also in brown leather. Here, too, is "Sesame and Lilies," and Carlyle on Hero-Worship.

The upper shelf is entirely devoted to poetry, and here are Longfellow and Tennyson, of course, and Milton (*not* "of course"), and Scott (in tatters, worse off than Aytoun), and Shelley and Keats, and the Jacobite Ballads, and Allingham's Ballad Book, and Mrs. Browning, and "Sir Launfal," and the "Golden Treasury," and "Children's Garland." There is no room for the handy volume Shakespeare, so he and his box must live on top of the bookcase, with his own bust on one side and Beethoven's on the other. These are flanked in turn by photographs of Sir Walter, with Maida at his feet, and Edwin Booth as Hamlet, both in those pretty glass frames which are almost as good as no frame at all. [68]

"And if you are not a pleasant sight," said Hildegarde, falling back to survey her work, and addressing the collection comprehensively, "then I never saw one, that's all. *Isn't* it nice, dear persons?" she continued, turning to the portraits, which from their places over the mantel-piece had a full view of the bookcase.

But the persons expressed no opinion. Indeed, I am not sure that William the Silent could read English; and Dundee's knowledge of literature was slight, if we may judge from his spelling. I should not, however, wish Hildegarde to hear me say this. [69]

Failing to elicit a response from her two presiding heroes, our maiden turned to Sir Walter, who always knew just how things were; and from this the natural step was to the "Lay of the Last Minstrel" (which she had not read so *very* lately, she thought, with a guilty glance at the trunk and box, which stood in the middle of the room, yawning to be put away), and there was an end of Hildegarde till dinner-time.

"And that is why I was late, dear love!" she said, as after a hasty explanation of the above related doings, she sank down in her chair at the dinner-table, and gave a furtive pat to her hair, which she had smoothed rather hurriedly. "You know you would have brained me with the hammer, if I had not put it away, and that the tacks would have been served up on toast for my supper. Such is your ferocious disposition." [70]

Mrs. Grahame smiled as she helped Hildegarde to soup. "Suppose a stranger should pass by that open window and hear your remarks," she said. "A pretty idea he would have of my maternal care. After all, my desire is to keep tacks *out* of your food. How long ago was it that I found a button in the cup of tea which a certain young woman of my acquaintance brought me?"

"Ungenerous!" exclaimed Hildegarde with tragic fervour. "It was only a glove-button. It dropped off my glove, and it would not have disagreed with you in the least. I move that we change the subject." And at that moment in came Janet with the veal cutlets.

CHAPTER IV. [71]

A WALK AND AN ADVENTURE.

ONE lovely afternoon, after they were well settled, and all the unpacking was done, Hildegarde started out on an exploration tour. She and her mother had already taken one or two short walks along the road near which their house stood, and had seen the brand-new towers of Mrs. Loftus's house, "pricking a cockney ear" on the other side of the way, and had caught a glimpse of an old vine-covered mansion, standing back from the road and almost hidden by great trees, which her mother said was Colonel Ferrers's house.

But now Hildegarde wanted a long tramp; she wanted to explore that sunny meadow that lay behind the green garden, and the woods that fringed the meadow again beyond. So she put on a short corduroy skirt, that would not tear when it caught on the bushes, slung a tin plant-box over her shoulder, kissed her mother, who had a headache and could not go, and started off in high spirits. She was singing as she ran down the stairs and through auntie's sunny back yard, and the martial strains of "Bonny Dundee" rang merrily through the clear June air; but as she closed the garden door behind her, the song died away, for "one would as soon sing in a churchyard," she thought, "as in the Ladies' Garden." So she passed silently along between the box hedges, her footsteps making no sound on the mossy path, only the branches rustling softly as she put them aside. The afternoon sun sent faint gleams of pallid gold down through the branches of the great elm; they were like the ghosts of sunbeams. Her ear caught the sound of falling water, which she had not noticed before; she turned a corner, and lo! there was a dusky ravine, and a little dark stream falling over the rocks, and flowing along with a sullen murmur between banks of fern. It was part of the green world. The mysterious sadness of the deserted garden was here, too, and Hildegarde felt her glad spirits going down, down, as if an actual weight were pressing on her. But she shook off the oppression. "I will not!" she said. "I will not be enchanted to-day! Another day I will come and sit here, and the stream will tell me all the mournful story; I know it will if I sit long enough. But to-day I want joy, and sunshine, and cheerful things. Good-by, dear ladies! I hope you won't mind!" and grasping the hanging bough of a neighbouring elm, she swung herself easily down into the meadow. [72] [73] [74]

It was a very pleasant meadow. The grass was long, so long that Hildegarde felt rather guilty

at walking through it, and framed a mental apology to the farmer as she went along. It was full of daisies and sorrel, so it was not his best mowing-field, she thought. She plucked a daisy and pulled off the petals to see whether Rose loved her, and found she did not, which made her laugh in a foolish, happy way, since she knew better. Now she came to a huge sycamore-tree, a veritable giant, all scarred with white patches where the bark had dropped off. Beside it lay another, prostrate. The branches had been cut off, but the vast trunk showed that it had been even taller than the one which was now standing. "Baucis and Philemon!" said Hildegarde. "Poor dears! One is more sorry for the one who is left, I think, than for the fallen one. To see him lying here with his head off, and not to be able to do anything about it! She cannot even 'tear her ling-long yellow hair'—only it is green. I wonder who killed him." And she went on, murmuring to herself,—

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"They shot him dead on the Nine-Stane Rigg,
Beside the Headless Cross.
And they left him lying in his blood
Upon the moor and moss,"

as if Barthram's Dirge had anything to do with the story of Baucis and Philemon. But this young woman's head was very full of ballads and scraps of old songs, and she was apt to break into them on any or no pretext. She went on now with her favourite dirge, half reciting, half chanting it, as she mounted the sunny slope before her.

"They made a bier of the broken bough,
The sauch and the aspen grey,
And they bore him to the Lady Chapel
And waked him there all day.

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"A lady came to that lonely bower,
And threw her robes aside.
She tore her ling-long yellow hair,
And knelt at Barthram's side.

"She bathed him in the Lady-Well,
His wounds sae deep and sair,
And she plaited a garland for his breast,
And a garland for his hair.

"They rowed him in a lily-sheet
And bare him to his earth,
And the grey friars sung the dead man's mass,
As they passed the Chapel Garth.

"They buried him at the mirk midnight,
When the dew fell cold and still;
When the aspen grey forgot to play,
And the mist clung to the hill.

"They dug his grave but a bare foot deep
By the edge of the Nine-Stane Burn,
And they covered him o'er with the heather flower,
The moss and the lady fern.

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"A grey friar stayed upon the grave
And sung through the morning tide.
And a friar shall sing for Barthram's soul
While Headless Cross shall bide."

Now she had reached the fringe of trees at the top of the slope, and found that it was the beginning of what looked like a considerable wood. "A pine wood!" said Hildegarde, sniffing the spicy perfume with delight. "Oh, pleasant place! No plants, but one cannot have everything. Oh! how good it smells! and hark to the sound of the sea! I shall call this Ramoth Hill." She walked along, keeping near the edge of the wood, where it was still warm and luminous with sunshine. Now she looked up into the murmuring cloud of branches above her, now she looked down at the burnished needles which made a soft, thick carpet under her feet; and she said again, "Oh, pleasant place!" Presently, in one of the upward glances, she stopped short. Her look, from carelessly wandering, became keen and intent. On one of the branches of the tree under which she stood was a small, round object. "A nest!" said Hildegarde. "The question is, What nest?" She walked round and round the tree, like a pointer who has "treed" a partridge; but no bird rose from the nest, nor could she see at all what manner of nest it was. Finding this to be the case, she transferred her scrutiny from the nest to the tree. It was a sturdy pine, with strong, broad branches jutting out, the lowest not so very far above her head, a most attractive tree, from every point of view. Hildegarde leaned against the trunk for a moment, smiling to herself, and listening to the "two voices." "You are seventeen years old," said one voice. "Not quite," said the other. "Not for a month yet. Besides, what if I were?" "Suppose some one should come by and see you?" said the first voice. "But no one will," replied the second. "And perhaps you can't do it, anyhow," continued the first; "it would be ridiculous to try, and fail." "Just wait and see!" said the second

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voice. And when it had said that, Hildegarde climbed the tree.

I shall not describe exactly how she did it, for it may not have been in the most approved style of the art; but she got up, and seated herself on the broad, spreading branch, not so very much out of breath, all things considered, and with only two scratches worth mentioning. After a moment's triumphant repose, she worked her way upward to where the nest was firmly fixed in a crotch, and bent eagerly over it. A kingbird's nest! this was great joy, for she had never found one before. There were five eggs in it, and she gazed with delight at the perfect little things. But when she touched them gently, she found them quite cold. The nest was deserted. "Bad little mother!" said Hildegarde. "How could you leave the lovely things? Such a perfect place to bring up a family in, too!" She looked around her. It was very pleasant up in this airy bower. Great level branches stretched above and below her, roof and floor of soft, dusky plumes. The keen, exquisite fragrance seemed to fold round her like a cloud; she felt fairly steeped in warmth and perfume. Sitting curled up on the great bough, her back resting against the trunk, the girl fell into a pleasant waking dream, her thoughts wandering idly here and there, and the sound of the sea in her ears. She was an enchanted princess, shut in a green tower by the sea. The sea loved her, and sang to her all day long the softest song he knew, and no angry waves ever came to make clamour and confusion. By and by a rescuer would come,—

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"A fairy prince, with joyful eyes,
And lighter-footed than the fox."



IT WAS VERY PLEASANT UP IN THIS AIRY BOWER.

He would stand beneath the green tower, and call to her:—

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"Hallo, there! you young rascal, come down! How dare you rob birds' nests in my woods?"

The voice was deep and stern, and Hildegarde started so violently that she nearly fell from her perch. She could not speak for the moment, but she looked down, and saw a fierce-looking old gentleman, clad in a black velvet coat and spotless white trousers, brandishing a thick stick, and peering with angry, short-sighted eyes up into the tree.

"Come down, I say!" he repeated sternly. "I'll teach you to rob my nests, you young vagabond!"

This was really not to be endured.

"I am *not* robbing the nest, sir!" cried Hildegarde, indignation overcoming her alarm. "I never did such a thing in my life. And I—I am not a boy!"

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"Harry Monmouth!" exclaimed the old gentleman. "I beg ten thousand pardons! What are you?"

Hildegarde's first impulse was to say that she lived in Alaska (that being the most distant place she could think of), and was on her way thither; but

fortunately the second thought came quickly, and she replied with as much dignity as the situation allowed:—

"I am the daughter of Mrs. Hugh Grahame. I live at Braeside" (I have forgotten to mention that this was the name of the new home), "and have wandered off our own grounds without knowing it. I am extremely sorry to be trespassing, but—but—I only wanted to see what kind of nest it was."

She stopped suddenly, feeling that there was a little sob somewhere about her, and that she would die rather than let it get into her voice. The old gentleman took off his hat.

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"My dear young lady," he said, "the apologies are all on my side. Accept ten thousand of them, I beg of you! I am delighted to make the acquaintance of Mrs. Grahame's daughter, under—any circumstances." (Here he evidently suppressed a chuckle, and Hildegarde knew it, and hated him.) "Permit me to introduce myself,—Colonel Ferrers.

"I have been annoyed lately," he added kindly, "by thieving boys, and, being near-sighted, did not distinguish between a persecutor and a protector of my birds." He bowed again. "And now I will continue my walk, merely remarking that I beg you to consider yourself entirely free of my grounds, in any and every part. I shall do myself the honour of calling on your mother very shortly. Good-morning, my dear Miss Grahame!" and, with another bow, Colonel Ferrers replaced his felt wide-awake, and strode off across the meadow, flourishing his stick, and indulging in the chuckle which he had so long suppressed.

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"Harry Monmouth!" he said to himself, as he switched the daisy-heads off. "So we have a fair tomboy for a neighbour. Well, it may be a good thing for Jack. I must take him over and introduce

him."

Now Hildegarde was not in the least a tomboy, as we know; and the intuitive knowledge that the old gentleman would think her one made her very angry indeed. She waited till he was out of sight, and then slid down the tree, without a second glance at the kingbird's nest, the innocent cause of all the trouble. She had meant to take one egg, to add to her collection; but she would not touch one now, if there were a thousand of them. She ran down the long sunny slope of the meadow, her cheeks glowing, her heart still beating angrily. She was going straight home, to tell her mother all about it, and how horrid Colonel Ferrers had been, and how she should never come downstairs when he came to the house—never! "under any circumstances!" How dared he make fun of her? She sat down on the stone wall to rest, and thought how her mother would hear the tale with sympathetic indignation. But somehow—how was it?—when she conjured up her mother's face, there was a twinkle in her eye. Mamma had such a fatal way of seeing the funny side of things. Suppose she should only laugh at this dreadful adventure! Perhaps—perhaps it was funny, from Colonel Ferrers's point of view.

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In short, by the time she reached home, Hildegarde had cooled off a good deal, and it was a modified version of the tragedy that Mrs. Grahame heard. She found this quite funny enough, however, and Hildegarde was almost, but not quite, ready to laugh with her.

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That evening, mother and daughter were sitting on the broad verandah as usual, playing Encyclopædics. This was a game of Mrs. Grahame's own invention, and a favourite resource with her and Hildegarde in darkling hours like this. Perhaps some of my readers may like to know how the game is played, and, as the Dodo says of the Caucus Race, "the best way to explain it is to play it."

They began with the letter "A," and had already been playing some time, turn and turn about.

"Aphrodite, goddess of Love and Beauty."

"Ahasuerus, king of Persia, B.C. something or other, afflicted with sleeplessness."

"Alfred the Great, unsuccessful tender of cakes."

"Æneas, pious; from the flames of Troy did on his back the old Anchises bear; also deserted Dido."

"Ananias, liar."

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"Anacreon, Greek poet."

"Allan-a-dale, minstrel and outlaw."

"Andromache, wife of Hector."

"Astyanax, son of the same."

"Oh—don't you think it's time to go on to B?" asked Hildegarde.

"I have several more A's," replied her mother.

"Well, my initials are not 'B. U.,'" said the girl, "but perhaps I can manage one or two more."

"B. U.?"

"Yes! Biographic Universelle, of course, dear. Artaxerxes, also king of Persia."

"Anne of Geierstein."

"Arabella Stuart."

"Ap Morgan, Ap Griffith, Ap Hugh, Ap Tudor, Ap Rice, quoth his roundelay."

"Oh! oh! that was one of my reserves. Azrael, the angel of death."

"Agamemnon, king of men."

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"Alecto, Fury."

"Agag, who came walking delicately."

"Addison, Joseph, writer."

"Antony, Mark, Roman general, lover of Cleopatra."

"Amlet, Prince of—"

"Hilda!" cried Mrs. Grahame. "For shame! It is certainly high time to go on to B, if you are going to behave in this way, and I shall put *e d* after it."

"Oh, no!" said Hildegarde, "I will be good. It isn't nine o'clock yet, I know. Buccleugh, Bold, Duke of, Warden here o' the Scottish side. I was determined to get him first."

"Balaam, prophet."

"Beatrice, in 'Much Ado about Nothing.'"

"Beatrix Esmond."

"Bruce, Robert, King of Scotland."

"Burns, Robert, King of Scottish poets."

"Oh! oh! well, I suppose he is!" Hilda admitted reluctantly. "But Sir Walter makes an admirable viceroy. I think—who is that? Mamma, there is some one coming up the steps." [91]

"Mrs. Grahame?" said a deep voice, as two shadowy forms emerged from the darkness. "I am delighted to meet you again. You remember Colonel Ferrers?"

"Perfectly!" said Mrs. Grahame, cordially, advancing and holding out her hand. "I am very glad to see you. Colonel Ferrers,—though I hardly do see you!" she added, laughing. "Hildegarde, here is Colonel Ferrers, whom you met this morning."

"Good evening!" said Hildegarde, thinking that mamma was very cruel.

"Delighted!" said Colonel Ferrers, bowing again; and he added, "May I be allowed to present my nephew? Mrs. Grahame, Miss Grahame, my nephew, John Ferrers."

A tall figure bowed awkwardly, and a voice murmured something which might have been a greeting in English, Choctaw, or pure Polynesian, as it was wholly unintelligible. [92]

"It is too pleasant an evening to spend in the house," said Mrs. Grahame. "I think you will find chairs, gentlemen, by a little judicious groping. Oh! I trust you are not hurt, Mr. Ferrers?" For Mr. Ferrers had tumbled over his chair, and was now sprawling at full length on the piazza. He gathered himself up again, apparently too much abashed to say a word.

"Oh! he's all right!" said Colonel Ferrers, laughing. "He's always tumbling about; just got his growth, you see, and hasn't learned what to do with it. Well, many things have happened since we met, Mrs. Grahame; we won't say how many years it is."

"Many things, indeed!" said Mrs. Grahame with a sigh.

"Yes! yes!" said Colonel Ferrers. "Poor Grahame! met him last year in town; never saw him looking better. Well, so it goes. Changing world, my dear Madame! Poor Aytoun, too! I miss him sadly. My only neighbour. We have been together a great deal since his sisters died. Yes! yes! very glad I was to hear that he had left the property to you. Not another soul to speak to in the neighbourhood." [93]

"Who lives in the large new house across the way?" asked Mrs. Grahame. "I know the name of the family is Loftus, but nothing more."

"Parcel of fools, I call 'em!" said Colonel Ferrers, contemptuously. "New people, with money. Loftus, sharp business man, wants to be a gentleman farmer. As much idea of farming as my stick has. Wife and daughters look like a parcel o' fools. Don't know 'em! don't want to know 'em!" Mrs. Grahame, finding this not an agreeable subject, turned the conversation upon old friends, and they were soon deep in matters of twenty years ago. [94]

Meanwhile Hildegarde and the bashful youth had sat in absolute silence. At first Hildegarde had been too much discomposed by her mother's allusion to the morning's adventure to speak, though she was able to see afterwards how much better it was to bring up the matter naturally, and then dismiss it as a thing of no consequence, as it was, than to let it hang, an unacknowledged cloud, in the background.

As the moments went on, however, she became conscious that it was her duty to entertain Mr. Ferrers. He evidently had no idea of saying anything; her mother and Colonel Ferrers had forgotten the presence of either of them, apparently. The silence became more and more awkward. What could she say to this gawky youth, whose face she could not even see? "What a lovely day it has been!" she finally remarked, and was startled by the sound of her own voice, though she was not usually shy in the least. [95]

"Yes," said Mr. Ferrers, "it has been a fine day."

Silence again. This would never do! "Do you play tennis?" she asked boldly.

"No—not much!" was the reply. "Doesn't pay, in hot weather."

This was not encouraging, but Hildegarde was fairly roused by this time, and had no idea of being beaten. "What *do* you do?" she said.

Mr. Ferrers was silent, as if considering.

"Oh—I don't know!" he said finally. "Nothing much. Poke about!" Then, after a pause, he added in explanation, "I don't live here. I only came a few days ago. I am to spend the summer with my uncle." Apparently this effort was too much for him, for he relapsed into silence, and Hildegarde could get nothing more save "Yes!" and "No!" out of him. But now Colonel Ferrers came to the rescue. [96]

"By the way, Mrs. Grahame," he said, "I think this boy must be a relation of yours, a Scotch cousin at least. His mother was a Grahame, daughter of Robert Grahame of Baltimore. His own name is John Grahame Ferrers."

"Is it possible?" cried Mrs. Grahame, greatly surprised. "If that is the case, he is much more than a Scotch cousin. Why, Robert Grahame was my dear husband's first cousin. Their fathers were brothers. Hugh often spoke of his cousin Robert, and regretted that they never met, as they were great friends in their boyhood. And this is his son! is it possible? My dear boy, I must shake hands with you again. You *are* a boy, aren't you, though you are so big?"

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"To be sure he is a boy!" said Colonel Ferrers, who was highly delighted with his discovery of a relationship. "Just eighteen—a mere snip of a boy! Going to college in the autumn."

"Hildegarde," continued Mrs. Grahame, "shake hands with your cousin John, and tell him how glad you are to find him."

Hildegarde held out her hand, and John Ferrers tried to find it, but found a hanging-basket instead, and knocked it over, sending a shower of damp earth over the other members of the party.

"I must take him home," exclaimed Colonel Ferrers, in mock despair, "or he will destroy the whole house. Miss Hildegarde," he added, in a very kind voice, "you probably thought me an ogre this morning. I am generally regarded as such. Fact is, you frightened me more than I frightened you. We are not used to seeing young ladies here who know how to climb trees. Harry Monmouth! Wish I could climb 'em myself as I used. Best fun in the world! Come, Jack, I must get you home before you do any more mischief. Good-night, Mrs. Grahame! I trust we shall meet often!"

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"I trust so, indeed!" said Mrs. Grahame heartily. "We shall count upon your being neighbourly, in the good old country sense; and as for John, he must do a cousin's duty by us, and shall in return receive the freedom of the house."

"Hum mum mum!" said John; at least, that is what it sounded like; on which his uncle seized him by the arm impatiently, and walked him off.

"Well, Mammina!" said Hildegarde, when the visitors were well out of hearing.

"Well, dear!" replied her mother placidly. "What a pleasant visit! The poor lad is very shy, isn't he? Could you make anything out of him?"

