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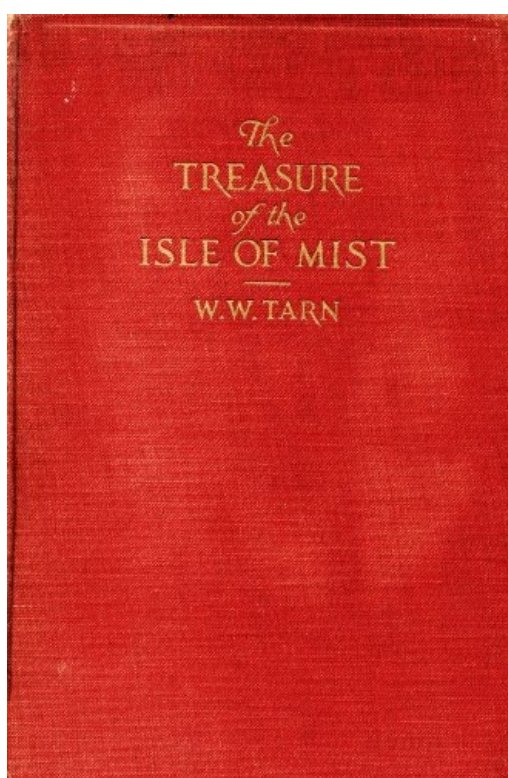
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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE TREASURE OF THE ISLE OF MIST ***



THE TREASURE OF THE ISLE OF MIST

BY W. W. TARN



G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS
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A FAIRY TALE FOR
MY DAUGHTER

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The Treasure of the Isle of Mist

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CHAPTER I

THE GIFT OF THE SEARCH

The Student and Fiona lived in a little gray house on the shores of a gray sea-loch in the Isle of Mist. The Student was a thin man with a stoop to his shoulders, which old Anne MacDermott said came of reading books; but really it was because he had been educated at a place where this is expected of you. Fiona, when she was doing nothing else, used to help Anne to keep house, rather jerkily, in the way a learned man may be supposed to like. She was a long-legged creature of fifteen, who laughed when her father threatened her with school on the mainland, and she had a warm heart and a largish size in shoes. Sometimes they had dinner; sometimes nobody remembered in time, and they had sunset and salt herrings, with a bowl of glorious yellow corn-daisies to catch the sunset.

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It was Anne who saw the old hawker crossing the field behind the house, and burst in on the bookroom to inform the Student that he wanted buttons. She was met by a patient remonstrance on her ambiguous use of language:

"For," said the Student, "if you mean that buttons are lacking to me, there may be something to be said for you; but if you mean that I desire buttons, then indeed I do not desire buttons; I desire . . ."

Whereon Anne fled, and went out to meet the hawker. The frail old man, bending under his pack, was crossing the meadow behind the house, brushing his way through the September clover. His white hair was uncovered save for the huge umbrella which he carried alike in sun and rain; but youth still lingered in his eyes, which were bright as the dawn and deep as the sea-caves. Behind him followed a little rough-haired terrier, black as jet, his inseparable companion. At the door he unslung his pack, and, leaving Anne to select her buttons, passed straight through, knocked at the bookroom door, and went in.

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The Student wheeled round in his chair and began to grope about.

"Have you seen my spectacles?" he said. "I can't see who you are till I put them on, and I can't

put them on till you find them for me, for I can't see to find them myself unless I have them on. Pardon this involved sentence."

The old hawker picked up the missing spectacles and handed them over.

"You wouldn't remember me, in any case," he said. "I last saw you twenty-five years ago, when you were trying to dig at Verria. There was an old man there, do you remember, being beaten by armed Bashi-Bazouks, and you held them up with an empty revolver, and took the old man to your camp and nursed him, and you said things to the Turkish Governor, and . . ."

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"My excavations came to an untimely end," said the Student. "I always owed that old man a grudge for being beaten before my tent. Why couldn't he have been beaten somewhere else? I should like to meet him again and tell him precisely what I thought of his conduct."

"You have done both now," said the hawker. "And it is his turn."

"Impossible," said the Student. "He was as old twenty-five years ago as you are now."

"At my age," said the old man, "one grows no older. No one who walks the world as I do need ever grow any older. You can walk thirty miles on Monday when you are twenty years old; good. If you can do it on Monday you can do it on Tuesday; and if on Tuesday, then on Wednesday; therefore, by an easy reckoning, you can do it as well at eighty years old as at twenty. Thus you never age."

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"There's a flaw in that somewhere," said the Student. "I know; it's the Heap. How many grains of sand make a heap?"

"How many buttons do you want?" said the hawker. "You saved my life once; you shall have all the buttons you want for nothing."