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"Why, Mammina, he is a perfect goose!" exclaimed Hildegarde, warmly. "I don't think it was a pleasant visit at all. As to making anything out of that—"

"Fair and softly!" said Mrs. Grahame quietly. "In the first place, we will not criticise the guests who have just left us, because that is not pretty-behaved, as auntie would say. And in the second place—your dear father was just eighteen when I first met him, Hildegarde; and he put his foot through the flounce of my gown, upset strawberries and cream into my lap, and sat down on my new ivory fan, all at one tea-party."

"Good-night, dear mamma!" said Hildegarde meekly.

"Good-night, my darling! and don't forget that barn-door rent in your corduroy skirt, when you get up in the morning."

CHAPTER V.

[100]

UNCLE AND NEPHEW.

COLONEL FERRERS and his nephew walked away together, the former with a quick, military stride, the latter shambling, as lads do whose legs have outgrown their understanding of them.

"Don't hunch, sir!" exclaimed the Colonel, throwing his broad shoulders back and his chin to the position of "eyes front." "Put your chin in and your chest out, and don't hunch! You have about as much carriage, my nephew Jack, as a rheumatic camel. Well!" (as poor Jack straightened his awkward length and tried to govern his prancing legs). "So Mrs. Grahame is a connection, after all; and a very charming woman, too. And how did you find the young lady, sir? Did she give you any points on tree-climbing? Ho! ho! I was wrong, though, about her being a tomboy. She hasn't the voice of one. Did you notice her voice, nephew? it is very sweet and melodious. It reminded me of—of a voice I remember."

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"I like her voice!" replied Jack Ferrers. By the way, his own voice was a very pleasant one, a well-bred and good-tempered voice. "I couldn't see her face very well. I can't talk to girls!" he added. "I don't know what to say to them. Why did you tell them about mother, Uncle Tom? There was no need of their knowing."

"Why did I tell them?" exclaimed Colonel Ferrers. "Harry Monmouth! I told them, you young noodle, because I chose to tell them, and because it was the truth, and a mighty lucky thing for you, too. What with your poor mother's dying young, and your father's astonishing and supernatural wrong-headedness, you have had no bringing up whatever, my poor fellow! Talk of your going to college next year! why, you don't know how to make a bow. I present you to two charming women, and you double yourself up as if you had been run through the body, and then

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stumble over your own legs and tumble over everything else. Shade of Chesterfield! How am I to take you about, if this is the way you behave?"

"It was dark," said poor Jack. "And—and I don't want to be taken about, uncle, thank you. Can't I just keep quiet while I am here, and not see people? I don't know how to talk, really I don't."

"Pooh! pooh! sir," roared the Colonel, smiting the earth with his stick. "Have the goodness to hold your tongue! You know how to talk nonsense, and I request you'll not do it to me. You are my brother's son, sir, and I shall make it my business to teach you to walk, and to talk, and to behave like a rational Christian, while you are under my roof. If your father had the smallest atom of common sense in his composition—" [103]

"Please don't say anything against father, Uncle Tom," cried the lad. "I can't stand that!" and one felt in the dark the fiery flush that made his cheeks tingle.

"Upon my soul!" cried Colonel Ferrers (who did not seem in the least angry), "you are the most astounding young rascal it has ever been my good fortune to meet. Are you aware, sir, that your father is my brother? that I first made the acquaintance of Raymond Ferrers when he was one hour old, a squeaking little scarlet wretch in a flannel blanket? Are you aware of this, pray?"

"I suppose I am," answered the lad. "But that doesn't make any difference. Nobody body must say anything against him, even if it is his own brother." [104]

"Who is saying anything against him?" demanded Colonel Ferrers, fiercely. "He is an angel, sir; every idiot knows that. A combination of angel and infant, Raymond Ferrers is, and always has been. But the combination does not qualify him for bringing up children. Probatum est! Here we are! Now let me see if you can open the gate without fumbling, sir. If there is one thing I *cannot* endure, it is fumbling."

Thus adjured, Jack Ferrers opened the heavy wooden gate, and the two passed through a garden which seemed, from the fragrance, to be full of roses. The old house frowned dark and gloomy, with only one light twinkling feebly in a lower window. When they had entered, and were standing in the pleasant library, book-lined from floor to ceiling, Colonel Ferrers turned suddenly to his nephew, who was in a brown study, and dealt him a blow on the shoulder which sent him staggering half-way across the room, unexpected as it was. [105]

"You're right to stand up for your father, my lad," he said, with gruff heartiness. "It was unnecessary in this case, for I would be cut into inch pieces and served up on toast if it would do my brother Raymond any good; but you are right all the same. If anybody else ever says he hasn't common sense, knock him down, do you hear? A blow from the shoulder, sir! that's the proper answer."

"Yes, uncle," said the boy demurely; but he looked up with a twinkle in his eye. "It's lucky for me that I *don't* have to knock you down, sir," he added. "You're awfully strong, aren't you? I wish I were!"

"You, sir!" rejoined the Colonel. "You have the frame of an ox, if you had any flesh to cover it. Exercise is what you need, Nephew Jack! Fencing is what you want, sir! Take that walking-stick! Harry Monmouth! I'll give you a lesson, now. On guard! So! defend yourself! Ha! humph!" The last exclamation was one of disgust, for at the Colonel's first thrust, Jack's stick flew out of his hand, and knocked over a porcelain vase, shattering it in pieces, Jack, meanwhile, standing rubbing his arm and looking very foolish. [106]

"Humph!" repeated Colonel Ferrers, looking rather disconcerted himself, and all the more fierce therefore. "That comes of trying to instruct a person who has not been taught to hold himself together. You are a milksop, my poor fellow! a sad milksop! but we are going to change all that. There! never mind about the pieces. Giuseppe will pick up the pieces. Get your supper, and then go to bed."

"I don't care about supper, thank you, uncle," said the lad. [107]

"Pooh! pooh! don't talk nonsense!" cried the Colonel. "You don't go to bed without supper."

He led the way into the dining-room, a long, low room, panelled with dark oak. Walls, table, sideboard, shone like mirrors, with the polish of many years. Over the sideboard was the head of a gigantic moose, with huge, spreading antlers. On the sideboard itself were some beautiful pieces of old silver, shining with the peculiar blue lustre that comes from long rubbing, and from that alone. A tray stood on the table, and on it was a pitcher of milk, two glasses, and a plate of very attractive-looking little cakes. The colonel filled Jack's glass, and stood by with grim determination till he had drunk every drop.

"Now, a cake, sir," he added, sipping his own glass leisurely. "A plummy cake, of Mrs. Beadle's best make. Down with it, I insist!" In the matter of the plum cake, little insistence was necessary, and between uncle and nephew both plate and pitcher were soon empty. [108]

"There," said the good Colonel, as they returned to the library, "now you have something to sleep on, my friend. No empty stomachs in this house, to distract people's brains and make mooncalves of them. Ten minutes' exercise with the Indian clubs—you have them in your room?—and then to bed. Hand me the 'Worthies of England,' will you? Bookcase on the right of the door, third shelf from the bottom, fifth book from the left. Thomas Fuller. Yes, thank you. Good-night,

my boy! don't forget the clubs, and *don't* poke your head forward like a ritualist parson, because you are not otherwise cut out for one."

Leaving his uncle comfortably established with his book and reading-lamp, Jack Ferrers took his way upstairs. It was not late, but he had already found out that his uncle had nothing to say to him or any one else after the frugal nine o'clock supper, and his own taste for solitude prompted him to seek his room. As he passed along a dark corridor, a gleam of light shot out from a half-open door.

"Are you awake, Biddy?" he asked.

"Yes, dear!" answered a kind, hearty voice. "Come in, Master Jack, if you've a mind."

The room was so bright that Jack screwed up his eyes for a moment. The lamp was bright, the carpet was bright, the curtains almost danced on the wall from their own gayety, while the coloured prints, in shining gilt frames, sang the whole gamut of colour up and down and round and round. But brighter than all else in the gay little room was the gay little woman who sat by the round table (which answered every purpose of a mirror), piecing a rainbow-coloured quilt. Her face was as round and rosy as a Gravenstein apple. She had bright yellow ribbons in her lace cap, and her gown was of the most wonderful merino that ever was seen, with palm-leaves three inches long curling on a crimson ground.

"How very bright you are in here, Biddy!" said Jack, sitting down on the floor, with his long legs curled under him. "You positively make my eyes ache."

"It's cheerful, dear," replied the good housekeeper. "I like to see things cheerful, that I do. Will you have a drop of shrub, Master Jack? there's some in the cupboard there, and 'twill warm you up, like, before going to bed."

Then, as Jack declined the shrub with thanks, she continued, "And so you have been to call on the ladies at Braeside, you and the Colonel. Ah! and very sweet ladies, I'm told."

"Very likely!" said Jack absently. "Do you mind if I pull the cat's tail, Biddy?"

He stretched out his hand toward a superb yellow Angora cat which lay curled up on a scarlet cushion, fast asleep.

"Oh! my dear!" cried Mrs. Beadle. "Don't you do it! He's old, and his temper not what it was. Poor old Sunshine! and why would you pull his tail, you naughty boy?"

"Oh! well—no matter!" said Jack. "There's a fugue—that's a piece of music, Biddy—that I am practising, called the 'Cat's Fugue,' and I thought I would see if it really sounded like a cat, that's all."

"Indeed, that's not such music as I should like your uncle to hear!" exclaimed Mrs. Beadle. "And what did you say to the young lady, Master Jack?" she added, as she placed a scarlet block against a purple one. "I'm glad enough you've found some young company, to make you gay, like. You're too quiet for a young lad, that you are."

"Oh, bother!" responded Jack, shaking his shoulders. "Tell me about my father, Biddy. I don't believe he liked g—company, any better than I do. What was he like when he was a boy?"

"An angel!" said Mrs. Beadle fervently. "An angel with his head in his pocket; that is what Mr. Raymond was like."

"Uncle Tom called him an angel, too!" said the lad. "Of course he is; a combination of angel and—why did you say 'with his head in his pocket,' Biddy?"

"Well, dear, it wasn't on his shoulders," replied the housekeeper. "He was in a dream, like, all the time; oh, much worse than you are yourself, Master Jack."

"Thank you!" muttered Jack.

"And forgetful! well! well! he needed to be tied to some one, Mr. Raymond did. To see him come in for his luncheon, and then forget all about it, and stand with a book in his hand, reading as if there was nothing else in the world. And then Mr. Tom—dear! dear! would put his head down and run and butt him right in the stomach, and down they would go together and roll over and over; great big lads, like you, sir, and their father would take the dog-whip and thrash 'em till they got up. 'Twas all in sport like, d'ye see; but Mr. Raymond never let go his book, only beat Mr. Tom with it. Dear! dear! such lads!"

"Tell me about his running away," said Jack.

"After the fiddler, do you mean, dear? That was when he was a little lad. Always mad after music he was, and playing on anything he could get hold of, and singing like a serup, that boy. So one day there came along an Italian, with a fiddle that he played on, and a little boy along with him, that had a fiddle, too. Well, and if Mr. Raymond didn't persuade that boy to change clothes with him, and he to stay here and Mr. Raymond to go with the fiddler and learn to play. Of course the man was a scamp, and had no business; and Mr. Raymond gave him his gold piece to take him, and all! But when the old Squire—that's your grandfather, dear!—when he came in and found that little black-eyed fellow dressed in his son's clothes, and crying with fright, and not a word of English—well, he was neither to hold nor to bind, as the saying is. Luckily Mrs. Ferrers—

that's your grandmother, dear! she came in before the child was frightened into a fit, though very near it; and she spoke the language, and with her quiet ways she got the child quiet, and he told her all about it, and how the fiddler beat him, and showed the great bruises. And when she told the Squire, he got black in the face, like he used, and took his dog-whip and rode off on his big grey horse like mad; and when he came back with Mr. Raymond in front of him, the whip was all in pieces, and Mr. Raymond crying and holding the little fiddle tight. And the Italian boy stayed, and the Squire made a man of him, from being a Papist outlandish-man. And that's all the story, Master Jack." [115]

"And he is Giuseppe?" asked Jack.

"And he is Jew Seppy," Mrs. Beadle assented. "Though it seems a hard name to give him, and no Jew blood in him that any one can prove, only his eyes being black. But he won't hear to its being shortened. And now it is getting to be night-cap time, Master Jack," said the good woman, beginning to fold up her work, "and I hope you are going to bed, too, like a good young gentleman. But if you don't, you'll shut the door careful, won't you dear?" [116]

"Never fear," said the boy, gathering himself up from the floor. "I'm sleepy to-night, anyhow; I may go straight to bed. Good-night, Biddy. You're quite sure you like me to call you 'Biddy'?"

"My dear, it makes me feel five-and-twenty years younger!" said the good woman; "and I seem to see your dear father, coming in with his curls a-shaking, calling his Biddy. Ah, well! Good-night, Master Jack, dear! Don't forget to look in when you go by."

"Good-night, Biddy!"

The lad went off with his candle, fairly stumbling along the corridor from sheer sleepiness; but when he reached his own room, which was flooded with moonlight, the drowsiness seemed to take wings and disappear. He sat down by the open window and looked out. Below lay the garden, all black and silver in the intense white light. The smell of the roses came up to him, exquisitely sweet. He leaned his head against the window-frame, and felt as if he were floating away on the buoyant fragrance—far, far away, to the South, where his home was, and where the roses were in bloom so long that it seemed as if there were always roses. [117]

The silver-lit garden vanished from his sight, and he saw instead a long, low room, half garret, half workshop, where a man stood beside a long table, busily at work with some fine tools. The spare, stooping figure, the long, delicate hands, the features carved as if in ivory, the blue, near-sighted eyes peering anxiously at the work in his hands,—all these were as actually present to the boy as if he could put out his own hand and touch them. It was with a start that he came back to the world of tangible surroundings, as a sudden breath of wind waved the trees below him, and sent whisperings of leaf and blossom through his room. [118]

"Daddy!" he said half to himself; and he brushed away something which had no possible place in the eyes of a youth who was to go to college next year. Giving himself a violent shake, Jack Ferrers rose, and, going to a cupboard, took out with great care a long, black, oblong box. This he deposited on the bed; then took off his boots and put on a pair of soft felt slippers. His coat, too, was taken off; and then, holding the black box in his arms, as if it were a particularly delicate baby, he left the room, and softly made his way to the stairs which led to the attic. There was a door at the foot of the stairs, which he opened noiselessly, and then he stopped to listen. All was still. He must have been sitting for some time at the window, for the light in the hall was extinguished, which was a sign that his uncle had gone to bed. In fact, as he listened intently, his ear caught a faint, rhythmic sound, rising and falling at regular intervals, like the distant murmur of surf on the sea-shore; his uncle was asleep. Closing the door softly after him, and clasping the black box firmly, Jack climbed the attic stairs and disappeared in the darkness. [119]

CHAPTER VI.

 [120]

COUSIN JACK.

THE next day, as Hildegarde was arranging flowers on the piazza, with a table before her covered with bowls and vases, and a great basket of many-coloured blossoms beside her, Jack Ferrers appeared, evidently in the depths of misery, carrying a huge bunch of roses. He stumbled while coming up the steps, and dropped half the roses, which increased his discomfort so much that Hildegarde was really sorry for him. Moreover, when seen by daylight, he was a very pleasant-looking fellow, with curly brown hair and great honest blue eyes very wide open. He was over six feet tall, and as awkward as a human being could be, but of course he could not help that. [123]

"Good-morning, Cousin Jack!" said Hildegarde pleasantly. "What lovely roses! Are they from Colonel Ferrers's garden?"

"Yes," replied Jack Ferrers. "Uncle sends them with his compliments. I'm sorry I knocked over the basket last night. Good-by."

He was about to fling himself down the steps again, but Hildegarde, controlling her desire to laugh, said cordially: "Oh, don't go! Sit down a moment, and tell me the names of some of these beauties."

"Thank you!" muttered the youth, blushing redder than the roses. "I—I think I must go back."

"Are you so very busy?" asked Hildegarde innocently. "I thought this was your vacation. What have you to do?"

"Oh—nothing!" said the lad awkwardly. "Nothing in particular."

"Then sit down," said Hildegarde decidedly.

And Jack Ferrers sat down. A pause followed. Then Hildegarde said in a matter-of-fact tone, "You have no sisters, have you, Cousin Jack?"

"No," was the reply. "How did you know?"

"Because you are so shy," said Hildegarde, smiling. "Boys who have no sisters are apt to regard girls as a kind of griffin. There used to be a boy at dancing-school, two or three years ago, who was so shy it was really painful to dance with him at first, but he got over it after a while. And it was all because he had no sisters."

"Did you like dancing-school?" Jack inquired, venturing to look up at her shyly.

"Yes, very much indeed!" replied Hildegarde. "Didn't you?"

"No; hated it."

Then they both laughed a little, and after that things went a good deal better. Jack came up on the piazza (he had been sitting on the steps, shuffling his feet in a most distressing manner), and helped to clip the long stems of the roses, and pulled off superfluous leaves. It appeared that he did not care much for flowers, though he admitted that roses were "pretty." He did not care for fishing or shooting; tennis had made his head ache ever since he began to grow so fast. Did he like walking? Pretty well, when it wasn't too hot. Reading? Well enough, when the book wasn't stupid.

"Wot are we to do with this 'ere 'opeless chap?" said Hildegarde to herself, quoting from "Pinafore."

As a last resort she asked if he were fond of music. Instantly his face lighted up.

"Awfully fond of it," he said with animation, and the embarrassed wrinkle disappeared as if by magic from between his eyebrows.

"Oh, I am so glad!" cried Hildegarde. "I haven't had any music the last two summers. I had everything else that was nice, but still I missed it, of course. Do you play, or sing?"

"A little of both," said Jack modestly.

"Oh, how delightful! We must make music together for mamma sometimes. My own piano has not come yet, but there is the dearest old funny thing here which belonged to the Misses Aytoun."

"Uncle Tom has no piano," said Jack, "but I have my violin, so I don't mind."

"Oh, a violin!" said Hildegarde, opening her eyes wide. "Have you been studying it long?"

"Ever since I was six years old," was the reply. "My mother would not let me begin earlier, though my father said that as soon as I could hold a knife and fork I could hold a bow. He's a little cracked about violins, my father. He makes them, you know."

"I *don't* know," cried Hildegarde. "Tell me about it; how very interesting!"

"Well—I don't mean that it's his business," said Jack, who seemed to have forgotten his shyness entirely; "he's a lawyer, you know. But it's the only thing he really cares about. He has a workshop, and he has made—oh, ever so many violins! He went to Cremona once, and spent a year there, poking about, and he found an old church that was going to be repaired, and bought the sounding-board. Oh, it must have been a couple of hundred years old. Then he moused about more and found an old fellow, a descendant of one of Amati's workmen, and I believe he would have bought him, too, if he could; but, anyhow, they were great chums, and he taught my father all kinds of tricks. When he came home he made this violin out of a piece of the old sounding-board, and gave it to me on my birthday. It's—oh, it's no end, you know! And he made another for himself, and we play together. Do you know the Mozart Concerto in F, for two violins? It begins with an allegro."

And being fairly mounted on his hobby, Jack Ferrers pranced about on it as if he had done nothing but talk to Hildegarde all his life. Hildegarde, meanwhile, listened with a mixture of surprise, amusement, and respect. He did not look in the least like a musical genius, this long-



"JACK FERRERS APPEARED CARRYING A HUGE BUNCH OF ROSES."

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legged, curly-haired lad, with his blue eyes and his simple, honest face. She thought of the lion front of Beethoven, and the brilliant, exquisite beauty of Mozart, and tried to imagine honest Jack standing between them, and almost laughed in the midst of an animated description of the andante movement. Then she realised that he was talking extremely well, and talking a great deal over her head.

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"I am afraid you will find me very ignorant," she said meekly, when her cousin paused, a little out of breath, but with glowing cheeks and sparkling eyes. "I have heard a great deal of music, of course, and I love it dearly; but I don't know about it as you do, not a bit. I play the piano a little, and I sing, just simple old songs, you know, and that is all."

Hildegarde might have added that she had a remarkably sweet voice, and sang with taste and feeling, but that her cousin must find out for himself; besides, she was really over-awed by this superior knowledge in one whom the night before she had been inclined to set down as a booby. "Shall I ever learn," she thought remorsefully, "not to make these ridiculous judgments of people, before I know anything about them?"

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Just then Mrs. Grahame came out and asked her new-found nephew, as she called him, to stay to dinner; but at sight of her the lad's shyness returned in full force. His animation died away; he hung his head, and muttered that he "couldn't possibly, thank you! Uncle Tom—stayed too long already. Good-by!" and, without even a farewell glance at Hildegarde, went down all the steps at once with a breakneck plunge, and disappeared.

"Tragedy of the Gorgon's Head! Medusa, Mrs. Grahame," said that lady, laughing softly. "Has my hair turned to snakes, Hilda, or what is there so frightful in my appearance? I heard your voices sounding so merrily I thought the ice was completely broken."

"Oh, I think it is," said Hildegarde. "You came upon him suddenly, that was all."

"Next time," said her mother, "I will appear gradually, like the Cheshire Cat, beginning with the grin."

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Hildegarde laughed, and went to pin a red rose on her mother's dress. Then she said: "I was wrong, Mammina, and you were right, as usual. It is a tiresome way you have, so monotonous! But really he is a very nice boy, and he knows, oh! ever so much about music. He must be quite a wonder." And she told her mother about the violin, and all the rest of it.

Mrs. Grahame agreed with her that it would be delightful to have some musical evenings, and Hildegarde resolved to practise two hours a day regularly.

"But there are so few hours in the day!" she complained. "I thought getting up at seven would give me—oh! ever so much time, and I have none at all. Here is the morning nearly gone, and we have had no reading, not a word." And she looked injured.

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"There is an hour before dinner," said Mrs. Grahame, "and the 'Makers of Florence' is lying on my table at this minute. Come up, and I will read while you—need I specify the occupation?"

"You need not," said Hildegarde. "I really did mean to mend it this morning, love, but things happened. I had to sew on boot-buttons before breakfast, three of them, and then Janet wanted me to show her about something. But now I will really be industrious."

This was destined to be a day of visits. In the afternoon Mrs. Loftus and her daughter called, driving up in great state, with prancing horses and clinking harness. Hildegarde, who was in her own room, meditated a plunge down her private staircase and an escape by way of the back door, but decided that it would be base to desert her mother; so she smoothed her waving hair, inspected her gown to make sure that it was spotless, and came down into the parlour.

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Mrs. Loftus was a very large lady, with a very red face, who talked volubly about "our place," "our horses," "our hot-houses," etc., etc. Miss Loftus, whose name was Leonie, was small and rather pretty, though she did not look altogether amiable. She was inclined to patronise Hildegarde, but that young person did not take kindly to patronage, and was a little stately, though very polite, in her manner.

"Yes, it is pretty about here," said Miss Loftus, "though one tires of it very quickly. We vegetate here for three months every summer; it's papa's" (she pronounced it "puppa") "whim, you see. How long a season do you make?"

"None at all," said Hildegarde quietly. "We are going to live here."

Miss Loftus raised her eyebrows. "Oh! you can hardly do that, I should think!" she said with a superior smile. "A few months will probably change your views entirely. There is no life here, absolutely none."

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"Indeed!" said Hildegarde. "I thought it was a very prosperous neighbourhood. All the farms look thrifty and well cared for; the crops are alive, at least."

"Oh, farmers and crops!" said Miss Loftus. "Very likely. I meant social life."

"I don't like social life," said Hildegarde.

This was not strictly true, but she could not help saying it, as she told her mother afterward.

Miss Loftus passed over the remark with another smile, which made our heroine want to pinch her, and added, "You must consider us your only neighbours, as indeed we really are."

"Yes, indeed!" said Mrs. Loftus, who was now rising ponderously to depart. "We shall hope to see you often at The Poplars, Mrs. Grahame. There is not another house within five miles where one can visit. Of course I don't include that old bear, Colonel Ferrers, who never speaks a civil word to any one."

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Hildegarde flushed and looked at her mother, but Mrs. Grahame said very quietly, "I have known Colonel Ferrers for many years. He was a friend of my husband's."

"Oh, I beg your pardon!" said Mrs. Loftus, looking scared. "I had no idea—I never heard of *any one* knowing Colonel Ferrers. Come, Leonie, we must be going."

They departed, first engaging Hildegarde, rather against her will, to lunch with them the following Friday; and the grand equipage rolled clinking and jingling away.

"We seem to have fallen upon a Montague and Capulet neighbourhood," said Mrs. Grahame, smiling, as she turned to go upstairs.

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"Yes, indeed!" said Hildegarde. "Shall we be Tybalts or Mercutios?"

"Neither, I hope," said her mother, "as both were run through the body. Of course, however, there is no question as to which neighbour we shall find most congenial. And now, child, get your hat, and let us take a good walk, to drive the cobwebs out of our brains."

"Have with you!" said Hildegarde, running lightly up the stairs; "only, darling, *don't* be so—so incongruous as to call Mrs. Loftus a cobweb!"

CHAPTER VII.

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MISS AGATHA'S CABINET.

"MAMMINA! I have found them! I have found them!" cried Hildegarde, rushing like a whirlwind into her mother's room, and waving something over her head.

"What have you found, darling?" asked Mrs. Grahame, looking up from her writing. "Not your wits, for example? I should be so glad!"

"One may not shake one's mother," said Hildegarde, "but beware, lest you 'rouse an Indian's indomitable nature.' I have found the keys of Miss Agatha's cabinet."

"Really!" cried Mrs. Grahame, laying down her pen. "Are you sure? where were they?"

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"In that old secretary in Uncle Aytoun's room," said Hildegarde. "You know you said I might rummage in it some day, and this rainy afternoon seemed to be the very time. They were in a little drawer, all by themselves; and see, they are marked, 'Keys of the cabinet in my sister Agatha's room, containing miniatures, etc.'"

"This is indeed a discovery!" said Mrs. Grahame, rising. "We will examine the cabinet together, dear; as you say, it is just the day for it."

Hildegarde led the way, dancing with excitement and pleasure; her mother followed more slowly. There might be sadness, she thought, as well as pleasure, in looking over the relics of a family which had died out, leaving none of the name, so far as she knew, in this country at least. Miss Agatha's room did not look very cheerful in the grey light of a wet day. The prevailing tint of walls and ceiling was a greyish yellow; the faded curtains were held back by faded ribbons; the furniture was angular and high-shouldered. On the wall was a coloured print of "London in 1802," from which the metropolis would seem to have been a singular place. The only interesting feature in the room was the cabinet which they had come to explore, and this was really a beautiful piece of furniture. It stood seven feet high at least, and was apparently of solid ebony, inlaid with yellow ivory in curious spiral patterns. In the centre was a small door, almost entirely covered with the ivory tracery; above, below, and around were drawers, large and small, deep and shallow, a very wilderness of drawers. All had silver keyholes of curious pattern, and all were fast locked, a fact which had seriously interfered with Hildegarde's peace of mind ever since they came to the house. Now, however, that she actually stood before it with the "Open sesame," this bunch of quaint silver keys in her hand, she shrank back, and felt shy and afraid.

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"You must open it, mamma," she said. "I dare not."

Mrs. Grahame fitted a key to one of the larger drawers, and opened it. A faint perfume floated out, old roses and lavender, laid away one knows not how many years. Under folds of silver paper lay some damask towels, fine and thick and smooth, but yellow with age. They were tied with a lilac ribbon, and on the ribbon was pinned a piece of paper, covered with writing in a fine, cramped hand.

"Lift them out carefully, dear," said Mrs. Grahame, "and read the label."

Hildegarde complied, and read aloud: "These towels were spun and woven by my grandmother Grahame in Scotland, before she came to this country. Her maiden name was Annot McIntosh." [141]

"What beautiful linen!" said Mrs. Grahame, smoothing the glossy folds with the hand of a housewife. "I always wished I had learned to spin and weave. Linen that one buys has no feeling in it. Lay it back reverently, degenerate daughter of the nineteenth century, and your degenerate mother will open another drawer."

The next drawer contained several sets of baby-clothes, at sight of which Hildegarde opened her eyes very wide indeed. Her mother was an exquisite needle-woman, so was her cousin Wealthy Bond, and she herself had no need to be ashamed of the "fine seam" she could sew; but never had she seen such needlework as this: tiny caps, wrought so thick with flower and leaf that no spot of the plain linen could be seen; robes of finest lawn, with wonderful embroidered fronts; shawls of silk flannel, with deep borders of heavy "laid work." One robe was so beautiful that both Hildegarde and her mother cried over it, and took it up to examine it more carefully. On the breast was pinned a piece of paper, with an inscription in the same delicate hand: "Hester's christening-robe. We think it was in consequence of this fine work that our dear mother lost her eyesight." [142]

"I should think it highly probable," said Mrs. Grahame, laying the exquisite monument of folly back in the drawer. "I did not know that old Madam Aytoun was blind. What is written on that tiny cap, in the corner there? It must be a doll's cap; no baby could be so small."

Hildegarde read the inscription: "Worn by our uncle Hesketh, who weighed two pounds at birth. He grew to be six feet and six inches in height, and weighed three hundred pounds." [143]

"What a wonderful person Miss Agatha must have been!" said Hildegarde. "Who else would think of all these pleasant bits of information? And now for the next drawer!"

She opened it, and gave a little shriek of delight. Here truly were beautiful things, such as neither she nor her mother had ever seen before: three short aprons of white silk, trimmed with deep gold lace, and covered with silk-embroidered flowers of richest hues, one with tulips, another with roses, a third with carnations. Folds of tissue paper separated them from each other, and the legend told that they had been worn by "our great-grandmother Ponsonby, when she was Maid of Honour to Queen Caroline. She was an Englishwoman."

Then came a tippet of white marabou feathers, buttoned into a silk case, and smelling faintly of camphor; a gown of rose-coloured satin, brocaded with green, and one of ruby-coloured velvet, which bore the inscription: "This was the gown on which our great-grandmother Ponsonby wore the diamond buttons which have since been divided among her descendants. A sinful waste of money which might have been put to good purpose." [144]

"How *very* frivolous Great-grandmother Ponsonby must have been!" said Hildegarde. "I think Miss Agatha is rather hard on her, though. Perhaps the buttons were wedding presents. I wonder what has become of them all! See, Mammina, here are her red shoes—just like Beatrix Esmond's, aren't they? My foot would not begin to go into them. And here—oh! the lace! the lace!" For there was a whole drawer full of lace, all in little bundles neatly tied up and marked. Here was Madam Aytoun's wedding veil, Grandmother This One's Mechlin tabs, Aunt That One's Venetian flounces. It would take pages to describe all the laces, and the pleasure that mother and daughter had in examining them. What woman or girl does not love lace? Finally, in a corner of the drawer, was a morocco box containing a key, whose ivory label said: "Central compartment. Miniatures." [145]

"This will be the best of all!" cried Hildegarde, eagerly. "Perhaps we shall find Great-grandmother Ponsonby herself. Who knows?"

The ivory door flew open as the key turned, and revealed a space set round with tiny drawers. Each drawer contained one or more miniatures, in cases of red or green morocco, and Hildegarde and her mother examined them with delight. Here, to be sure, was Great-grandmother Ponsonby; in fact, she appeared twice: first, as a splendid young matron, clad in the identical ruby velvet with the diamond buttons, her hair powdered high and adorned with feathers; and, again, as a not less superb old lady, with folds of snowy muslin under her chin, and keen dark eyes flashing from under her white curls, and a wonderful cap. Here was Grandfather Aytoun, first as a handsome boy, with great dark eyes, and a parrot on his hand, then as a somewhat choleric-looking gentleman with a great fur collar. [146]

"How they do change!" said Hildegarde. "I am not sure that I like to see two of the same person. Let me see, now! He married—"

"The daughter of Great-grandmother Ponsonby," replied Mrs. Grahame. "Here she is! Caroline Regina Ponsonby, *æt.* 16. Named after the royal patroness, you see. What a sweet, gentle-looking girl! I fear her magnificent mother and her decided-looking husband may have been too much for her, for I see she died at twenty-three." [147]

"Oh! and he married again!" cried Hildegarde, opening another case. "See here! Selina Euphemia McKenzie, second wife of John Aytoun. Oh! and here is a slip of paper inside the frame.

"Sweet flower, that faded soon
In Rapture's fervid noon.

'J. A.'

"Dear me! he must have written it himself!" she added. "It is not like Miss Agatha's handwriting. Why, she only lived three months, poor dear! He makes very sure about the rapture, doesn't he?"

"I think he does," said her mother, smiling, "considering that he married a third time, inside a year from the fading of the sweet flower. Look at this aquiline dame, with the remarkably firm mouth, and the bird of paradise in her turban. 'Adelaide McLeod, third wife of John Aytoun. She survived him.' I'll warrant she did!" said Mrs. Grahame. "She carries conquest in her face. All the children were of the first marriage, and I fear she was not a gentle stepmother. I wonder who this may be!" She took up a heavy bracelet of dark hair, with a small miniature set in the clasp. "What a pretty, pretty child! Good Miss Agatha has surely not left us in the dark concerning him. 'Little John Hesketh, 1804.' That is all."

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"Why Hesketh?" asked Hildegarde. "I have never heard of any Heskeths."

Mrs. Grahame was about to plunge into genealogical depths, when Hildegarde, who had been opening a case of purple morocco, carefully secured with silver clasps, gave an exclamation of pleasure.

"Hester!" she cried. "This is Hester, I know."

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Her mother looked, and nodded; and they both gazed in silence at the lovely face, with its earnest grey eyes.

"The dear!" murmured Hildegarde. "How I should have loved her! I am sure we should have liked the same things. I wish she had not died."

"You must remember that she would be a dear old lady now, were she alive, and not a young lassie. What does the slip say, darling? Miss Agatha's hand is rather trying for my eyes."

"Our dearest Hester," Hildegarde read. "A duplicate of the one painted for Robert Ferrers. Robert Ferrers!" she repeated thoughtfully. "Is that Colonel Ferrers? and do you suppose—"

At this moment came a knock at the door, and Janet informed them that Mrs. Lankton was in the hall, and would like to speak to one of the ladies.

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"I will go," said Hildegarde, laying down the miniature reluctantly.

"We will both go," said her mother. "The poor old dame! We have neglected her all these days."

They locked the drawer of the treasure-cabinet, and Hildegarde ran to put the precious keys in a safe place, while her mother went directly downstairs. By the time Hildegarde appeared, Mrs. Lankton was launched on the full tide of her woes, and was sailing along with a good breeze.

"And it's comin' in, Mis' Grahame—I'd say like a house afire, if 'twa'n't that 'twas wet. Dreepin' all down the chimbley, and runnin' over the floor in streams. I stepped into a pool o' water with my bar' feet, gittin' out o' bed; likely I caught my death, but it's no great matter. Ah! Mis' Grahame, I've seen trouble all my life. Mr. Aytoun, he was like a father to me. He wouldn't never ha' let me go bar'foot in water if he'd ben alive. I've ben a hard-workin' woman all my life, and he knowed it. I hope your own health is good, dear?"

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"What can I do for you, Mrs. Lankton?" asked Mrs. Grahame, kindly, as a moment's pause gave her a chance to get in a word. "Does the roof need shingling?"

"Mr. Aytoun was goin' to have it shingled for me last Janooary," said Mrs. Lankton, with a sigh that was almost a groan; "and he was called on to die in Febooary. Jest afore he passed away, he was tryin' dretful hard to say somethin', and I ain't no manner o' doubt myself but what 'twas 'Shingle!' He had it on his mind; they needn't tell me. But nobody seemed to feel a call after he was gone. Ah, dear me! You don't know nothin' about it, Mis' Grahame. You ain't never stepped bar'foot out o' your bed into a pool o' water, and you all doubled up with neurology in your j'intis. Ah, well, 'twon't be long now that I shall trouble anybody."

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"Which is your house, Mrs. Lankton?" asked Mrs. Grahame. "I will try to have something done about the roof at once."

"I know!" said Hildegarde, quickly. "It is a brown cottage with a green door."

"See how she knows!" exclaimed Mrs. Lankton, with a sad smile. "Ain't that thoughtful? Ah! she'll be a comfit to you, Mis' Grahame, if you've luck to raise her, but there's no knowin'. Don't you set your heart on it, that's all. Ah! I know what trouble is."

"Don't you think I am 'raised' already, Mrs. Lankton?" Hilda asked, smiling down on the weazened face that did not reach to her shoulder.

"So fur ye be, dear!" replied the widow, with a doleful shake of the head. "So fur ye be, but there's no knowin'. My Phrony was jest like you, hearty and stout, and she's gone. Ah! dear me! She had a store tooth, where she knocked out one of hers, slidin', and she swallowed it one night, and she never got over it. Lodged on her liver, the doctor said. He went down and tried to fetch it up, but 'twa'n't no use. She was fleshy, same as you be. Yes, gals is hard to raise."

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At this, Hildegarde retreated suddenly into the parlour, and Mrs. Grahame, in a voice which shook a little, expressed proper regret and sympathy, and repeated that she would have the roof

attended to.

"And now," she added, "go into the kitchen, and auntie shall give you a cup of hot tea. You must dry your feet, too, before you go out again."

"The Lord'll reward you, dear!" said Mrs. Lankton, turning with a faint gleam of cheerfulness toward the kitchen door. "It ain't long before I shall go the way of all, but it doos seem as if I mought go dry, 'stead o' dreepin'. But *you'll* be rewarded, Mis' Grahame. I felt as if you'd be a mother to me, soon as I sot eyes on ye. *Good-mornin'*, dear!" and with a groan that ended in a half-chuckle, she disappeared. [154]

CHAPTER VIII. [155]

THE POPLARS.

PUNCTUALLY at half-past one on Friday, Hildegarde walked up the avenue which led to "The Poplars." It was a broad avenue, and the steps to which it led were broad, and the whole house had an air of being spread out. "But Mrs. Loftus needs a good deal of room!" said Hildegarde to herself, and then cuffed herself mentally for wickedness.

Very fair and sweet she looked, our Hildegarde, in her white serge gown, with the pretty hat of white "chiffon" which "Mamma" had made only the evening before. Standing on the verandah, with eyes and cheeks brilliant from walking, she met the entire approval of a young gentleman who was reclining behind the hedge. He was a *very* young gentleman. He wore corduroy knickerbockers, and he was lying flat on his stomach, with his heels in the air, sucking a large bull's-eye. The sudden apparition of a tall maiden in white, with shining eyes, nearly caused him to swallow the bull's-eye, but he recovered himself, and gazed steadfastly at her. When the door opened to admit her, the young gentleman sighed, and considered that it was not so fine a day as he had thought it. "She is a beautiful girl!" he said to himself with fervour; "she is a Purple Maid!" and then he rolled over on his back, to see if the bull's-eye would taste as good in that position. [156]

Hildegarde, meanwhile, unconscious of the approving scrutiny of the infant connoisseur, was ushered by a stately butler through room after room, until she came to one where Mrs. and Miss Loftus were waiting to receive her. They were both very cordial, one in a ponderous, the other in an airily patronising way. [157]

"But I did not hear you drive up," said Mrs. Loftus, "and we have been listening every moment; for I said to Leonie, 'Suppose she should not come, after all!' And so you must have driven up very quietly, you see."

"I walked," said Hildegarde, smiling; "so there were no wheels to hear, Mrs. Loftus."

"Walked! Is it possible?" cried Mrs. Loftus, while her daughter raised her eyebrows and regarded Hildegarde with languid curiosity. "My dear, you must be terribly heated. Let me ring for some Florida water. No, I insist!" as Hildegarde made a gesture of protest. "It is *so* dangerous to walk in the heat of the day. The brain, you know, becomes heated, and it does something to the spinal marrow. Do you feel any dizziness? Really, the best thing would be for you to lie down at once for half an hour. I will darken the room, and—" [158]

"Nonsense, mamma!" said Miss Loftus, "I don't believe Miss Grahame wants to lie down."

"Oh, no, indeed!" cried Hildegarde, thankful for the interruption. "I am used to walking, you know, Mrs. Loftus. I always walk, everywhere. I like it very much better than driving; besides," she added, "we have no horses, so I should have to walk in any case."

"I think it so dangerous!" said Mrs. Loftus, with a compassionate shake of the head. "In the heat of the day, as I said, the spinal marrow; so important, my dear! and towards evening there is a chill in the air, malaria, all kinds of dreadful things. I shall make a point of picking you up whenever I am driving by—I drive by nearly every day—and taking you out." [159]

"Oh—thank you!" cried poor Hildegarde, an abyss opening at her feet. "You are very kind, but I could not! I am so busy—and walking is my delight."

The announcement of lunch created a diversion, to the great relief of our heroine. Mr. Loftus appeared, a small, shrivelled man, with sharp eyes, whose idea of making himself agreeable was to criticise each article of food as it came on the table.

"Very weak bouillon, Mrs. Loftus" (he called it "bullion"). "Very weak! greasy, too! Not fit to put on the table. What's this? chicken? Fowl, I should say! Rooster, Mrs. L.! Is this your twelve-dollar cook? Not a thing Miss Grahame can eat! She'll go and tell old Ferrers how we gave her roast rooster, see if she don't! I hear you're very thick with old Ferrers, Miss Grahame. Old Grizzly Bruin, I call him. Good name, too! he! he!" [160]

Hildegarde blushed scarlet, and wondered what her mother would say in her place. All she could do was to murmur that the chicken was very nice indeed, and to hope that she did not show more of her disgust than was proper. The luncheon was very fine, in spite of Mr. Loftus's depreciation; and when it came to the dessert, he changed his tune, and descanted on the

qualities of "my peaches," "my nectarines," and "my gardener."

"You don't eat enough, Miss Grahame!" was his comment. "No need to stint yourself here; plenty for all, and more where that came from."

But here Miss Loftus came to the rescue, and with a "Don't be tiresome, puppa!" changed the conversation, and began to talk of the Worth gowns she had seen in New York, on her last visit.

"Which do you admire most, Worth or Felix?" she asked, after a graphic description of some marvellous gown which fitted the fortunate owner "as if she had been poured into it. Absolutely poured, Miss Grahame!" [161]

"I—I really don't know," Hildegarde confessed meekly. "I never can tell one dressmaker's style from another. If a gown is pretty, that is all I think about it."