"I thought you couldn't answer my question," said the Student. "But we are getting on much too fast; we haven't really begun yet. I suppose you came here to sell things? Anne seemed to know you, and she said I wanted buttons. I pointed out to her that her statement was either an untruth or a truism, and equally objectionable in either sense; and now you repeat it, just as I was beginning to consider you quite an intelligent person. By the way, who are you?"

"I have a different name in most countries which I visit," said the old man. "But by profession I sell buttons—and other things."

"What sort of things?" said the Student.

"I have dreams," said the old man, "dreams and the matter of dreams; imaginings of the impossible come true; the wonder of the hills at sunrise; the quest of unearthly treasure among the moon-flowers; the look in the eyes of a child that trusts you."

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The Student took off his spectacles, rubbed his eyes hard, and settled his shoulders.

"I desire something very much," he said. "If you can do all that, you can give me what I desire."

The hawker frowned.

"You are a scholar," he said, "and I can do nothing for scholars. You need no ideal, for you have one. You need no dreams, for your life is one. For you, the earth pours out hidden treasure, and the impossible comes true day by day. What you desire just now is a long definite inscription to settle a controverted point in your favor. And if I could give it you, just think how miserable you'd be. Nothing further to argue about, there; and several quite happy and contentious professors would be reduced to such straits that I don't know what crimes you might all commit. You might even take to making money."

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"If I wanted money," said the Student, "I should, being an intelligent person, at once proceed to make it. Then I should have to live in the big house again, instead of letting it, and my precious time would be spent in arguing with my gardener and endeavoring to conceal my ignorance from my chauffeur. As it is, we live anyhow, and I am happy."

"Happiness doesn't score any points in the game," said the hawker. "What good do you and your inscriptions do, anyway?"

"That's not my job here," said the Student. "That will come on afterwards. Besides, I don't want to do good. I am old-fashioned; why should I take my neighbor by the throat and say, 'Let me do good to you, or it shall be the worse for you and yours'? Besides, I can't do good. You can't dot the wilderness with prosperous homesteads when half the years the oats don't ripen till the year after. Besides, I do do good; I have let the big house to shooting tenants, and it's excellent for their health. Besides seventeen other reasons, which I can enumerate if you are able to bear them. Besides, Fiona is fond of me."

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"Yes," said the old man softly, "that's your real justification. And it's a great deal more than I could give you; my hawker's licence doesn't cover the big things. How many buttons do you want?"

Fiona came scrambling through the open window, and curled herself up on the rug with her head on the Student's knee. The Student stroked her hair.

"Tell me what it's all about," she said.

"This gentleman," he said, "once interrupted a very important piece of work which I was doing, and I was just about to tell him exactly what I thought of him when you interrupted me."

The old hawker had risen and bowed courteously to the girl.

"My dear young lady," he said, "I have been searching my pack for a present for your father, and found nothing suitable. But perhaps I could find something for you." [Pg 9]

Fiona jumped up.

"Have you a hedgehog?" was her question.

"I do not carry them with me, as a general thing," said the old man. "No doubt one could be got. But why a hedgehog?"

"I want one for the Urchin," she said. "You see, it's his namesake."

"I see," said the old man, quite gravely. "And who is the Urchin?"

"The Urchin," said the Student, "is a young rascal who is the son of my shooting tenant. He plunders my daughter of all her possessions, and she abets him in every form of villainy."

"I do try to stop him throwing stones at things," said the girl.

"Here are hedgehogs," said the hawker. "Isn't that lucky, now?"

Past the window came five hedgehogs in a solemn row, two big and three little. Behind them, marshalling the procession, walked the black terrier, with an eye of happy drollery. [Pg 10]

"There's something wrong about those hedgehogs," said the girl. "They don't do things like that. I don't think I want a hedgehog any more, thank you. How did you make them do that? Is your dog a conjurer?"

"I never harm anything," said the old man, "so that many creatures will come to me when I call. But I have better presents than that."

"Choose for her, my friend," said the Student.

The old man began talking to himself in a low voice.

"Youth she has," he said, "and freedom, and the joy of life. Wonder also, and dim imaginings of unseen things. And of the things which men desire, fame and power are not worth giving, and love is not mine to give. I have it. I give you the Search," he said. "The search for the treasure of the Isle of Mist. Others have searched for it before; and some have found; but the treasure never grows less." [Pg 11]

"That's splendid," said the girl. "And when I find the treasure I will buy my father seven great books which no one else wants to read, and he will be perfectly happy."

"But I did not promise treasure," said the old man. "I promised a search."

Fiona's face fell.

"Then am I not to find anything at the end of it?" she asked.