"Oh! if you have never studied these things, of course!" said the fair Leonie indulgently. "I went to Madame Vivien's school, you see, and we had a regular hour for studying fashions. I can tell a Worth or a Felix or a Donovan gown as far as I can see it."

"Did you like Madame Vivien's school?" asked Hildegarde.

"She ought to!" exclaimed Mr. Loftus. "It cost enough, I can tell you."

"Oh, it is the best school in the city, of course," said Leonie complacently. "We had a very good time, a set of us that were there. They called us the Highflyers, and I suppose we had rather top-lofty notions. Anyway, we were Madame's favourites, because we had *the air*, she always said. She couldn't endure a dowdy girl, and she dressed beautifully herself. There were two or three girls that were regular digs, with their noses always in their books, and Madame couldn't bear them. 'Miss Antrim,' she was always saving to one of them, 'it is true that you know your lesson, but your gown is buttoned awry, and it fits as if the miller had made it.' He! he!" [162]

"And—and did you care for study?" Hildegarde asked, mentally sympathising with Miss Antrim, though conscious that she would never have been allowed to go to school with a gown buttoned awry.

"Oh! I liked French," said Miss Loftus, "and history pretty well, when it wasn't too poky. But you didn't have to study at Madame Vivien's unless you wanted to." [163]

"What Leonie went most for was manners," explained Mrs. Loftus, taking a large mouthful of mayonnaise, and continuing her remarks while eating it. "Elegant manners they teach at Madame Vivien's."

"How to enter a room well,"—Leonie enumerated the points on her taper fingers,—"how to salute and take leave of a hostess, how to order a dinner,—those were some of the most important things. We took turns in making up *menus*, and prizes were given for the best."

"Leonie took the prize for the best minew!" exclaimed Mrs. Loftus, triumphantly. "Tell Miss Grahame your prize minew, Leonie."

Nothing loth, Leonie described the dinner at length, from little-neck clams to coffee; and a very fine dinner it was.

"Hm!" grunted Mr. Loftus, "better dinner than we ever get from your twelve-dollar cook, Mrs. L. Hm! Fine dinners on paper, I dare say. Hand me that salad! Why don't you give Miss Grahame some more salad? She ain't eating anything at all." [164]

"Then we had lectures on the Art of Dress," continued the fair student of Madame Vivien's. "Those were very interesting."

"Well, dress does change, the most of anything!" exclaimed Mrs. Loftus. "To see the difference now from when I was a girl! Why, when I was married I had thirty-five yards of silk in my wedding dress, and now nobody don't have more than ten or twelve. Almost too scant to cover 'em, it seems sometimes."

"Thirty-five yards, mamma!" exclaimed her daughter. "You're joking!"

"Not a mite!" Mrs. Loftus said firmly. "Thirty-five yards of white satin, and trimmed with four whole pieces of lace and three hundred and eighty-two bows." The two girls exclaimed in wonder, and Mrs. Loftus continued in high good-humour. "Yes, a dress was a dress in those days. Why, I had one walking dress, a brown silk it was, with fifty yards in it." [165]

"But how was it possible?" cried Hildegarde. "Did you wear crinoline?"

"No," was the reply, "not a mite of hoop-skirt; but things were very full, you see, Miss Grahame. That brown dress, now; it had a deep side-plaiting all round, and an overskirt, very full too, and the back very deep, flounced, scalloped, and trimmed with narrow piping, looped in each corner with scallops. There was a deep fringe round the basque and overskirt, and coming up from the postilion (that was deep, too), to loop on the left shoulder."

"Well, it sounds *awful*!" said Leonie frankly. "You must have been a perfect sight, mamma!" [166]

"She was better-looking than you are, or ever will be!" snarled Mr. Loftus. "Are you goin' to sit here all day talkin' about women's folderols? I have to pay for 'em, and I guess that's all I want to

know about 'em."

Glad enough was Hildegarde when four o'clock came, and she could plead an appointment to meet her mother at a certain turn of the road, as they were going for a walk together.

"More walking!" cried Mrs. Loftus. "You'll have a fever, I'm certain of it. I don't think girls ought *ever* to walk, unless it's a little turn in the park while the horses are waiting, or something of that sort." She begged Hildegarde to wait till the horses were harnessed, but our heroine was firm, and finally departed, leaving her good-natured hostess shaking her head in the doorway, like a mandarin in wine-coloured satin. [167]

As she turned the corner by the gilded iron gates, Hildegarde was startled by the apparition of a small boy in brown corduroy, sitting on a post and swinging his legs.

Hildegarde was fond of boys. One of her two best friends was a boy, and she had a little sweetheart in Maine, whose name was Benny, and who loved her with all the ardour of four years old. This boy must be six or seven, she thought. He had red hair, a round, rosy, freckled face, and two eyes so blue and so bright that the very meeting them made her smile. Her smile was answered by a flash, which lighted up the whole face, and subsided instantly, leaving preternatural gravity.

"How do you do?" said Hildegarde. "Is it fun sitting there?"

"No!" said the boy; and down he came. Then shyness seized him; he hung his head and considered his toes attentively. [168]

"My name is Hilda," continued our heroine. "Do you think it is a nice name?"

He nodded, still intent on the boots.

"But I don't know what your name is," she went on sadly. "I should like to tell you about my puppy, if you would walk along by me, but you see I can't, because I don't know your name."

"Hugh Allen," said the lad briefly.

"Hugh!" cried Hildegarde, her cheek flushing and her eyes softening. "That was my dear father's name. We must be friends, Hugh, for the name's sake. Come along, laddie!"

The boy came, and walked in silence by her side, occasionally stealing a glance at the kind, bright face so much higher up than his own.

"Well, my puppy," said Hildegarde, as if she were continuing a conversation. "His name was Patsy, and he was such a funny puppy,—all white, with a great big head, and paws almost as big, and a mouth large enough to swallow—oh! I don't know what! a watermelon, perhaps. I loved him very much. He used to gnaw my boots, and nibble the skirt of my dress; but, of course, I didn't mind, for I knew he was cutting his teeth, poor dear, and couldn't help it. But when he gnawed all the corners off the leather chairs in the dining-room, my mother dear didn't like it, and she said Patsy must go. Then my father said he would take him to his office every day, and keep him out of mischief, and then I could take the dear for a good walk in the afternoon, and have a comfortable time with him, and he could sleep in the shed. Well, I thought this was a delightful plan, and the next day Patsy went off with papa, as pleased and happy as possible. Oh, dear! Hugh, what do you think that puppy did?" [169]

"Perhaps he bit his legs," suggested Hugh, with a gleam of delight in his blue eyes.

"Oh, no!" said Hildegarde. "He wouldn't have dared to do that, for he was a sad coward, my poor Patsy. My father left him shut up in the office while he went to lunch; and as the day was mild (though it was winter), he left his new ulster on a chair, where he had laid it when he first came in. Hugh, when he came back, he found the ulster—it was a stout heavy one—he found it all torn into little pieces, and the pieces piled in a heap, and Patsy lying on top of them."

"Oh-ee!" cried the boy. "And *then* what happened? Did he smite him hip and thigh, even unto the going down of the sun?"

Hildegarde opened her eyes a little at this scriptural phrase, but answered: "Yes, I am afraid papa gave him a pretty severe whipping. He had to, of course. And then he sent him away, and I never saw poor Patsy again. Don't you think that was sad, Hugh?" [170]

"It was sad for you," replied the boy, "but sadder for Patsy. Would you like to be a dog?" he added, looking up suddenly into Hildegarde's face.

"I—think—not!" said that young woman meditatively. "I should have to eat scraps and cold bones, and that I could not endure. Besides, you couldn't read, or play on the piano, or anything of that sort. No, I am quite sure I should not like it, Hugh."

"But you would have a tail!" cried the boy, with kindling eyes. "A tail to wag! And—and just think how you would *go* with four legs!" he added, giving a jump with his two stout little limbs. "And never to have to sit up straight, except for fun sometimes; and no boots to lace, and not to have to cut up your dinner. Oh! it would be such fun!" [171]

"Yes, and never to be able to change your clothes when they are wet or muddy," replied the girl, "and to have to lie on the floor"—"I like to lie on the floor," put in Hugh—"and to have

unnatural people, who don't like dogs, say, 'There! there! get away, dog!' when you are trying to make yourself agreeable."

"Yes, that is bad!" Hugh admitted. "Aunt Loftus beat Merlin yesterday when he hadn't done anything, just not anything at all. Just he wagged his tail to tell me something, and there was an old jug in the way, and it fell over and broke. And now he isn't to come into the house any more. I felt like 'many oxen come about me, fat bulls of Basan compass me on every side,' when she glared at me and said that."

Hildegarde turned her face away, and was silent for a minute.

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"Merlin is your dog?" she asked presently, with a suspicious quiver in her voice.

"Would you like to see him?" cried the lad joyfully. "He stayed behind with a bone, but I'll call him." He gave a long, clear whistle, and a superb collie came bounding down the avenue, and greeted his master with violent affection.

"Down, Merlin!" said Hugh Allen gravely. "This is the Purple Maid I told you about, but her real name is Hilda. A Purple Maid was what I called you when I saw you coming up the steps," he explained, turning to Hildegarde. "I didn't know any other name, you see."

"But why 'Purple Maid'?" asked Hildegarde, feeling more and more that this was a very queer little boy. "I had been walking fast, but was I actually purple, Hugh?"

"Oh, no!" said the boy. "It wasn't that at all. Your cheeks were like the rosy eve. But 'purple' has a nice sound, don't you think so? a kind of rich sound. Do you mind my calling you a Purple Maid?"

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Hildegarde assured him that she did not, and then, from mere idle curiosity, as she afterwards assured herself, she added, "And what do you call your cousin Leonie?"

"A vinegar cruet!" replied Hugh promptly. "And Aunt Loftus is a fat—"

"Oh, hush! hush! my dear little boy!" cried Hildegarde hastily. "You must not say such things as that."

"You asked me," replied Hugh simply. "That is what I do call them when I think about them."

"But it is not nice to think rude and unkind things," said the Purple Maid, reprovingly.

"Then I won't think about them at all," said the boy. "For they really are, you know. I'd rather think of you, anyhow, and mamma, and Merlin."

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While this dialogue was going on, Hildegarde had been making friends with Merlin, who responded with cheerful cordiality to her advances. He was a beautiful creature, of true collie brown, with a black nose, and the finest white waistcoat in the world. His eyes were wonderful, clear, deep, and intelligent, in colour "like mountain water when it's flowing o'er a rock."

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"Dear lad!" said Hildegarde, taking his black paw and pressing it affectionately. "I know you are as good as you are handsome. Will you be my friend, too? Hugh is going to be my friend."

"He will!" cried Hugh eagerly. "We always like the same people, and *almost* always the same things. He won't eat apples, and I don't chase cats; but those are nearly the only things we don't like together."

At a turn in the road, Hildegarde saw in the distance a black figure walking toward them.

"There is my mother dear!" she exclaimed. "She said she would come and meet me. Will you come and see her, Hugh?—she is *very* nice!" she added, seeing that the boy hung back. But Hugh studied his boots again with rapt attention, and apparently read in them a summons back to The Poplars.

"I think I have to go back!" he said. "I love you, and you are my Purple Maid. May I come to see you once?"

"You may come fifty times, dear little lad!" cried Hildegarde warmly. "Come as often as you like."

But Hugh Allen shook his head sagely. "Maybe once will be enough," he said. "Come, Merlin! Good-by, Purple Maid!" And he and Merlin disappeared in a cloud of legs and dust.



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"HILDEGARDE HAD BEEN MAKING FRIENDS WITH MERLIN."

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THE COUSINS.

HILDEGARDE and her cousin Jack soon became fast friends. His fear of Mrs. Grahame vanished the first time he saw her smile, and he found, to his great amazement, that a girl was not necessarily either "dreadful" or stupid; moreover, that a girl's mother might be a very delightful person, instead of a mixture of harpy and Gorgon. He was invited to come to tea and bring his violin. Colonel Ferrers was invited, too, but promptly declined.

"A fiddling nephew, dear madam," he said, "is a dispensation to which I resign myself, but I do not wish to hear him fiddle."

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Mrs. Grahame suggested that the fiddle might be left at home.

"No, no! Let him bring it! by all means let him bring it! if you can really endure it without discomfort, that is. It will be the greatest pleasure to the lad, who is a good lad, though a deplorable milksop."

So Jack came with the precious black box under his arm. Tea was set out on the verandah, a symphony in white and gold,—golden croquettes, butter, honey, snowy rolls, and cream cheese,—and Hildegard pouring the tea, in white with gold-coloured ribbons at waist and throat.

Jack Ferrers had never seen anything of this sort. "Daddy" and he had always been together, and neither of them had ever cared or thought how anything looked. He wondered if his cousin Hildegard was very frivolous. Girls were, of course; and yet—she was certainly very pretty; and, if she really cared for music—and then, being eighteen and hungry, he gave his undivided attention to the croquettes, which truly deserved it.

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And after tea, when they had sat quiet in the twilight for a little, Hildegard said softly, "Now, Cousin Jack!" And Jack took his violin and began to play.

At the first note Mrs. Grahame laid down her knitting; at the second, she and Hildegard exchanged glances; at the third, they forgot each other and everything else save the music. First came a few simple chords, melting into a soft harmony, a prelude as low and sweet as the notes of the mother-bird brooding over her nest; then, suddenly, from this soft cloud of peaceful harmony there leaped a wonderful melody, clear and keen as the same bird's song at daybreak,—a melody that mounted higher and higher, soaring as the lark breasts the blue morning, flight upon flight of golden notes pouring out as if the violin were a living thing, a breathing, singing creature, with heart and soul filled and brimming over with love and joy and beauty.

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On and on the boy played, while the two women listened spellbound, feeling that this was no ordinary playing; and as he played his whole aspect seemed to change. He straightened himself and stood erect, save for the loving bend of the head over the beloved instrument. His blue eyes flashed, his whole countenance grew luminous, intense. The gawky, listless, indolent lad was gone; and one saw only the musician rapt in his art.

When it was over, they were all silent for a moment. Then Mrs. Grahame held out her hand. "My dear boy!" she said. "My dear Jack, you ought to be the happiest fellow in the world. To be able to give and to enjoy such pleasure as this, is indeed a great privilege."

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Hildegard could only look her thanks, for the music had moved her deeply; but her smile told Jack all that he wanted to know, and it appeared that girls were not all frivolous; also that it must be very nice to have a mother.

Then he played again. Indeed, they left him no choice,—the Mozart concerto, of which he had spoken, and then one lovely thing after another, barcarolle and serenade and fairy dance, melting finally into the exquisite melody of an old Gaelic lullaby.

"Oh!" said Hildegard, under her breath; and then, as her mother bade her, she sang softly the words she loved,—

"Slumber sweetly, little Donald."

Such a happy evening it was, on the wide verandah, with the moon shining down, softening everything into magical wonders of ivory and silver!

It was the first of many such evenings, for soon Jack came to spending half his time at Braeside. At nine o'clock Colonel Ferrers would come striding up the gravel walk, swinging his big stick; and then the violin would be tenderly laid away, and half an hour of pleasant chat would follow, after which uncle and nephew would go off together, and the last the two ladies heard of them would be passionate adjurations from the former to "step out," and not to "poke your head forward like an army mule following a grain-cart, sir!"

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One day the two cousins were taking a walk together. At least they had been walking, and now had sat down to rest on the mossy trunk of a fallen tree,—in fact, of the same great sycamore which Hildegard had christened Philemon, on the memorable day of the tree-climbing. They had been talking about everything and nothing, when suddenly Jack shook his head and began earnestly, "Did your mother mean that the other night?"

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Hildegarde simply looked at him, and raised her eyebrows.

"I mean about my being happy," the boy continued. "Because I'm not happy, and I never expect to be."

"What is it?" Hildegarde asked, seeing that a confidence was coming.

"There is only one thing in the world that I want," cried the boy, "and that is just what I cannot have. I want to go to Leipsic, and Uncle Tom won't hear of it; calls it nonsense, and is going to send me to Harvard. We are poor, you know; Daddy doesn't know anything about money, and—and who cares about it, anyhow, except for—for things one wants? Uncle Tom says I can't make a bow, and—oh, all kinds of rubbish! What's the use of making a bow? I'm not going to be a dancing-master, Hildegarde!"

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"Indeed, you would not be a good one!" his cousin said; "but, considering that one must make bows, Jack, isn't it just as well to do it well as to do it badly?"

"Who cares?" cried the boy, shaking his head wildly. "If a man is going to *be* anything, who cares how he bows? And—oh, of course that is one item. I am to go to Harvard, and learn to bow and to dance, and to be a classical scholar, and to play base-ball. I *hate* base-ball, Hilda! it's perfect idiocy, and it makes my head ache, and any one can see that I'm not cut out for athletics. Are you laughing at me?"

"Indeed I am not!" said Hildegarde, heartily. "But, tell me! you want to go to Leipsic, to study music?"

"Of course!" was the reply. "And Daddy wants me to go, and Herr Geigen is going over in the autumn, and he would place me, and all; but Uncle Tom hates music, you know, and if I speak of it he goes off in a rage, and talks about rascally Dutch fiddlers, and says I walk like a giraffe with the palsy. At least, that was the animal this morning. Yesterday I was a gouty ostrich, and I suppose we shall go through the whole menagerie."

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"You like him?" Hildegarde said interrogatively.

"He is *very* kind, in his way," replied Jack. "Awfully kind, and he loves my father, and I know he wants to do things for me; but—it all has to be done in his way, don't you see? And—well, there isn't anything in me except music. I know that, you see, Hildegarde. Just nothing!"

"I don't feel so sure of that!" Hildegarde said. "Perhaps you never tried to develop the other side of you. There must be other sides, you know."

"No, there aren't!" said Jack positively. "None at all!"

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"But that is nonsense!" cried Hildegarde impatiently. "Do you mean to say that you are a flat surface, like a playing-card, with 'music' painted on you?"

"I didn't know I was flat!" rather stiffly.

"You see, you are not! then why not try to care for something else *beside* music, without caring any the less for that?"

"What is there to care for? a parcel of musty old books, such as Uncle Tom is forever reading."

"Oh! oh! you Goth! As if it were not a rapture simply to look at the outside of your uncle's books. To see my heart's own Doctor in dark blue calf, with all that beautiful tooling—"

"What Doctor? what are you talking about, Hildegarde?"

"Johnson, of course! Is there another? as the man in *Punch* says about his hatter. And even in your own line, you foolish boy! Have you never read that beautiful 'Life of Handel'? I looked into it the other day, and it seemed delightful."

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"No," said Jack, looking blank. "Where is it? I never saw it."

"Bookcase between the south windows, fourth shelf, about the middle; three fat volumes in green morocco. And you never saw it, because you never look at the books at all. What *do* you look at, Jack, except your music and your violin? For example, do you ever look in the glass? I know you don't."

"How do you know?" and Jack blushed hotly.

"Because—you won't mind? I am your cousin, you know!—because your necktie is so often crooked. It is crooked now; a little more to the right! that's it! And—and you ought to brush that spot off your coat. Now, if you made it a point always to look in the glass before leaving your room—"

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"Is that one of the sides you want me to develop?" asked Jack slowly. "Caring about dress, and looks, and that sort of thing? I didn't know you were of that kind, Hildegarde."

"Of what kind?" cried our heroine, blushing furiously in her turn, and feeling that she was in great danger of losing her temper. "I certainly do care about my dress and looks, as every one ought to do. Suppose the next time you came to tea, you found me with my hair tumbling down, and a great spot of ink on my gown, and my ruffles torn! Is that the kind of person you like to

see? I always thought Herrick's Julia was a most untidy young woman, with her shoe-strings, and her 'erring lace' and all."

"I don't know who she is," said Jack meekly. "But I beg your pardon if I was rude, Hilda; and—and I will try to 'spruce up,' as Uncle Tom is always trying to make me. You see," he added shyly, "when *you* look in the glass you see something nice, and I don't!" [191]

"Nonsense!" said Hildegarde, promptly. "And then, Jack—that is only one thing, of course. But if you had the habit of using your eyes! Oh! you don't know what a difference it would make. I know, because I used to be as blind as you are. I never looked at anything till about two years ago. And now—of course I am only learning still, and shall be learning all my life, I hope; but—well, I do see things more or less. For example, what do you see at our feet here?"

"Grass!" said Jack, peering about. "Green grass. Do you think I don't know that?"

Hildegarde laughed, and clapped her hands.

"Just what I should have said two years ago!" she cried. "There are twelve different plants that I know—I've been counting them—and several more that are new to me." [192]

"Well, they're all green, anyhow!" said Jack. "What's the difference?"

Hildegarde scorned a direct reply, but went on, being now mounted on her own hobby.

"And as for moths, Jack, you can have no idea of what my ignorance was in regard to moths."

"Oh, come!" said Jack. "Every one knows about moths, of course. They eat our clothes, and fly into the lamps. That is one of the things one finds out when one is a baby, I suppose."

"Indeed!" cried Hildegarde. "And that is all there is to find out, I suppose. Why—" she stopped suddenly; then said in a very different tone, "Oh, Jack! this is a wonderful coincidence. Look! oh, *will* you look? oh! the beautiful, beautiful dear! Get me something! anything! quick!" [193]

Jack, who was not accustomed to feminine ways, wondered if his fair cousin was going out of her mind. She was gazing intently at a spot of lighter green on the "grass" at her feet. Presently the spot moved, spread; developed two great wings, delicate, exquisite, in colour like a chrysope, or the pure, cold green one sometimes sees in a winter sunset.