The old man chuckled quietly.

"I did not say that either," he said. "There *is* a treasure, and you shall search for it; and you will find it if you are able. Many there are who helped to build it up. Cuchulain and the forgotten heroes who fought before Cuchulain; Ossian and the forgotten bards who sang before Ossian; Columba and the forgotten saints who died before Columba; each has added something to the pile. It is their treasure which you shall seek for; that is my gift to you." [Pg 12]

"How shall I know where to begin?" asked the girl. "And may I take the Urchin with me?"

"Whether you can take the Urchin with you or not depends on his capacity to go," said the old man. "And as to beginning, I think you will find that the Search will begin itself, independently of you. It always does. But I can give you something that will help you," and he took out of his pocket a red copper bangle, rudely hammered out with some rough implement, which he slipped over her wrist. "That was made long ago," he said, "made by men to whom metal was a new toy, men who perhaps were nearer to the heart of things than we are."

"You will stay and have some dinner, will you not?" said the Student. "At least, if this is a dinner night. Fiona, is this a dinner night?"

"I have my doubts," said the girl. "Oat cake and honeysuckle, I expect."

"And what better?" said the old man. "But I fear I could not dine with you, were it ortolans and Tokay. For I may never eat beneath a roof. The open moor is my dining hall, and the stars serve me. And the long white road is calling me even now. But I think that before the treasure is found you will see me again." [Pg 13]

CHAPTER II

THE BEGINNING OF TROUBLE

"Man," said the Student, "is a weird creature. He dimly remembers that he began his evolution, not as a pair, but as a horde; and to the horde he still seeks, forming huge crowds during his working days, and on his holidays merely transferring the same crowds in their totality to some other place, accompanied by a great deal of purposeless noise. Apart from his crowd he apparently feels chilly, and without noise unhappy. Nothing is more striking to the reflective mind than the abdication of civilization in the face of meaningless noises."

"Daddy," said Fiona, "I want your advice on the matter of treasure hunting. For if two go together, they don't make a crowd, and they needn't make a noise."

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"Quote correctly," said the Student. "What Homer said was, that if you and I went to look for a treasure, I, being a mere man, would find it at once by logical processes of induction and deduction, while you, being a superior woman, were losing yourself in the quicksands of the intuitive short cut."

"Sir," said the girl, "your word is law to me. Therefore deduce."

"Persiflage," said the Student, "is not to be encouraged in young children. Remember that if you were to force me to do so I might come with you, and then I should see exactly how you bungled the thing."

"But that's what I want you to do, daddy," said Fiona.

"I don't," said the Student. "Though treasure hunting is quite an ancient and respectable amusement. For treasure, some have descended the crater of Popocatepetl; some have dived at Tobermory; some have dug in Kensington Gardens. Alexander found a treasure at Persepolis, and Essex lost another in Cadiz harbor. The treasure of the Incas lies hid in a Peruvian ravine, known but to two Indians at a time; the plunder which Alaric took from Rome is still beneath the river which he diverted to guard it. No one has ever found the hoard of Captain Kidd, or the gold carried in the Venetian galleon which sailed with the Armada and went on the rocks in this loch. The pursuit of treasure is, therefore, no doubt, for the young, a legitimate pastime."

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"Daddy," said Fiona, "did one of the Armada ships really go ashore here?"

"Yes, my dear," said the Student. "She was a great Venetian, called after the Madonna of the Holy Cross, and she carried the doubloons contributed by the Church."

"That's not the treasure the old man meant," said the girl.

"It is not," said the Student. "We know all about the Venetian ship. The crew were mostly knocked on the head, but the captain brought the doubloons ashore and hid them. He himself was saved by my ancestor for the time being, to whom he gave a map showing the place in the cave in which the treasure was hidden. He never came back for it. So far, everything proceeded on approved lines. Unhappily, my ancestor was a careless sort of person, and gambled the plan away. We never heard any more of it. It is, however, a family tradition that there was nothing on the plan to identify the cave; and as this coast, and the islands in the loch, are honeycombed with caves, it would be of little use if we had it. No one knows whereabouts the galleon went ashore. On calm nights her officers may be seen swimming round the cliffs, keeping guard still over their holy gold. Angus MacEachan saw one once, and tried to speak to him; but he turned into a seal, and just looked at Angus with large patient eyes; and Angus' boat was wrecked the week after."

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"And did you never search for the gold, daddy?" asked Fiona.

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"Never, my dear," he said. "In the first place, it would mean a minute examination of some 170 caves. In the second place, half of the caves are not mine. In the third place, it is not the kind of treasure I want. In the fourth place, I haven't time. In the fifth place, I am morally certain it is not there now. In the sixth place, the Government would claim it as treasure-trove. And in the seventh and last place, I never thought about it till you asked me."