"What is it?" asked Jack, in wonder.

"A Luna!" cried Hildegarde. "Hush! slip off on the other side, quietly! *Fly* to the house, and ask auntie for a fly-screen. *Quick*, Jack!"

Jack, greatly wondering, ran off none the less, his long legs scampering with irreverent haste through the Ladies' Garden. Returning with the screen, which auntie gave him without question, being well used to the sudden frenzies of a moth-collector, he found Hildegarde on her knees, holding her handkerchief over the great moth, which fortunately had remained quiet, being indeed stupid in the strong light. The girl's face was all aglow with triumph and delight. [194]

"A perfect specimen," she cried, as she skilfully conveyed the great moth under the screen. "I have two, but the tails are a little broken. Isn't he glorious, Jack? Oh, happy day! Come, good cousin, and let us take him home in a triumphal procession."

Jack looked rather blank. "Are you going home now?" he asked.

"Of course, to put my beauty in the ammonia jar."

"What is it?" she added, seeing that her cousin looked really vexed.

"Oh—nothing!" said Jack. "Nothing of any consequence. I am ready."

"But *what* is it?" Hildegarde repeated. "You would a great deal better tell me than look like that, for I know I have done something to vex you." [195]

"Well—I am not used to girls, you know, Hildegarde, and perhaps I am stupid. Only—well, I was going to ask you seriously what you thought about—my music, and all that; and first you tell me to look in the glass, and then you go to catching moths and forget all about me. I suppose it's all right, only—"

He blushed, and evidently did not think it *was* all right. Hildegarde blushed, too, in real distress.

"My *dear* Jack," she cried, "how shall I tell you how sorry I am?"

She looked about for a suitable place, and then carefully set down the fly-screen with its precious contents.

"Sit down again," she cried, motioning her cousin to take his place on the fallen tree, while she did the same. "And you will not believe now how interested I really am," she said. "Mamma would never have been so stupid, nor Rose either. But you must believe me. I *was* thinking about you till—till I saw the Luna, and you don't know what a Luna means when one hasn't a perfect specimen. But now, tell me, do you think it would be quite impossible to persuade your uncle? Why, you *must* go to Leipsic, of course you must. He—has he ever heard you play, Jack?" [196]

Jack laughed rather bitterly. "Once," he said. "He cried out that when he wanted to listen to cats with their tails tied together, he would tie them himself. Since then I always go up into the garret to practise, and shut all the doors and windows."

"What a pity! and he is so nice when one knows him. I wonder—do you know, Jack, what I am thinking of?"

Her face was so bright that the boy's face brightened as he looked at it.

"I hope it is what I was thinking of," he said; "but I didn't dare—"

"Mamma," cried Hildegarde.

He nodded in delight, colouring with pleasure.

"She is just the person."

"Of course she is; but will she?"

"Of course she will. I am sure of it. Your uncle shall come to tea some evening, and you shall stay at home. I will go away to write letters, and then—oh, you see, Jack, no one can resist mamma."

"What a good fellow you are, Hildegarde! Oh, I *beg* your pardon!"

"Never mind!" cried Hildegarde merrily. "I did climb the tree, you know. And now, come along. I must take my beauty, my love, my moonlight rapture, up to his death."

CHAPTER X.

BONNY SIR HUGH.

MEANWHILE Hildegarde had not lost sight of little Hugh Allen, the one link of interest which connected her with The Poplars. He, too, had been won by Mrs. Grahame's smile, and had learned the way to Braeside; and the more they saw of him, the more Hildegarde and her mother felt that he was a very remarkable little boy.

Much of the time he seemed to be lost in dreams, wrapped in a cloud of silent thought; and, again, from this cloud would flash out the quaintest sayings, sudden outbursts of passionate feeling, which were startling to quiet, every-day people. When he had been walking with Mrs. Grahame, as he was fond of doing (sneaking out by the back gate from his prison-place, as he called it, and making a *détour* to reach the road where she most often walked), and when she said, "Now, dear, it is time to say good-by, and go home," he would throw himself on his knees, and hold up his clasped hands, crying, "How can I leave thee?" in a manner which positively embarrassed her.

Now it happened one day that Hugh was sitting with Merlin beside the brook that flowed at the foot of the Ladies' Garden. Hildegarde had told him to come through the garden and wait for her, and it was his first visit to the lovely, silent place. The child went dreaming along between the high box hedges, stopping occasionally to look about him and to exchange confidences with his dog. Merlin seemed to feel the influence of the place, and went along quietly, with bent head and drooping tail. When the murmur of the hidden streamlet first fell upon his ear, "It is like the fishpools of Heshbon," said the boy dreamily. "Isn't it, Merlin? I never understood before." Merlin put his cool black nose in his master's hand, and gave a little sympathetic shake.

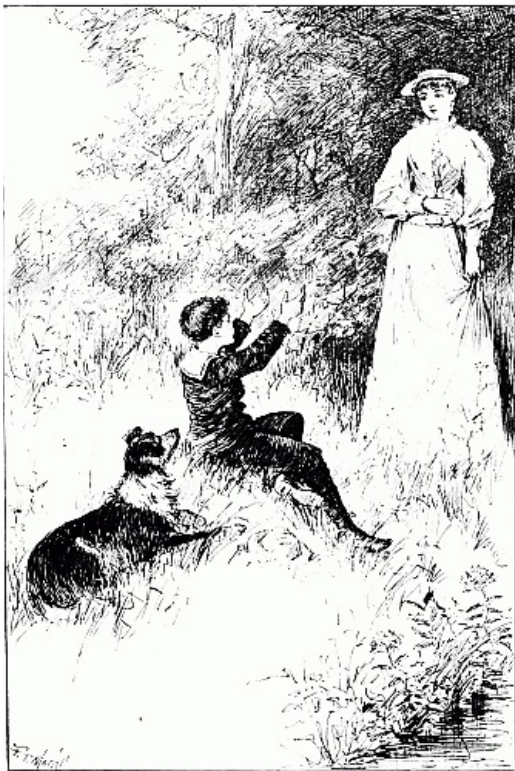
And now the pair were sitting on a bank of moss, looking down into the dark, clear water, which moved so swiftly yet so silently, with only a faint sound, which somehow seemed no louder than when they were at a distance.

"Do you see that dark round place where it is deep, Merlin?" said the child. "Do you think that under there lives a fair woman with green hair, who takes a person by the hand, and kisses him, and pulls him down? Do you think that, Merlin?" But Merlin sneezed, and shook his head, and evidently thought nothing of the kind. "Then do you think about fishes?" the boy went on. "Dark little fishes, with gleaming eyes, who are sad because they cannot speak. I wish I knew your thoughts, Merlin."

"Wuff!" said Merlin, in his voice of welcome, raising his head, and becoming instantly a living image of cheerfulness. Hugh looked, and there was his Purple Maid, all bright and shining, standing among the green trees, and smiling at him. The child's face flushed with such vivid light that the place seemed brighter. He held out his arms with a passionate gesture that would have been theatrical if it had not been so real, but remained silent.

"Dear!" said Hildegarde. "How quiet you are, you and Merlin! I could not tell whether it was your voice or the brook, talking." The boy and dog made room for her between them, and she sat down. "Aren't you going to speak to me, Hugh?" she continued, as he still said nothing.

"I spoke to myself," said the boy. "When I saw you stand there, angelic, in the green, 'Blessed heart of woman!' I said to myself. Do you like the



HILDEGARDE FINDING HUGH AND MERLIN BY THE BROOK.

sound of that?"

"My bonny Sir Hugh!" said Hildegard, laying her hand caressingly on the red-gold hair. "I do like the sound of it. And do you like this place? I want you to care for it as I do."

The boy nodded. "It is the place of dead people," he said. "We are too alive to be here."

"I call it the Ladies' Garden," said Hildegard softly. "Fair, sweet ladies lived here once, and loved it. They used to sit here, Hugh, and wander up and down the green paths, and fill the place with sweet, gentle words. I don't believe they sang; Hester may have sung, perhaps."

"Were they fair as the moon, clear as the sun?" asked the child.

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"Where did you find those sweet words, Sir Hugh?"

"In the Bible. 'Fair as the moon, clear as the sun, terrible as an army with banners.' And 'thy neck is a tower of ivory.' Were they terrible, do you think?"

"Oh, no! they were very gentle, I think, very soft and mild, like folds of old soft cashmere; only Hester was blithe and gay, and she died, Hugh, when she was just my age. Think of it! to die so young and go away out of all the sunshine."

The child looked at her with strange eyes. "Why do you be sad?" he said. "Don't you know about your Mother dear Jerusalem?"

"A little," said Hildegard. "Tell me what you are thinking, Sir Hugh."

"It is greener there," said the child, "and brighter. Don't you know, blessed heart? 'Where grow such sweet and pleasant flowers as nowhere else are seen.' And more coloured words. Don't you love coloured words?" The girl laid her hand on his lightly, but said nothing, and he went on as if in a dream.

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"Thy houses are of ivory,
Thy windows crystal clear,
Thy streets are laid with beaten gold—
There angels do appear."

"Two of them are papa and mamma," he added after a pause. "Do you think they mind waiting for me very much? At first I wanted to go to them—oh, so badly! because those people are devils, and I would rather die; but now I have you, Purple Maid, and your mother is like balm dropping in the valley, and I don't mind waiting, if only I thought *they* didn't mind it too much." He looked up wistfully, and Hildegard bent to kiss him.

"How long is it, dear?" she asked softly.

"A year now, a very long year, only I had Merlin. And Uncle Loftus took me out of charity, he said; but mamma said I was to go to Aunt Martha, so that makes me feel wrong, even if I wanted to stay with them, and it is the pains of hell to me."

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"Aunt Martha?" asked Hildegard, willing to ask more, yet dreading to rouse the boy's scriptural eloquence on the subject of his relatives at The Poplars.

Hugh nodded. "Mamma's aunt," he said. "She lives somewhere, not far from here, but I don't know where; and Uncle Loftus won't tell me, or let me see her, 'cause she is a menial. What is a menial, dearly beloved?"

"Did your uncle say that to you?" Hildegard asked, waiving the question.

"He said it *at* me!" was the reply. "At my back, but I heard it. She was a menial, and he wasn't going to have folks saying that his aunt was housekeeper to a stuck-up old bear, just because she was a fool and had no proper spirit. And the others said 'hush!' and I went away, and now they won't let me speak about her."

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"Housekeeper to a—why!" began Hildegard; and then she was silent, and smoothed the child's hair thoughtfully. An old bear! that was what Mr. Loftus had vulgarly called Colonel Ferrers. Could it be possible that—Jack had told her about dear, good Mrs. Beadle, who had been nurse to his father and uncle, and who was so devoted to them all, and such a superior woman. She had been meaning to go to see her the next time she was at Roseholme. Was there a mystery here? was Mrs. Beadle the plump and comfortable skeleton in the Loftus closet? She must ask Jack.

As she mused thus, the child had fallen a-dreaming again, and they both sat for some time

silent, with the soft falling of the water in their ears, and all the dim, shadowy beauty of the place filling their hearts with vague delight.

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Presently, "Beloved," said Hugh (he wavered between this and "Purple Maid" as names for Hildegarde, wholly ignoring her own name), "Beloved, there is an angel near me. Did you know it?"

"There might well be angels in this place," said Hildegarde, looking at the boy, whose wide blue eyes wore a far-away, spiritual look.

"I don't mean just here in this spot. I mean floating through the air at night. I hear him, almost every night, playing on his harp of gold."

"Dear Hugh, tell me a little more clearly."

"Sometimes the moon shines in at my window and wakes me up, you know. Then I get up and look out, for it is so like heaven, only silver instead of gold; and then—then I hear the angel play."

"What does it sound like?"

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"Sometimes like a voice, sometimes like birds. And then it sobs and cries, and dies away, and then it sounds out again, like 'blow up the trumpet in the new moon,' and goes up, up, up, oh, so high! Do you think that is when the angel goes up to the gate, and then is sorry for people here, and comes back again? I have thought of that."

"My bonny Sir Hugh!" said Hildegarde gently. "Would you care less about the lovely music if it was not really made by an angel? if it was a person like you and me, who had the power and the love to make such beautiful sounds?"

The child's face lightened. "Was it you?" he said in an awe-struck voice.

"Not I, dear, but my cousin, my cousin Jack, who plays the violin most beautifully, Hugh. He practises every night, up in the garret at Roseholme, because—only think! his uncle does not like to hear him."

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"The ostrich gentleman!" cried Hugh, bursting into merry laughter. "Is it the ostrich gentleman?"

Hildegarde tried to look grave, with moderate success. "My cousin is tall," she said, "but you must not call names, little lad!"

"Never any more will I call him it," cried Hugh, "if he is really the angel. But he does look like one. Must we go?" he asked wistfully, as Hildegarde rose, and held out her hand to him.

"Yes, dear, I am going to the village, you know. I thought we would come this way because I wanted you to see the Ladies' Garden. Now we must go across the meadow, and round by the back of Roseholme to find the road again."

They crossed the brook by some mossy stepping-stones, and climbed the dark slope on the further side, thick-set with ferns and dusky hemlock-trees. Then came the wall, and then the sudden break into the sunny meadow. Hugh threw off his grave mood with the shadow, and danced and leaped in the sunshine.

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"Shall I run with Merlin?" he asked. "You have never seen us run, Beloved!"

Hildegarde nodded, and with a shout and a bark the two were off. A pretty sight they were! the boy's golden head bobbing up and down in full energy of running, the dog bounding beside him with long, graceful leaps. They breasted the long, low hill, then swept round in a wide circle, and came rushing past Hildegarde, breathless and radiant. This was more than our heroine could bear. With a merry "Hark, follow!" she started in pursuit, and was soon running abreast of the others, with head thrown back, eyes sparkling, cheeks glowing.

"Hurrah!" cried Hugh.

"Hurrah it is!" echoed the Purple Maid.

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"Wow, *wow!*" panted Merlin, ecstatically.

As the chase swept round the hill the second time, two gentlemen came out of the woods, and paused in amazement at the sight. Hildegarde's long hair had come down, and was flying in the wind; her two companions were frantic with delight, and bobbed and leaped, shouting, beside her. So bright was the sunshine, so vivid in colour, so full of life the three runners, they seemed actually to flash as they moved.

"Harry Monmouth!" cried Colonel Ferrers. "Here is a girl who knows how to run. Look at that action! It's poetry, sir! it's rhythm and metre and melody."

"'Nor lighter does the swallow skim
Along the smooth lake's airy rim.'"

After her, Master Milksop, and let me see what your long legs can do!"

Jack Ferrers needed no second bidding, and though his running was not graceful, being rather a hurling himself forward, as if he were catapult and missile in one, he got over the ground with

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great rapidity, and caught his cousin up as she came flying round the meadow for the third time. Hildegarde stopped short, in great confusion.

"Jack!" she faltered, panting. "How—where did you come from? You must have started up out of the earth."

Turning to capture her flying tresses, she caught sight of Colonel Ferrers, and her confusion was redoubled.

"Oh!" she cried, the crimson mounting from her cheeks to her forehead, bathing her in a fiery tide. "Oh! how could you? He—he will be *sure* I am a tomboy now."

"Nothing of the kind, my fair Atalanta!" exclaimed the Colonel, who had the ears of a fox. He advanced, beaming, and flourishing his stick. "Nothing of the kind!" he repeated. "He is delighted, on the contrary, to see a young creature who can make the free movements of nature with nature's grace and activity. Harry Monmouth! Miss Hildegarde, I wish I were twenty years younger, and I would challenge you to a race myself!"

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CHAPTER XI.

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A CALL AND A CONSPIRACY.

"AND you really seriously intend passing the winter here?" asked Miss Leonie Loftus.

This young lady had come to make a parting call at Braeside. It was near the end of August, and three months of country life were all that she could possibly endure, and she was going with her mother to Long Branch, and thence to Saratoga.

"You really mean it?" she repeated, looking incredulous.

"Assuredly!" replied Hildegarde, smiling. "Winter and summer, and winter again, Miss Loftus. This is our home now, and we have become attached to it even in these few months."

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"Oh, you look at it in a sentimental light," said Miss Loftus, with a disagreeable smile. "The domestic hearth, and that sort of thing. Rather old-fashioned, isn't it, Miss Grahame?"

"Possibly; I have never thought of it as a matter of fashion," was the quiet reply.

"And how do you expect to kill time in your wilderness?" was the next question.

"Kill him?" Hildegarde laughed. "We never can catch him, even for a moment, Miss Loftus. He flies faster at Braeside than even in New York. I sometimes think there are only two days in the week, Monday and Saturday."

"I hear you have a sewing-school in the village. I suppose that will take up some time."

"I hope so! The children seem interested, and it is a great pleasure to me. Then, too, I expect to join some of Miss Wayland's classes in the fall, and that will keep me busy, of course."

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"Miss Wayland, over in Dorset? Why, it is three miles off."

"And even if so? I hear it is a delightful school, and Miss Wayland herself is very lovely. Do you know her?"

"No!" said Miss Loftus, who had been "dying" as she would have put it, to get into Miss Wayland's school three years before. "A country boarding-school isn't *my* idea of education."

"Oh!" said Hildegarde civilly. "But to go back for a moment, Miss Loftus. Your speaking of the children reminds me to ask you, is little Hugh going with you to Long Branch?"

Miss Loftus coloured. "Oh, dear, no!" she replied. "A child at such places, you know, is out of the question. He is to be sent to school. He is going next week."

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"But—pardon me! are not all schools in vacation now?"

"I believe so! But these people—the Miss Hardhacks—are willing to take him now, and keep him."

"Poor little lad!" murmured Hildegarde, regardless of the fact that it was none of her business. "Will he not be very lonely?"

"Beggars must not be choosers, Miss Grahame!" was the reply, with another unamiable smile. Miss Loftus really would not have smiled at all, if she had known how she looked.

No sooner was the visitor gone, than Hildegarde flew up to her mother with the news. The Loftuses were going away; they were going to send Hugh to school. What was to be done? He could not go! He *should* not go.

She was greatly excited, but Mrs. Grahame's quiet voice and words restored her composure. "'Can't' and 'shan't' never won a battle!" said that lady. "We must think and plan."

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Hildegarde had lately discovered, beyond peradventure, from some chance words let fall by little Hugh, that his mother had been the sister of Mr. Loftus; and she felt no doubt in her own mind that good Mrs. Beadle was aunt to both. The sister had been a school teacher, had married a man of some education, who died during the second year of their marriage, leaving her alone, in a Western town, with her little baby. She had struggled on, not wishing to be a burden either on her rich brother (who had not approved her marriage) or her aunt, who had nothing but her savings and her comfortable berth at Roseholme. At length, consumption laying its deadly hand on her, she sent for her brother, and begged him to take the boy to their good aunt, who, she knew, would care for him as her own. "But he didn't!" said Hugh. "He did not do that. He said he would make a man of me, but I don't believe he could make a very good one, do you, Beloved?"

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Now the question was, how to bring about a meeting between the boy and his great-aunt, if great-aunt she were.

No child was allowed to enter the sacred precincts of Roseholme, for Colonel Ferrers regarded children, and especially boys, as the fountain-head of all mischief, flower-breaking, bird-nesting, turf-destroying. His own nephew had had to wait eighteen years for an invitation. How could it be possible to introduce little Hugh, a boy and a stranger, into the charmed garden?

If "Mamma" could only take him! No one could resist her mother, Hildegarde thought; certainly not Colonel Ferrers, who admired her so much. But this dear mother had sprained her ankle a week before, slipping on a mossy stone in the garden, and was only now beginning to get about, using a crutched stick.

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Mrs. Grahame and Hildegarde put their heads together, and talked long and earnestly. Then they sent for Jack, and took counsel with him; and a plan was made for the first act of what Hildegarde called the Drama of the Conspirators.

A day or two after, when Mrs. Beadle drove to the town of Whitfield, some miles off, on her weekly marketing trip, it was Jack Ferrers, instead of Giuseppe, the faithful manservant, who held the reins and drove the yellow wagon with the stout brown cob. He wanted to buy some things, he said: a necktie, and some chocolate, and—oh, lots of things; and Mrs. Beadle was only too glad of his company. The good housekeeper was dressed, like Villikins' Dinah, in gorgeous array, her cashmere shawl being of the finest scarlet, her gown of a brilliant blue, while her bonnet nodded with blue and yellow cornflowers. Not a tradesman in Whitfield but came smiling to his door when he saw Mrs. Beadle's yellow cart; for she was a good customer, and wanted everything of the best for her Colonel. When they at last turned Chow-chow's head homeward, the wagon was nearly filled with brown-paper parcels, and Jack's pockets bulged out in all directions. As they drove along the pleasant road, fringed with oaks and beeches, Jack broke silence with, "Biddy, did you ever have any children?"

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"Bless me, Master Jack, how you startled me!" cried Mrs. Beadle, who was deep in a problem of jelly and roly-poly pudding. "No, dear! no jelly—I should say, no chick nor child had I ever. I wasn't good enough, I suppose."

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"Nonsense. Biddy!" said Jack. "But you must have had some relations; some—nieces or nephews, or something of that sort."

Mrs. Beadle sighed, and fell straightway into the trap.

"I had, dear! I had, indeed, once upon a time. But they're no good to me now, and never will be."

She sighed again.

"How no good to you?" queried this artful Jack.

"Oh, 'tis a long story, dear, and you wouldn't care for it at all. You would? Well! well! there's no harm that I know of in speaking of it. I've nothing to be ashamed of. I had a niece, Master Jack, and a dearer one never was, nor married to a finer young man. But they went out West, and he died, and left her with a baby. I wrote again and again, begging her to come home, but she was doing well, she said, and felt to stay, and had friends there, and all. Oh, dear! and last year—a year ago it is now, she died." Mrs. Beadle drew out a handkerchief and wiped her eyes. "She died, my dear; and—I didn't ought to speak of this, Master Jack, it do upset me so—I don't know where the child is to this day."

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"Her child?" asked Jack, with a guilty consciousness of his ears being red.

"My own dear niece Martha's child!" repeated the good woman sorrowfully. "A boy it was, as should be seven years old by this time. I've wrote, and I've wrote, but no answer could I get. And whether he is dead, too, or whether his father's people have him, or what, is darkness to me."

"The brute!" exclaimed Jack Ferrers vehemently. "The cold-hearted, odious brute!"

"What is it, my dear?" cried Mrs. Beadle, drying her tears, and looking with alarm at the pony. "His tail over the reins, is it? Well, he will do that, but 'tis only play. He means no harm."

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"Oh, I know!" cried Jack in confusion. "I didn't mean—that is—and is that all the relatives you have, Biddy?"

"Why, boys do love questions, don't they?" the good woman said. "I have a nephew living,

Master Jack; and if you guessed from now till Sunday week, you never would guess his name."

"Solomon Grundy" rose to Jack's lips, he could not in the least tell why. He did his best to look unconscious, but it was perhaps fortunate that Mrs. Beadle was so absorbed in her own troubled thoughts that she did not look at him.

"Who is it?" he asked. "Do tell me. Biddy! Is it any one I ever heard of?"

"Hush, my dear! don't tell a soul that I mentioned it. I am not one to force myself on them as has got up in the world, and think honest service a disgrace. It's Ephraim Loftus!"

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"Not Mr. Loftus at the Poplars?"

"Mr. Loftus at the Poplars! The very same. My own sister's son, and little credit he is to either of us. Don't ask me how he made his money, for I don't know, and don't want to know. When he was a little boy, his pockets were always full of pennies that he got from the other boys, trading and the like, and nobody had a kindness for him, though they loved Martha. Not a soul in the village but loved Martha, and would do anything for her. So when Ephraim was fourteen or so, he went away to New York, and we never heard anything more till he came back three or four years ago, a rich man, and built that great house, and lived there summers. I've never seen him but once; I don't go out, only just in the back garden, except when I drive to town. And that once he looked me all over, as if I was a waxwork in a glass case, and never stopped nor spoke a word. That's Ephraim Loftus! He needn't have been afraid of my troubling him or his, I can tell him. I wouldn't demean myself." Mrs. Beadle's face was red, and her voice trembled with angry pride.

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"And—" Jack wished Hildegarde were speaking instead of himself; she would know what to say, and he felt entirely at a loss. "Do you—do you suppose he knows anything about—about his sister's little boy?"

Mrs. Beadle looked as if some one had struck her a blow. "Ephraim Loftus!" she cried. "If I thought that, Master Jack, I'd—I'd—why, what's the matter, sir?" For Jack had risen in his seat, and was waving the whip wildly round his head.

"It's my cousin," he said. "Don't you see her coming?"

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"Oh, the dear young lady! yes, to be sure. Walking this way, isn't she? Never mind me. Master Jack!" said the good woman, striving for composure. "I was upset by what you said, that's all. It gave me a thought—who is the little boy with Miss Grahame, dear?"

"He? oh—he's a boy," said Jack, rather incoherently. "His name is Hugh. Good-morning, Hildegarde! Hallo, Hugh! how are you?"

"Good-morning!" cried Hildegarde, as the wagon drew up beside her. "Good-morning, Mrs. Beadle. Isn't it a lovely day? Will the pony stand, Jack?"

"Like a rock!" and Jack, obeying the hint, leaped to the ground.

Mrs. Beadle had turned very pale. She was gazing fixedly at Hugh, who returned the look with wide blue eyes, shining with some strong emotion.

"Dear Mrs. Beadle," said Hildegarde gently, taking the housekeeper's hand in hers as she leant against the wagon, "this is a very dear little friend of mine, whom I want you to know. His name is Hugh; Hugh Allen; and he is staying with his uncle, Mr. Loftus."

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"I knew it!" cried Mrs. Beadle, clapping her hands together. "I knew it! And I am going to faint!"

"No, don't do that!" said Hugh, climbing up into the seat beside her. "Don't do that. You must be calm, for you are my great-aunt, and I am your little nephew. How do you do? I am very glad to see you."

"You are sure he will stand?" whispered Hildegarde.

"Look at him! he is asleep already."

"Then come along!" and the two conspirators vanished among the trees.

They pushed on a little way through the tangle of undergrowth, and paused, breathless and radiant, under a great beech-tree.

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"Jack," said Hildegarde, "you are a dear! How did you manage it?"

"I didn't manage it at all. I am a stupid ninny. Why, I've thrown her into a fit. Do you think it's safe to leave her alone?"

"Nonsense! a joy fit does not hurt, when a person is well and strong. Oh! isn't it delightful! and you have enjoyed it, too, Jack, haven't you? I am sure you have. And—why, you have a new hat! and your necktie is straight. You look really very nice, *mon cousin!*"

"*Mille remerciements, ma cousine!*" replied Jack, with a low bow, which, Hildegarde noticed, was not nearly so like the shutting-up of a jackknife as it would have been a few weeks ago. "Am I really improving? You have no idea what I go through with, looking in the glass. It is a humiliating practice. Have some chocolates?" He pulled out a box, and they crunched in silent

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contentment.

"Now I think we may go back," said Hildegarde, after her third bonbon. "But I must tell you first what Hugh said. I told him the whole story as we walked along; first as if it were about some one else, you know, and then when he had taken it all in, I told him that he himself was the little boy. He was silent at first, reflecting, as he always does. Then he said: 'I am like an enchanted prince, I think. Generally it is fair ones with golden locks that take them out of prison, but at my age a great-aunt is better. Don't you think so, Beloved?' and I did think so."

"But it *was* a fair one with golden locks who planned it all!" Jack said, with a shy look at his cousin's fair hair.

"Jack, you are learning to pay compliments!" cried Hildegarde, clapping her hands. "I believe you will go to Harvard after all, and be a classical scholar." [233]

"I would never pay another," said Jack seriously, "if I thought it would have that effect."

When they returned to the wagon, they found Mrs. Beadle still wiping away joyful tears, while Hugh was apparently making plans for the future. His voice rang out loud and clear. "And we will dwell in a corner of the house-top, and have a dinner of herbs!" said the child. "They may have *all* the stalled oxes themselves, mayn't they, great-aunt? And you will clothe us in scarlet and fine wool, won't you, great-aunt?"

"Bless your dear heart!" cried Mrs. Beadle. "Is it red flannel you mean? Don't tell me those heathen haven't put you into flannels!" And she wept again.

CHAPTER XII.

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THE SECOND ACT.

COLONEL FERRERS was taking his afternoon stroll in the garden. Dinner was over; for at Roseholme, as at Braeside, country hours were kept, with early dinner, and seven o'clock tea, the pleasantest of all meals.

With a fragrant Manilla cigar between his lips, and his good stick in his hand, the Colonel paced up and down the well-kept gravel paths, at peace with all mankind. The garden was all ablaze with geranium and verbena, heliotrope and larkspur. The pansies spread a gold and purple mantle in their own corner, while poppies were scattered all about in well-planned confusion. All this was Giuseppe's work,—good, faithful Giuseppe, who never rested, and never spoke, save to say "Subito, Signor!" when his master called him. He was at work now in a corner of the garden, setting out chrysanthemums; but no one would have known it, so noiseless were his motions, so silent his coming and going. [235]

The Colonel, though pleasantly conscious of the lovely pomp spread out for his delight, was thinking of other things than flowers. He was thinking how his nephew Jack had improved in the last two months. Positively, thought the Colonel, the boy was developing, was coming out of the animal kingdom, and becoming quite human. Partly due to the Indian clubs, no doubt, and to his, the Colonel's, wholesome discipline and instructions; but largely, sir, largely to feminine influence. Daily intercourse with women like Mrs. Grahame and her daughter would civilise a gorilla, let alone a well-intentioned giraffe who played the fiddle. He puffed meditatively at his cigar, and dwelt on a pleasant picture that his mind called up: Hildegarde as he had seen her yesterday, sitting with a dozen little girls about her, and telling them stories while they sewed, under her careful supervision, at patchwork and dolls' clothes. How sweet she looked! how bright her face was, as she told the merry tale of the "Midsummer Night's Dream." "Harry Monmouth, sir! she was telling 'em Shakespeare! And they were drinking it in as if it had been Mother Goose." The Colonel paused, and sighed heavily. "If Hester had lived," he said, "if my little Hester had lived—" and then he drew a long whiff of the fragrant Manilla, and walked on. [236]

As he turned the corner by the great canna plant, he came suddenly upon Mrs. Beadle, who was apparently waiting to speak to him. The good housekeeper was in her state dress of black silk, with embroidered apron and lace mitts, and a truly wonderful cap; and Colonel Ferrers, if he had been observant of details, might have known that this portended something of a serious nature. Being such as he was, he merely raised his hat with his grave courtesy, and said: "Good-afternoon, Mrs. Beadle. Is it about the yellow pickles? The same quantity as usual, ma'am, or perhaps a few more jars, as I wish to send some to Mrs. Grahame at Braeside." [237]

Mrs. Beadle shivered a little. She had made the yellow pickles at Roseholme for five and twenty years; and now,—"No, sir," she said faintly. "It is not the pickles." She plucked at the fringe of her shawl, and Colonel Ferrers waited, though with a kindling eye. Women were admirable, but some of their ways were hard to bear.

Finally Mrs. Beadle made a desperate effort, and said, "Do you think, sir, that you could find some one to take my place?" [238]

Colonel Ferrers fixed a look of keen inquiry on her, and instantly felt her pulse. "Rapid!" he said, "and fluttering; Elizabeth Beadle, are you losing your mind?"

"I have found my little boy, sir," cried Mrs. Beadle, bursting into tears. "My dear niece Martha's own child, Colonel Ferrers. He is in the hands of heathen reprobates, if I do say it, and it is my duty to make a home for him. I never thought to leave Roseholme while work I could, but you see how it is, sir."

"I—see how it is?" cried the Colonel, with a sudden explosion. Then controlling himself by a great effort, he said with forced calmness, "I will walk over to the end of the garden, Elizabeth Beadle, and when I return I shall expect a sensible and coherent—do you understand?—*coherent* account of this folderol. See how it is, indeed!"

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The Colonel strode off, muttering to himself, and poor Mrs. Beadle wiped her eyes, and smoothed down her apron with trembling hands, and made up her mind that she would not cry, if she should die for it.

When the grim-frowning Colonel returned, she told her story with tolerable plainness, and concluded by begging that her kind friend and master would not be angry, but would allow her to retire to a cottage, where she could "see to" her niece's child, and bring him up in a Christian way.

"Pooh! pooh! my good Beadle!" cried the Colonel. "Stuff and nonsense, my good soul! I am delighted that you have found the child; delighted, I assure you. We will get him away from those people, never fear for that! and we will send him to school. A good school, ma'am, is the place for the boy. None of your Hardhacks, but a school where he will be happy and well-treated. In vacation time—hum! ha!—you might take a little trip with him now and then, perhaps. But as to disturbing your position here— Pooh! pooh! stuff and nonsense! Don't let me hear of it again!"

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Mrs. Beadle trembled, but remained firm. "No school, sir!" she said. "What the child needs is a home, Colonel Ferrers; and there's nobody but me to make one for him. No, sir! never, if I gave my life to it, could I thank you as should be for your kindness since first I set foot in this dear house, as no other place will ever be home to me! but go I must, Colonel, and the sooner the better."

Then the Colonel exploded. His face became purple; his eyes flashed fire, and, leaning upon his stick, he poured out volley upon volley of reproach, exhortation, argument. Higher and higher rose his voice, till the very leaves quivered upon the trees; till the object of his wrath shook like an aspen, and even Giuseppe, in the north corner of the garden, quailed, and murmured "Santa Maria!" over his chrysanthemums.

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How much more frightened, since theirs was the blame of all the mischief, were two guilty creatures who at this moment crouched, concealed behind a great laurel-bush, listening with all their ears!

Jack and Hildegard exchanged terrified glances. They had known that the Colonel would be angry, but they had no idea of anything like this. He was in a white heat of rage, and was hurling polysyllabic wrath at the devoted woman before him, who stood speechless but unshaken, meekly receiving the torrent of invective.

Suddenly, there was a movement among the bushes; and the next moment a small form emerged from the shade, and stood in front of the furious old gentleman. "Is your name Saul?" asked Hugh quietly.

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The two conspirators had forgotten the child. They had brought him with them, with some faint idea of letting the Colonel see him as if by accident, hoping that his quaint grace might make a favourable impression; but in the stress of the occasion they had wholly forgotten his presence, and now—now matters were taken out of their hands. Hildegard clutched her parasol tight; Jack clasped his violin, and both listened and looked with all their souls.

"Is your name Saul?" repeated the boy, as the Colonel, astonishment choking for an instant the torrent of his rage, paused speechless. "Because if it is, the evil spirit from God is upon you, and you should have some one play with his hand."

"What—what is this?" gasped the Colonel. "Who are you, boy?"

"I am my great-aunt's little nephew," said Hugh. "But no matter for me. You must sit down when the evil spirit is upon you. You might hurt some one. Why do you look so at me, great-aunt? Why don't you help Mr. Saul?"

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"Come away, Hughie, love!" cried Mrs. Beadle, in an agony of terror. "Come, dear, and don't ever speak to the Colonel so again. He's only a babe, sir, as doesn't know what he is saying."

"Go away yourself!" roared the Colonel, recovering the power of speech. "Depart, do you hear? Remove yourself from my presence, or—" he moved forward. Mrs. Beadle turned and fled. "Now," he said, turning to the child, "what do you mean, child, by what you said just now? I—I will sit down."

He sank heavily on a garden seat and motioned the child before him. "What do you mean, about Saul—eh?"

"But you know," said Hugh, opening wide eyes of wonder,— "are you so old that you forget?—how the evil spirit from God came upon King Saul, and they sent for David, and he played with his hand till the evil spirit went away. Now you remember?" He nodded confidently, and sat down

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beside the Colonel, who, though still heaving and panting from his recent outburst, made no motion to repel him. "I said *Mr. Saul*," Hugh continued, "because you are not a king, you see, and I suppose just 'Saul' would not be polite when a person is as old as you are. And *what* do you think?" he cried joyously, as a sudden thought struck him. "The ostrich gentleman plays most *beautifully* with his hand. His name isn't David, but that doesn't matter. I am going to find him."

"Play, Jack," whispered Hildegarde. "Play, *quick!* Something old and simple. Play 'Annie Laurie.'"

Obedying the girl's fleeting look, Jack laid fiddle to bow, and the old love tune rose from behind the laurel-bush and floated over the garden, so sweet, so sweet, the very air seemed to thrill with tenderness and gentle melody. [245]

Colonel Ferrers sank back on the seat. "Hester's song," he murmured. "Hester's song. Is it Hester, or an angel?"

The notes rose, swelled into the pathetic refrain,—

"And for bonny Annie Laurie,
I'd lay me down and die."

Then they sank away, and left the silence still throbbing, as the hearts of the listeners throbbed.

"I thought it was an angel," cried Hugh, "when I first heard him, Mr. Saul. But it isn't. It is the ostrich gentleman, and he has to play up in the attic generally, because his uncle is a poor person who doesn't know how to like music. I am *so* sorry for his uncle, aren't you?" [246]

"Yes," said Colonel Ferrers gruffly. "Yes, I am. Very sorry."

A pause followed. Then Hugh asked cautiously: "How do you feel now, Mr. Saul? Do you feel as if the evil spirit were going away?"

"I've got him," said the Colonel, in whose eyes the fire of anger was giving place to something suspiciously like a twinkle. "I've got him—bottled up. Now, youngster, who told you all that?"

"All what?" asked Hugh, whose thoughts were beginning to wander as he gazed around the garden. "About the poor person who doesn't know how to—"

"No, no," said the Colonel hastily, "not that. About Saul and David, and all that. Who put you up to it? Hey?"

His keen eyes gazed intently into the clear blue ones of the child. Hugh stared at him a moment, then answered gently, with a note of indulgence, as if he were speaking to a much younger child: "It is in the Bible. It is a pity that you do not know it. But perhaps there are no pictures in your Bible. There was a big one where I lived, all *full* of pictures, so I learned to read that way. And I always liked the Saul pictures," he added, his eyes kindling, "because David was beautiful, you know, and of a ruddy countenance; and King Saul was all hunched up against the tent-post, with his eyes glaring just as yours were when you roared, only he was uglier. You are not at all ugly now, but then you looked as if you were going to burst. If a person *should* burst—" [247]

Colonel Ferrers rose, and paced up and down the path, going a few steps each way, and glancing frequently at the boy from under his bushy eyebrows. Hugh fell into a short reverie, and woke to say cheerfully:— [248]

"This place fills me with heavenly joys. Does it fill you?"

"Humph!" growled the Colonel. "If you lived here, you would break all the flowers off, I suppose, and pull 'em to pieces to see how they grow; eh?"

Hugh contemplated him dreamily. "Is that what you did when you were a little boy?" he answered. "I love flowers. I don't like to pick them, for it takes their life. I don't care how they grow, as long as they *do* grow."

"And you would take all the birds' eggs," continued the Colonel, "and throw stones at the birds, and trample the flower-beds, and bring mud into the house, and tie fire-crackers to the cat's tail, and upset the ink. *I* know you!"

Hugh rose with dignity, and fixed his eyes on the Colonel with grave disapproval. "You do *not* know me!" he said. "And—and if that is the kind of boy you were, it is no wonder that the evil spirit comes upon you. I shouldn't be a bit surprised if you did burst some day. Good-by, Mr. Saul! I am going away now." [251]

"Hold on!" cried the Colonel peremptorily. "I beg your pardon! Do you hear? Shake hands!"

Hugh beamed forgiveness, and extended a small brown paw, which was shaken with right good will.

"That's right!" said Colonel Ferrers, with gruff heartiness. "Now go into the house and find your great-aunt, and tell her to give you some jam. Do you like jam?" The boy nodded with all the rapture of seven years. "Give you some jam, and a picture-book, and make up a bed in the little red room. Can you remember all that?"

"Yes, Mr. Saul!" cried Hugh, dancing about a little.

"Nice Mr. Saul! Shall I bring you some jam? What kind of jam shall I say?"

"What kind do you like best?"

"Damson."

"Damson it is! Off with you now!"

When the boy was gone, the Colonel walked up and down for a few moments, frowning heavily, his hands holding his stick behind him. Then he said quietly, "Jack!"

Jack came forward and stood before him, looking half-proud, half-sheepish, with his fiddle under his arm.

The Colonel contemplated him for a moment in silence. Then, "Why in the name of all that is cacophonous, didn't you play me a tune at first, instead of an infernal German exercise? Hey?"

Jack blushed and stammered. He had played for his uncle once only, a fugue by Hummel, of which his mind had happened to be full; he felt that it had not been a judicious choice.

"Can you play 'The Harp of Tara'?" demanded the Colonel; and Jack played, with exquisite feeling, the lovely old tune, the Colonel listening with bent head, and marking the time with his stick. "Harry Monmouth!" he said, when it was over. "Because a man doesn't like to attend the violent ward of a cats' lunatic asylum, it doesn't follow that he doesn't care for music. Music, sir, is melody, that's what it is!"

Jack shuddered slightly, and did silent homage to the shade of Wagner, but knew enough to keep silence.

"And—and where did you pick up this child?" his uncle continued. "I take it back about his having been put up to what he did. He is true blue, that child; I shouldn't wonder if you were, too, in milksop fashion. Hey?"

"Skim-milk is blue, you know, uncle," said Jack, smiling. "But I didn't discover Hugh. Isn't he a wonderful child, sir? Hildegarde discovered him, of course. I believe Hildegarde does everything, except what her mother does. Come here, Hildegarde! Come and tell Uncle Tom about your finding Hugh."

But Hildegarde was gone.



HUGH AND COLONEL FERRERS.

CHAPTER XIII.

A PICNIC.

"My dear Colonel, I congratulate you most heartily! Indeed, I had little doubt of your success, for this was a case in which Reynard the Fox was sure to have the worst of it. But I am very curious to know how you managed it."

"Nothing could be simpler, my dear madam. I went to the fellow's house yesterday morning. 'Mr. Loftus, your little nephew is at my house. Your aunt, Mrs. Beadle, has taken charge of him, according to his mother's wish, and I undertook to inform you of the fact.' He turned all the colours of the rainbow, began to bluster, and said he was the boy's nearest relation, which is very true. 'I want him to grow up a gentleman,' said he. 'Precisely,' said I. 'He shall have a chance to do so, Mr. Loftus.' The fellow didn't like that; he looked black and green, and spoke of the law and the police. 'That reminds me,' I said, 'of a story. About twenty-five years ago, or it may be thirty, a sum of money was stolen from my desk, in what I call my counting-room in my own house. Am I taking up too much of your valuable time, sir?' He choked and tried to speak, but could only shake his head. 'The thief was a mere lad,' I went on, 'and a clumsy one, for he dropped his pocketknife in getting out of the window,—a knife marked with his name. For reasons of my own I did not arrest the lad, who left town immediately after; but I have the knife, Ephraim, in my possession.' I waited a moment, and then said that I would send for the little boy's trunk; wished him good-day, and came off, leaving him glowering after me on the doorstep. You see, it was very simple."

"I see," said Mrs. Grahame. "But is it possible that Mr. Loftus—"

"Very possible, my dear Mrs. Grahame. As I told him, I have the knife, with his name in full.

One hundred dollars he stole; for Elizabeth Beadle's sake, of course I let it go. Her peace of mind is worth more than that, for if she's thoroughly upset, the dinners she orders are a nightmare, positively a nightmare. That is actually one reason why I planned this picnic for to-day, because I knew I should have something with cornstarch in it if I dined at home. Why cornstarch should connect itself with trouble in the feminine mind, I do not know; but such seems to be the case."

Mrs. Grahame laughed heartily at this theory; then, in a few earnest words, she told Colonel Ferrers how deeply interested she and her daughter were in this singular child, and how happy they were in the sudden and great change in his prospects. [258]

"And I know you will love him," she said. "You cannot help loving him, Colonel. He is really a wonderful child."

"Humph!" said the Colonel thoughtfully. Then after a pause, he continued: "I thought I had lost the power of loving, Mrs. Grahame; of loving anything but my flowers, that is, any living creature; lost it forty years ago. But somehow, of late, there has been a stirring of the ground, a movement among the old roots—yes! yes! there may be a little life yet. That child of yours—you never saw Hester Aytoun, Mrs. Grahame?"

"Never," said Mrs. Grahame softly. "She died the year before I came here as a child."

"Precisely," said Colonel Ferrers. "She was a—a very lovely person. Your daughter is extremely like her, my dear madam." [259]

"I fancied as much," said Mrs. Grahame, "from the miniature I found in Uncle Aytoun's collection."

"Ah! yes! the miniature. I remember, there were two. I have the mate to it, Mrs. Grahame. Yes! your daughter is very like her. There was a strong attachment between Hester and myself. Then came a mistake, a misunderstanding, the puff of a feather, a breath of wind; I went away. She was taken suddenly ill, died of a quick consumption. That was forty years ago, but it changed my life, do you see? I have lived alone. Robert Aytoun was a disappointed man. Wealthy Bond,—you know the old story,—Agatha an invalid, Barbara a rigorous woman, strict Calvinist, and so forth. We all grew old together. The neighbours call me a recluse, a bear—I don't know what all; right enough they have been. But now—well, first the lad, there, came—my brother's son. Duty, you know, and all the rest of it; father an unsuccessful genius, angel and saint, with an asinine quality added. That waked me up a little, but only made me growl. But that child of yours, and your own society, if you will allow me to say so—I see things with different eyes, in short. Why, I am actually becoming fond of my milksop; a good lad, eh, Mrs. Grahame? an honest, gentlemanly lad, I think?" [260]

"Indeed, yes!" cried Mrs. Grahame heartily. "A most dear and good lad, Colonel Grahame! I cannot tell you how fond Hilda and I are of him."

"That's right! that's right!" said the Colonel, with great heartiness. "You have done it all for him, between you. Holds up his head now, walks like a Christian; and, positively, I found him reading 'Henry Esmond,' the other day; reading it of his own accord, you observe. Said his cousin Hilda said Esmond was the finest gentleman she knew, and wanted to know what he was like. When a boy takes to 'Henry Esmond,' my dear madam, he is headed in the right direction. Asked me about Lord Herbert, too, at dinner yesterday; really took an interest. Got that from his cousin, too. How many girls know anything about Lord Herbert? Tell me that, will you?" [261]

"Hildegarde has always been a hero-worshipper!" said Mrs. Grahame, smiling, with the warm feeling about the heart that a mother feels when her child is praised. "You make me very happy, Colonel, with all these kind words about my dear daughter. What she is to me, of course, I cannot tell. 'The very eyes of me!' you remember Herrick's dear old song. But I think my good black auntie put it best, one day last week, when Hildegarde had a bad headache, and was in her room all day. 'Miss Hildy,' said auntie, 'she's de salt in de soup, she is. 'Tain't no good without her.' But hark! here they come back, with the water; and now, Colonel, it is time for luncheon." [262]

The speakers were sitting under a great pine tree, one of a grove which crowned the top of a green hill. Below them lay broad, sunny meadows, here whitening into silver with daisies, there waving with the young grain. In a hollow at a little distance lay a tiny lake, as if a giantess had dropped her mirror down among the golden fields; further off, dark stretches of woodland framed the bright picture. It was a scene of perfect beauty. Mrs. Grahame sat gazing over the landscape, her heart filled with a great peace. She listened to the young voices, which were coming nearer and nearer. She was so glad that she had made the effort to come. It had been an effort, even though Colonel Ferrers's thoughtfulness had provided the most comfortable of low phaetons, drawn by the slowest and steadiest of cobs, which had brought her with as little discomfort as might be to the top of the hill. But how well worth the fatigue it was to be here! [263]

"And do you love me, Purple Maid?" It was Hugh's clear treble that thrilled with earnestness.

"I love you very much, dear lad! What would you do if I did not, Hugh?"

"Oh! I should weep, and weep, and be a *very* melancholy Jaques, indeed!"

"Melancholy Jaques!" muttered Colonel Ferrers. "Where on earth did he get hold of that? Extraordinary youngster!"

"He loves the Shakespeare stories," said Mrs. Grahame. "Hilda tells them to him, and reads bits here and there. Oh, I assure you, Colonel Ferrers, Hugh is a revelation. There never was a child like him, I do believe. But, hush! here he is!" [264]

The boy's bright head appeared, as he came up the hill, hand in hand with Hildegarde. They were laden with ferns and flowers, while Jack Ferrers, a few steps behind, carried a pail of fresh water.

"Aha!" said the Colonel, rubbing his hands. "Here we are, eh? What! you have robbed the woods, Hildegarde? Scaramouche, how goes it, hey?"

"It goes very well!" replied Hugh soberly, but with sparkling eyes. "I am going to call him 'Bonny Dundee,' because his name is John Grahame, you see; and she says, perhaps he *may* be a hero, too, some day; that would be *so* nice!"

"Come, Hugh!" said Hildegarde, laughing and blushing. "You must not tell our secrets. Wait till he *is* a hero, and then he shall have the hero's name." [265]

"What!" cried the Colonel. "You young Jacobite, are you instilling your pernicious doctrines into this child's breast? Bonny Dundee, indeed! Marmalade is all that I want to know about Dundee. Bring the hamper, Jack! here, under this tree! You are quite comfortable here, Mrs. Grahame?"

"Extremely comfortable," said that lady. "Now, you gentlemen may unpack the baskets, while Hilda and I lay the cloth."

All hands went to work, and soon a most tempting repast was set out under the great pine tree. Colonel Ferrers's contribution was a triumph of Mrs. Beadle's skill, and resembled Tennyson's immortal

"Pasty costly made,
Where quail and pigeon, lark and linnet lay,
With golden yolks imbedded and injellied."

Indeed, the Colonel quoted these lines with great satisfaction, as he set the great pie down in the centre of the "damask napkin, wrought with horse and hound." [266]

"That is truly magnificent!" exclaimed Mrs. Grahame. "And I can match it with 'the dusky loaf that smells of home,'" she added, taking out of her basket a loaf of graham bread and a pot of golden butter.

"Here is the smoked tongue," cried Hildegarde; "here is raspberry jam, and almond cake. Shall we starve, do you think, Colonel Ferrers?"

"In case of extreme hunger, I have brought a few peaches," said the Colonel; and he piled the rosy, glowing, perfect globes in a pyramid at a corner of the cloth.

"Cloth of gold shall be matched with cloth of frieze," said Mrs. Grahame, and in the opposite corner rose a pyramid of baked potatoes, hot and hot, wafting such an inviting smell through the air that the Colonel seized the carving-knife at once. [267]

"Are you ready?" he demanded. "Why—where is Jack? Jack, you rascal! where have you got to?"

"Here!" cried a voice among the bushes; and Jack appeared, flushed with triumph, carrying a smoking coffee-pot. "This is my contribution," he said. "If it is only clear! I think it is."

Hildegarde held out a cup, and he poured out a clear amber stream, whose fragrance made both potatoes and peaches retire from the competition.

"You really made this?" Colonel Ferrers asked. "You, sir?"

"I, sir," replied Jack. "Biddy taught me. I—I have been practising on you for a couple of days," he added, smiling. "You may remember that your coffee was not quite clear day before yesterday?"

"Clear!" exclaimed the Colonel, bending his brows in mock anger. "I thought Lethe and Acheron had been stirred into it. So that is the kind of trick Elizabeth Beadle plays on me, eh? Scaramouche!" addressing Hugh, "you must look after this great-aunt of yours, do you hear?" [268]

"She made the pie," said Hugh diplomatically.

"She did! she did!" cried Hildegarde, holding out her cup. "Let no one breathe a word against her. Fill up, fill up the festal cup! drop Friendship's sugar therein! two lumps, my mother, if you love me!"

"Somebody should make a poem on this pie," said Mrs. Grahame. "There never was such a pie, I believe. Hilda, you seem in poetic mood. Can you not improvise something?"

Hildegarde considered for a few minutes, making meanwhile intimate acquaintance with the theme of song; then throwing back her head, she exclaimed with dramatic fervour:— [269]

"I sing the pie!

The pie sing I!
And yet I do not sing it; why?
Because my mind
Is more inclined
To eat it than to glorify."

Anything will make people laugh at a picnic, especially on a day when the whole world is aglow with light and life and joy. One jest followed another, and the walls of the pie melted away to the sound of laughter, as did those of Jericho at the sound of the trumpet. Merlin, who had stayed behind to watch a woodchuck, came up just in time to consume the last fragments, which he did with right good will. Then, when they had eaten "a combination of Keats and sunset," as Mrs. Grahame called the peaches, the Colonel asked permission to light his cigar; and the soft fragrance of the Manilla mingled with odours of pine and fir, while delicate blue rings floated through the air, to the delight of Hugh and Merlin. [270]

"This is the nose dinner," said the child. "It is almost better than the mouth dinner, isn't it?"

"Humph!" said the Colonel, puffing meditatively. "If you hadn't had the mouth dinner first, young man, I think we should hear from you shortly. Hest—a—Hildegarde, will you give us a song?"

So Hildegarde sang one song and another, the old songs that the Colonel loved: "Ben Bolt," and "The Arethusa," and "A-hunting we will go"; and then, for her own particular pleasure and her mother's, she sang an old ballad, to a strange, lovely old air that she had found in an Elizabethan song-book.

"When shaws been sheene, and shraddes full faire,
And leaves are large and long,
It is merry walking in the fair forest,
To hear the small birds' song. [271]

"The woodwele sang, and would not cease,
Sitting upon the spray,
Soe loud, he wakened Robin Hood,
In the greenwood where he lay."

It was the ballad of Robin Hood and Guy of Gisborne; and when she sang the second verse her mother's sweet alto chimed in; and when she sang the third verse, Jack began to whistle a soft, sweet accompaniment, the effect of which was almost magical; and when she sang the fourth verse,—wonder of wonders! here was the Colonel humming a bass, rather gruff, but in perfect tune.

When the ballad was over, there was a chorus of surprise and congratulation. "Colonel Ferrers! why didn't you tell us you sang?"

"I say, Uncle Tom, you've been regularly humbugging us. The idea of your turning out a *basso profundo!*"

The Colonel looked pleased and conscious. [272]

"Saul among the prophets, eh?" he said. "This little rascal calls me Saul, you know, Mrs. Grahame; caught me in a temper the other day, and set Jack on me with his fiddle. Ha! hum! Why, I used to sing a little, duets and so forth, forty years ago. Always fond of singing; fond of anything that has a tune to it, though I can't abide your Dutch noises. Where's your fiddle, Jack?"

Jack had not brought his fiddle; but he whistled a Scotch reel that Colonel Ferrers had not heard since before the flood, he said; and then Hildegarde sang "Young Lochinvar," and so the pleasant moments went.

By and by, when the dishes were burned (such a convenience are the paper dishes, removing the only unpleasant feature of a picnic, the washing of dishes or carrying home of dirty ones), and everything neatly packed away, Hugh challenged Hildegarde to a race down the hill and across the long meadow to the sunk wall beyond. Jack claimed a place in the running, but the Colonel insisted that he and Merlin should give the others odds, as ostriches and quadrupeds had an unfair advantage over ordinary runners. Mrs. Grahame, after hunting in her reticule, produced a prize, a rouleau of chocolate; positions were taken, and Colonel Ferrers gave the signal—one, two, three, and away! Away went Hildegarde and the boy, Jack holding Merlin, who was frantic with impatience, and did not understand the theory of handicaps. As the first pair reached the bottom of the hill, the Colonel again gave the signal, and the second two darted in pursuit. "Away, away went Auster like an arrow from the bow!" [273]

Hildegarde was running beautifully, her head thrown back, her arms close at her sides; just behind her Hugh's bright head bobbed up and down, as his little legs flew like a windmill. But Jack Ferrers really merited his name of the ostrich gentleman, as with head poked forward, arms flapping, and legs moving without apparent concert, he hurled himself down the hill at a most astonishing rate of speed. The Colonel and Mrs. Grahame looked on with delight, when suddenly both uttered an exclamation and rose to their feet. [274]

What was it?

From behind a clump of trees at a little distance beyond Hildegarde, a large animal suddenly appeared. It had apparently been grazing, but now it stopped short, raised its head, and gazed at the two figures which came flying, all unconscious, towards it.

"John Bryan's bull!" cried Mrs. Grahame. "Oh! Colonel Ferrers, the children! Hildegarde!"

"Don't be alarmed, dear madam!" said the Colonel hastily, seizing his stick. "Remain where you are, I beg of you. I will have John Bryan hanged to-morrow! Meanwhile"—and he hastened down the hill, as rapidly as seventy years and a rheumatic knee would permit. [275]

But it was clear that whatever was to be done must be done quickly. Hildegarde and Hugh had seen the bull, and stopped. He was well known as a dangerous animal, and had once before escaped from his owner, a neighbouring farmer. Mrs. Grahame, faint with terror, saw little Hugh, with a sudden movement, throw himself before Hildegarde, who clasped her arms round him, and slowly and quietly began to move backwards. The bull uttered a bellow, and advanced, pawing the ground; at first slowly, then more and more rapidly as Hildegarde increased her pace, till but a short distance intervened between him and the two helpless children. Colonel Ferrers was still a long way off. Oh! for help! help! The bull bellowed again, lowered his huge head, and rushed forward. In a moment he would be upon them. Suddenly—what was this? A strange object appeared, directly between the bull and his helpless victims. What was it? The bull stopped short, and glared at his new enemy. Two long legs, like those of a man, but no body; between the legs a face, looking at him with fiery eyes. Such a thing the bull had never seen. What was it? Men he knew, and women, and children; knew and hated them, for they were like his master, who kept him shut up, and sometimes beat him. But this thing! what was it? The strange figure advanced steadily towards him; the bull retreated—stopped—bellowed—retreated again, shaking his head. He did not like this. Suddenly the figure made a spring! turned upside down. The long legs waved threateningly in the air, and with an unearthly shriek the monster came whirling forward in the shape of a wheel. John Bryan's bull turned and fled, as never bull fled before. Snorting with terror, he went crashing through the woods, that wild shriek still sounding in his ears; and he never stopped till he reached his own barnyard, where John Bryan promptly beat him and tied him up. [276]

Hildegarde, pale and trembling, held out her hand as Jack, assuming his normal posture, came forward. She tried to speak, but found no voice, and could only press his hand and look her gratitude. [277]

Colonel Ferrers, much out of breath, came up, and gave the lad's hand a shake that might almost have loosened his arm in the socket. "Well done, lad!" he cried. "You are of the right stuff, after all, and you'll hear no more 'milksoop' from me. Where did you learn that trick? Harry Monmouth! the beast was frightened out of his boots! Where did you learn it, boy?" [278]

"An Englishman showed it to me," said Jack modestly. "It's nothing to do, but it always scares them. How are you now, Hildegarde? Sit down, and let me bring you some water!"

But Hugh Allen clasped the long legs of his deliverer, and cried joyously, "I knew he was a David! he is a double David now, isn't he, Beloved?"

"Yes," said Hildegarde, smiling again, as she turned to hasten up the hill to her mother, "but I shall call him 'Bonny Dundee,' for he has won the hero's name."

"It was the ostrich that won the day, though," said Jack, looking at his legs. [279]



CHAPTER XIV.

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OVER THE JAM-POTS.

ONE bright September morning Hildegarde was sitting in the dining-room, covering jam-pots. She had made the jam herself—peach marmalade it was, the best in the world, all golden-brown, like clear old amber—a day or two before, and now it was firm enough to cover. At her right hand was a pile of covers, thick white paper cut neatly in rounds, a saucer full of white of egg, another full of brandy, an inkstand and pen. At her left was an open book, and a large rosy apple. She worked away busily with deft fingers, only stopping now and then for a moment to nibble her apple. First a small cover wet in brandy, fitting neatly inside the jar; then a large cover brushed over with white of egg, which, when dry, would make the paper stiff, and at the same time fasten it securely round the jar. And all the time she was murmuring to herself, with an occasional glance at the volume beside her,—

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"Sabrina fair, listen where thou art sitting,
Under the glassy, cool, translucent wave,
In twisted braids of lilies knitting
The loose train of thy amber-dropping hair.
Listen for dear honour's sake,
Goddess of the silver lake,
Listen and save!
Listen and appear to us,
In name of great Oceanus."

Here she stopped to write on several jars the paper on which was dry and hard; a bite at her apple, and she continued,—

"By the earth-shaking Neptune's crook'—"

"No," glancing at the book. "Why do I always get that wrong?"

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"By the earth-shaking Neptune's *mace*,
And Tethys' grave majestic pace;
By hoary Nereus' wrinkled look,
And the Carpathian'—"

At this moment a shadow fell on the table, as of some one passing by the window, and the next moment Jack entered.

"What are you doing?" he asked, after the morning greetings, sitting down and scowling at the unoffending jam-pots. "Can't you come out in the garden? It's no end of a day, you know!"

"No end?" said Hildegarde. "Then I shall have plenty of time, and I must finish my jam-pots in any case, and my poetry."

"Poetry? are you making it?"

"Only learning it. I like to learn bits when I am doing things of this sort."

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"By Leucothea's lovely hands,
And her son that rules the strands'—"

"Wait just a moment, Jack. I think I know it all now."

"By Thetis' tinsel-slippered feet,
And the songs of Sirens sweet'—"

Isn't that lovely, Jack?"

"Oh, yes," answered Jack absently. "What *have* you been doing here, Hilda?" He was studying the jars that were already marked, and now read aloud,—

"William the Conqueror, his Jam, 1066.'

"Peach Marmalade.
Put up by Hamlet, Prince of Denmark,
For his own use.'

"What an extraordinary girl you are, Hildegarde!"

"Not at all extraordinary!" cried Hildegarde, laughing and blushing. "Why shouldn't I amuse myself? It hurts no one, and it amuses me very much."

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Jack laughed, and went on,—

"Marmaladus Crabappulis.

C. J. Cæsar fecit.
Jam satis.'

"Crab-apple Jelly.
Macbeth, Banquo & Co., Limited.'

"Peach Marmalade.
Made by
John Grahame, Viscount Dundee. Gold Medal.'

"This ought to be mine."

"It shall be yours, greedy viscount. Get a spoon and eat it at once, if you like."

"Thank you so much. I would rather take it home, if I may. I say, what is that brown stuff out on the porch, with mosquito netting over it? Nothing very valuable, I hope?"

"Oh, *Jack!*" cried Hildegarde, springing up, "my peach leather! What have you—did you fall into it? Oh, and I thought you were improving so much! I must go—" [286]

"No, don't go," said her cousin. "I—I only knocked down one plate. And—Merlin was with me, you know, and I don't believe you would find any left. I am very sorry, Hilda. Can I make some more for you?"

"I think not, my cousin. But no matter, if it is only one plate, for there are a good many, as you saw. Only, do be careful when you go home, that's a good boy."

"What is it, anyhow?"

"Why—you cook it with brown sugar, you know."

"Cook what? Leather?"

"Oh, dear! the masculine mind is *so* obtuse—peaches, O sacred bird of Juno!"

"The eagle?"

"The goose. You really *must* study mythology, Jack. You cook the peaches with brown sugar, and then you rub them through a sieve,—it's a horrid piece of work!—and then spread them on plates, just as you saw them, and cover them to keep the flies off." [287]

"And leave long ends trailing to trip up your visitors."

"One doesn't expect giraffes to make morning calls. So after a few days it hardens, if it has the luck to be left alone, and then you roll it up."

"Plates and all?"

"Of course! and sprinkle sugar over it, and it is really delicious. I might have given you that plate you knocked over, but now—"

"It was the smallest, I remember."

"And, Jack, I made it all myself. No one else touched it. And all this marmalade, and three dozen pots of currant jelly, and four dozen of crab-apple."

"Sacred bird of Juno!" ejaculated her cousin. [288]

"Do you dare call *me* a goose, sir?"

"She drove peacocks, didn't she? I do know a *little* mythology."

"But, Hildegarde, be serious now, will you? I'm in a peck of trouble, as Bidy says. I want consolation, or advice, or something."

"Sit down, and tell me," said Hildegarde, full of interest at once.

Jack sat down and drummed on the table, a thing that Hildegarde had never been allowed to do.

"I got a letter from Daddy, yesterday," he said, after a pause. "Herr Geigen is going to Germany now, in a week, and Daddy says I may go if Uncle Tom is willing."

"And he isn't willing?" Hilda said. "Oh!"

Jack got up and moved restlessly about the room, laying waste the chairs as he went. "Willing? He only roars, and says, 'Stuff and nonsense!' which is no answer, you know, Hilda. If he would just say 'No,' quietly, I—well, of course you can make up your mind to stand a thing, and stand it. But he won't listen to me for five minutes. If he could realise—one can get as good an education at Leipsic as at Harvard. But his idea of Germany is a country inhabited by a crazy emperor and a 'parcel of Dutch fiddlers,' and by no one else. I shall have to give it up, I suppose." [289]

"Oh, no!" cried Hildegarde hopefully. "Don't give it up yet. You know when mamma spoke to him, he didn't absolutely say 'No.' He said he would think about it. Perhaps—she might ask him if he had thought about it. Wait a day or two, at any rate, Jack, before you write to your father. Can

you wait?"

"Oh, yes! but it won't make any difference. I suppose it's good for me. You say all trouble is good in the end. Have you ever had any trouble, I wonder, Hilda?"

"My father!" said Hildegarde, colouring.

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"Forgive me!" cried her cousin. "I am a brute! an idiotic brute! What shall I do?" he said in desperation, seeing the tears in the girl's clear eyes. "It would do no good if I went and shot myself, or I would in a minute. You will forgive me, Hilda?"

"My dear, there is nothing to forgive!" said Hildegarde, smiling kindly at him. "Nothing at all. I shouldn't have minded—but—it is his birthday to-morrow," and the tears overflowed this time, while Jack stood looking at her in silent remorse, mentally heaping the most frantic abuse upon himself.

The tears were soon dried, however, and Hildegarde was her cheerful self again. "You must go now," she said, "for I have all these jam-pots to put away, and it is nearly dinner-time. See! this jar of peach marmalade is for Hugh, because he is fond of it. Of course Mrs. Beadle can make it a great deal better, but he will like this because his Purple Maid made it. Isn't he a darling, Jack?"

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"Yes, he's a little brick, certainly. Uncle Tom calls him the Ph[oe]nix, and is more delighted with him every day. Now *there's* a boy who ought to go to Harvard."

"He will," said Hildegarde, nodding sagely. "Good-by, Jack dear!"

"It is very early. I don't see why I have to go so soon! Can't I help you to put away the jam-pots?"

"You can go home, my dear boy. Good-by! I sha'nt forget—"

"Oh, good-by!" and Jack flung off in half a huff, as auntie would have said.

Hildegarde looked after him thoughtfully. "How young he is!" she said to herself. "I wonder if boys always are. And yet he is two years older than I by the clock, if you understand what I mean!" She addressed the jam-pots, in grave confidence, and began to put them away in their own particular cupboard.

CHAPTER XV.

[292]

AT THE BROWN COTTAGE.

HILDEGARDE'S mind was still full of her cousin and his future, as she sat that afternoon in Mrs. Lankton's kitchen, with her sewing-school around her. The brown cottage with the green door had been found the most central and convenient place for the little class, and it was an object of absorbing interest to Mrs. Lankton herself. She hovered about Hildegarde and her scholars, predicting disease and death for one and another, with ghoulish joy.

"Your ma hadn't ought to let you come out to-day, Marthy Skeat. You warn't never rugged from the time you was a baby; teethin' like to have carried you off, and 'tain't too late now. There's wisdom teeth, ye know. Well, it's none o' my business, but I hope your ma's prepared. Good-mornin', Miss Grahame! I'm tellin' Marthy Skeat she ain't very likely to see long skirts, comin' out in this damp air. You're peart, are ye? That's right! Ah! they can look peart as ain't had no troubles yet. I was jist like you oncet, Miss Grahame. I've had a sight o' trouble! no one don't know what I've ben through; don't know nothin' about it. You've fleshed up some since ye came here, ain't ye? Well, they do flesh up that way sometimes, but 'tain't no good sign. There's measles about, too, they say."

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"How bright and pretty your plants are, Mrs. Lankton!" said Hilda, trying to make a diversion. "No, Jack!—I mean Jenny! you will have to take that out again. See those long stitches! They look as if they were all running after each other, don't they? Take them out, dear, and make me some nice, neat little stitches, stepping along quietly, as you do when you have on those new shoes you were telling me about. Lizzie, I wonder what turns your thread so dark? See how white my seam is! What do you suppose is the matter with yours?"

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Lizzie giggled and hung her head. "Forgot to wash my hands!" she muttered.

"That was a pity!" said Hildegarde. "It spoils the looks of it, you see. I am sure Mrs. Lankton will let you wash your hands in that bright tin basin. Vesta Philbrook, where is your violin?"

"Ma'am?" said Vesta Philbrook, opening her mouth as wide as her eyes.

"Your thimble I mean, of course!" said Hildegarde, blushing violently, and giving herself a mental shake. "Now go to work, like a good girl. Mary, here is the patchwork I promised you, already basted. See, a pink square, a blue square, a white one, and a yellow one. They are all pieces of my dresses, the dresses I wore last summer; and I thought you would like to have them for your quilt."

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"Oh, thank you!" cried the child, delighted. "Oh, ain't them pretty?"

"Handsome!" said Mrs. Lankton, peering over the child's shoulder. "Them is handsome. Ah! I pieced a quilt once, with nine hundred and ninety-nine pieces into it. Good goods they was; I had good things then; real handsome calico, just like them. Ah, I didn't know what trouble was when I was your age, children. Wait till you've had lumbago, an' neurology, an' cricks in your necks so's't you can't stand straight, not for weeks together you can't, and your roof leakin', an' dreepin' all over yer bed, an'—"

"Why, Mrs. Lankton!" exclaimed Hildegarde. "Surely the roof is not leaking again, when it was all shingled this summer!" [296]

"Not yet it ain't, dear!" sighed the widow. "But I'm prepared for it, and I don't expect nothin' else, after what I've been through. I was fleshy myself, once, though no one wouldn't think it to look at me."

"I wonder, Mrs. Lankton," began Hildegarde gently.

"You may wonder, dear!" was the reply. "Folks do wonder when they think what I've been through. Fleshy was no name for it. There! I was fairly corpulent when I was your age."

"Oh!" said Hildegarde, in some confusion. "I meant—I am very thirsty, Mrs. Lankton, and if you *could* give me a glass of your delicious water—"

"Suttngly!" exclaimed the widow with alacrity. "Suttngly, Miss Grahame! I'll go right out and pump ye some. It *is* good water," she admitted, with reluctant pride. "I've been expectin' it would dry up, right along, lately!" and she hastened out into the yard. [297]

"Now, children," said Hildegarde hastily, "I will go on with the story I began last time. 'So Robert Bruce was crowned king of Scotland; and no sooner was he king than'—"

By the time Mrs. Lankton returned with the water, every child was listening spellbound to the wonderful tale of Bruce at the ford, and no one had an eye or an ear for the doleful widow, save Hildegarde, whose "Thank you!" and quick glance of gratitude lightened for a moment the gloom of her hostess's countenance.

So deep were teacher and pupils in Bruce and patchwork that none of them heard the sound of wheels, or the sudden cessation of it outside the door, till Mrs. Lankton exclaimed with tragic unction: "It is Colonel Ferrers! driving hisself, and his hoss all of a sweat. I hope he ain't the bearer of bad news, but I should be prepared, if I was you, Miss Grahame. Poor child! what would you do if your ma was took?" Hildegarde hastened to the door, but was instantly reassured by the old gentleman's cheery smile. [298]

"Why did you move?" he said. "I stopped on purpose to have a look at you, with your flock of doves around you. Hilda and the doves, hey? you remember? 'Marble Faun!' yes, yes! But since you have moved, shall I drive you home, Miss Industry?"

Hildegarde glanced at the clock. "Our time is over," she said to the children. "Yes, Colonel Ferrers, thank you! I should enjoy the drive very much indeed. Can you wait perhaps five minutes?"

The Colonel could and would; and Hildegarde returned to see that all work was neatly folded and put away. [299]

"And, Annie, here is the receipt I promised you. Be sure to mix the meal thoroughly, and have a good hot oven, and you will find them very nice indeed, and your mother will be so pleased at your making them yourself!"

"Vesta, did you try the honey candy?"

"Yes, 'm! 'twas dretful good. My little brother, he like t'ha' died, he eat so much."

"Dear me!" exclaimed Hilda, rather alarmed at this result of her neat little plan of teaching the children something about cookery, without their finding out that they were being taught.

"But you must see to it, Vesta, that he doesn't eat too much. That is one of the things an elder sister is for, you know."

"Now, whose turn is it to sweep up the threads and scraps? Yours, Euleta? Well, see how careful you can be! not a thread must be left on Mrs. Lankton's clean floor, you know." [300]

Soon all was in order, workbags put away, hats and bonnets tied on; and Hildegarde came out with her doves about her, all looking as if they had had a thoroughly good time. With many affectionate farewells to "Teacher," the children scattered in different directions, and Colonel Ferrers chattered to the brown cob, which trotted briskly away over the smooth road. The Colonel was deeply interested in the sewing-school. Hester Aytoun had had one for the village children, and there had been none from her death until now. He asked many questions, which Hildegarde answered with right good will. They were dear children, she said. She was getting to know them very well, for she tried to see them in their homes once a fortnight, and found they liked to have her come, and looked forward to it. Some of them were very bright; not all, of course, but they all *tried*, and that was the great thing. Yes, she told them all the stories they wanted, and they wanted a great many. [303]



"HE GAVE ME A LUNGE IN QUART."

"Speaking of stories," said the Colonel, "I find I have work laid out for the rest of *my* life."

"Hugh?" said Hildegarde, smiling.

"Most astonishing child I ever saw in my life!" the Colonel cried. "Most amazing child! to see how he flings himself on books is a wonder. I don't let him keep at 'em long, you understand. A brain like that needs play, sir, play! I've bought him a little foil, and—Harry Monmouth! he gave me a lunge in quart that almost broke my guard, last night. But stories! 'More about kings, please, Sire!'—he's got a notion of calling me Sire—ho! ho! can't get Saul out of his head, d'ye see? I feel like Charlemagne, or Barbarossa, or some of 'em. 'More about kings when they were in battle.' He's learned 'Agincourt' by heart, just from my reading it to him. 'Fair stood the wind for France,' hey? Finest ballad in the English language. Says you read it to him, too. And if I am busy he goes to Elizabeth Beadle and frightens her out of her wits with sentences out of the Lamentations of Jeremiah. Now this boy—mark me, Hildegarde!—will turn out something very uncommon, if he has the right training. That scoundrelly knave, Ephraim Loftus, wanted to make a gentleman of him! Ho! Ephraim doesn't know how a gentleman's shoes look, unless he has been made acquainted with the soles of them. I kicked him myself once, I remember, for beating a horse unmercifully. This boy will be a great scholar, mark my words! And whatever assistance I can

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give him shall be cheerfully given. Why, the lad has genius! positive genius!"

"Oh!" said Hildegarde, her heart beating fast. "Then you think, Colonel Ferrers, that a—a person should be educated for what seems to be his natural bent. Do you think that?"

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"Harry Monmouth! of course I do! Look at me! D'ye think I was fitted for a mercantile life, for example? Never got algebra through my head, and hate figures. The army was what I was born for! Born for it, sir! Shouldered my pap-spoon in the cradle, and presented arms whenever I was taken up. Ho! ho! ho!"

Hildegarde began to tremble, but her courage did not fail. "And—and Jack, dear Colonel Ferrers," she said softly. "He was born for music, was he not?"

The Colonel turned square round, and gazed at her from under brows that met over his hooked nose. "What then?" he said slowly, after a pause. "If my nephew was born for a fiddler, what then, Miss Hildegarde Grahame? Is it any reason why he should not be trained for something better? I like the boy's playing very well, very well indeed, when he keeps clear of Dutch discords. But you would not compare playing the fiddle with the glorious Art of War, I imagine?"

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"Not for an instant!" cried Hildegarde, flushing deeply under the Colonel's half-stern, half-quizzical gaze. "Compare music, lovely music, that cheers and comforts and delights all the world, with fierce, cruel, dreadful war? Look at Jack, with his mind full of beautiful harmonies and—and 'airs from heaven'—they really are! making us laugh or cry, or dance or exult, just by the motion of his hand. Look at him, and then imagine him in a red coat, with a gun in his hand—"

"Red is the British colour," said the Colonel.

"Well, a blue coat, then. What difference does it make?—a gun in his hand, shooting people who never did him any harm, whose faces he had never even seen. Oh, Colonel Ferrers, I would not have believed it of you!"

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"And who asked you to believe it of me, pray?" asked the Colonel, as he drove up to the door of Braeside. "To tell the truth, young lady, war is very much more in your line than in my nephew's. Harry Monmouth! Bellona in person, I verily believe. My compliments to your mother, and say I shall call her Madam Althæa in future, for she has brought forth a firebrand."

Instantly Hildegarde's ruffled plumes drooped, smoothed themselves down; instead of the flashing gaze of the eagle, a dove-like look now met the quizzical gaze of the old gentleman. "Dear Colonel Ferrers!" this hypocritical girl murmured, as, standing on the verandah steps, she laid her hand gently on his arm. "Thank you so *very* much for driving me home. You are always so kind—to me! And—and—I want to ask one question. Can you tell me the first lines of Dryden's 'Song for St. Cecilia's Day'?"

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"Of course!" said the simple Colonel.

"From harmony, from heavenly harmony,
This universal frame began."

Why do you—oh! you youthful Circe! you infant Medea, you—" he shook his whip threateningly.

"Good-by, dear Colonel Ferrers!" cried Hildegarde. "I am so glad you remembered the lines. Aren't they beautiful? Good-by!"

CHAPTER XVI.

[309]

GOOD-BY!

"I HAVE come to say good-by!" cried Jack Ferrers, rushing up the steps, as Hildegarde was sitting on the piazza, with Hugh curled up at her feet. "Uncle Tom will come for me with the wagon. Oh, Hilda, it doesn't seem possible, does it? It is too good to be true! and it is all your doing, every bit. I sha'n't forget it. I say! I wish you were coming too!"

"Oh, no, you don't!" said Hildegarde, speaking lightly, though her cheeks were flushed and her eyes bright with real feeling. "You would send me back by express, labelled 'troublesome baggage.'"

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"Dear old Jack! You know how glad I am, without my saying it. But, oh! how we shall miss you! Your uncle—"

"Oh! Hugh will take care of Uncle Tom, won't you, Hugh? Hugh suits him down to the ground—I beg pardon, I mean through and through, and they will have fine times together."

"I will try!" said the child. "But we shall be like a pelican in the wilderness, I am afraid."

"You go straight home now?" Hildegarde asked.

"Straight home! five days with Daddy—bless him! and then he goes to New York with me, and sees me off. Oh! see here!" he began fumbling in his pockets. "I have a keepsake for you. I—of course you know I haven't any money, Hilda, or I would have bought you something; but Uncle Tom gave it to me on purpose to give to you; so it's partly from him, too. Here it is! It belonged to our great-grandmother, he says."

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Such a lovely ring! A star of yellow diamonds set on a hoop of gold. Hildegarde flushed with delight. "Oh, Jack! how kind of him! how dear of you! Oh! what an exquisite thing! I shall wear it always."

"And—I say! how well it looks on your hand! I never noticed before what pretty hands you have, Hilda. You are the prettiest girl I ever saw, altogether."

"And Rose?" asked Hildegarde, smiling.

Jack blushed furiously. He had fallen deeply in love with Rose's photograph, and had been in the habit of gazing at it for ten or fifteen minutes every day for the past fortnight, ever since it arrived. "That's different!" he said. "She is an angel, if the picture is like her."

"It isn't half lovely enough!" cried loyal Hildegarde. "Not half! You don't see the blue of her eyes, or her complexion, just like 'a warm white rose.' Oh! you *would* love her, Jack!"

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"I—I rather think I do!" Jack confessed. "You might let me have the photograph, Hildegarde."

But this Hildegarde wholly refused to do. "I have something much more useful for you!" she said; and, running into the house, she brought out a handkerchief-case of linen, daintily embroidered, containing a dozen fine hemstitched handkerchiefs. "I hemstitched them myself," she said; "the peacock still spreads its tail, you observe. And—see! on one side of the case are forget-me-nots—that is my flower, you know; and on the other are roses. I take credit for putting the roses on top."

"Dear Hilda!" cried her cousin, giving her hand a hearty shake. "What a good fel—what a jolly girl you are! You ought," he added shyly, "to marry the best man in the world, and I hope you will."

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"I mean to," said Hildegarde, laughing, with a happy light in her eyes.

Hildegarde had never seen her "fairy prince, with joyful eyes, and lighter-footed than the fox"; but she knew he would come in good time. She knew, too, very much what he was like,—a combination of Amyas Leigh, Sir Richard Grenville, Dundee, and Montrose, with a dash of the Cid, and a strong flavour of Bayard, the constancy of William the Silent, the kindness of Scott, and the eyes of Edwin Booth. Some day he would come, and find his maiden waiting for him. Meantime, it was so very delightful to have Jack fall in love with Rose. If—she thought, and on that "if" rose many a Spanish castle, fair and lofty, with glittering pinnacle and turret. But she had not the heart to tell Jack of the joyful news she had just received, dared not tell him of the letter in her pocket which said that this dearest Rose was coming soon, perhaps this very week, to make her a long, long visit. If she could only have come earlier!

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But now Jack was taking his violin out of his box. "Where is your mother?" he said. "This is my own, this present for you both. It is 'Farewell to Braeside!'"

Hildegarde flew to call her mother, and met her just coming downstairs. "Jack has composed a

farewell for us," she cried. "All for us, mamma! Come!"

Farewell! the words seemed to breathe through the lovely melody, as the lad played softly, sweetly, a touch of sadness underlying the whole. "Farewell! farewell! parting is pain, is pain, but Love heals the wound with a touch. Love flies over land and sea, bringing peace, peace, and good tidings and joy." Then the theme changed, and a strain of triumph, of exultation, made the air thrill with happiness, with proud delight. The girl and her mother exchanged glances. "This is his work, his life!" said their eyes. And the song soared high and higher, till one fine, exquisite note melted like a skylark into the blue; then sinking gently, gently, it flowed again into the notes of the farewell,—

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"Parting is pain, is pain, but Love is immortal."

Both women were in tears when the song died away, and Jack's own eyes were suspiciously bright.

"My dear boy," said Mrs. Grahame, wiping her eyes, "I do believe you are going to a life of joy and of well-earned triumph. I do heartily believe it."

"It is all Hilda's doings," said Jack, "and yours. All Hilda's and yours, Aunt Mildred. I shall not forget."

Here Hugh, who had been listening spellbound, asked suddenly, "What was the name of the boat which the gentleman who begins with O made to go swiftly over the sea when he played with his hand?"

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"The *Argo*, dear," said Hildegarde.

"It is that boat *he* should go in," nodding to Jack. "It would leap like an unicorn, wouldn't it, if he played those beautiful things which he just played?"

And now Colonel Ferrers drove up to the door, with the brown cob and the yellow wagon. The last words were said; the precious violin was carefully stowed under the seat. Jack kissed Mrs. Grahame warmly, and exchanged with Hildegarde a long, silent pressure of the hand, in which there was a whole world of kindness and affection and comradeship. Boys and girls can be such *good* friends, if they only know how!

"Boot and saddle!" cried the Colonel.

"Good-by!" cried the lad, springing into the wagon. "Good-by! Don't forget the ostrich gentleman!"

[317]

"Good-by, dear Jack!"

"God bless you, my dear lad! Good-by!" and the wheels went crashing over the gravel.

At the end of the driveway the Colonel checked his horse for a moment before turning into the main road. "Look back, boy," he said.

Jack looked, and saw Hildegarde and her mother standing on the verandah with arms entwined, gazing after them with loving looks. The girl's white-clad figure and shining locks were set in a frame of hanging vines and creepers; her face was bright with love and cheer. The slender mother, in her black dress, seemed to droop and lean towards her; on the other side the child clasped her hand with fervent love and devotion.

"My boy," said Colonel Ferrers, "take that picture with you wherever you go. You will see many places and many people, good and bad, comely and ill-favoured; but you will see no sight so good as that of a young woman, lovely and beloved, shining in the doorway of the home she makes bright."

[318]

Transcriber's Note:

Obvious punctuation errors repaired.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK HILDEGARDE'S HOME ***

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