"I'm not getting any further with *my* treasure hunting, daddy," said Fiona. "Let's go out together and start."

"My dear," said the Student, "it's your search, not mine. It's no use my trying to come with you. And I have a fancy that it won't begin like that."

"Can you tell me how to begin then, daddy?" she asked.

"I suppose by taking no notice of it," he said. "It was to begin itself, wasn't it? And I have an uncomfortable suspicion that you hunt this kind of treasure by turning round and going the other way. So I think you'd better run out and find the Urchin, and I'll get back to my inscriptions."

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The Urchin was Fiona's principal ally; a troublesome ally, owing to his propensity for throwing stones. She found him now on the shore, steadily bombarding a shore lark, that would move a little way out of range and then sit down again, affording a splendid target. Luckily the enthusiasm of the persecutor in pursuit was well matched by the inaccuracy of his aim.

"Urchin," she called out, "if you hurt that bird the Little People will take you; I thought I'd

knocked that into you all right, even if you *are* English and slow in the uptake."

"All right," said the Urchin with a grin. "We conquered you, anyway."

"As a matter of fact," said the girl, "it was we who annexed you. If your people were as bad shots as you, Urchin, it must have been quite easy. You can't hit a bird sitting." [Pg 20]

"Can't I?" said the Urchin. "You watch." Another fling, and horrors! the shore lark rolled over, twittering helplessly and miserably.

Fiona was across the rocks like a young goat; and when the Urchin, contrite but defiant, arrived, she had the wounded bird in her hands and was holding it to her breast, feeling gently for its hurt. It lay quite still, panting, and watching her with quick bright eyes.

"Broken wing," she said. "I believe it will mend. Urchin, you are a mere beast. You'd better go home; I don't want ever to see you again."

The Urchin turned scarlet.

"That's just like a girl," he said. "First you tell me I can't hit the old bird, which is the same thing as telling me to hit it; and then when I do hit it you turn round on me and call names; and all the time you're just as bad as I am." And the Urchin turned and stalked off, an heroic figure with the mien of a Marcus Curtius about to save his country by leaping into the gulf. Unhappily there was a real gulf, and the boy, head in air, rolled neatly into it, and emerged from between two rocks, dripping and no longer heroic, rubbing a torn stocking and a scraped shin. [Pg 21]

It was too much for Fiona's gravity.

"Urchin," she called, "come back here, *quick*." And as the unhappy Urchin stood in doubt, hither and thither dividing the swift mind, she slid over the rocks and caught him. "My fault," she said, "and I'm sorry all the way through. Now I'll mend you first, and then we must mend the bird."

"And then what'll we do?" said the boy. "Let's do something harmless for a bit, hunt for shells or shrimps or . . ."

"Treasure," suggested Fiona, rather shyly. And by the time they had reached the house, and she had repaired the Urchin, and disposed the wounded bird as comfortably as possible, the boy had been put in possession of the essential facts of the case. [Pg 22]

"Mar-vellous," was the Urchin's comment. "Now, don't you see, Fiona? you can have your treasure when we find it, and I'll have the Spanish treasure when we find it, and there we both are. I want lots and lots and lots of those doubloons."

"What for?" said Fiona.

"Gun," said the Urchin. "Donald Ruadh has an old gun which he would sell me for two pounds. He says one barrel shoots all right sometimes. And I would use the rest of the doubloons to buy cartridges, and then I could kill curlews."

"You little wretch," said the girl. "You won't kill my curlews while I'm about. And anyhow your old gun would probably blow you up first. And anyhow you haven't got the doubloons yet. And they're not yours if you do find them."

"Whose would they be?" asked the Urchin.

"I suppose my father's," said Fiona. "But it depends on which cave they were in." [Pg 23]

"Come on, then," said the boy. "I'm going to ask him for them."

The Student took the interruption good-humoredly.

"I am in the second century," he said. "Doubloons have not yet been coined. As to these doubloons, I am quite sure they are not there, wherever 'there' may be; but if they are there, I have no objection to the Urchin fighting the Government for them. Urchin, would you like a deed?"

And, to the delight of the Urchin, the Student proceeded to make out a document, which called on all men to know that the said Student thereby assigned to the said Urchin all the estate, right, title, and interest, if any, of the said Student in and to a certain treasure of doubloons or other coins once carried in the galleon called *Our Lady of the Holy Cross* were the same a little more or less ("all good deeds get that in somewhere," said the Student) to hold to the said Urchin and his heirs ("but I don't suppose the heirs will see much of it") to the intent that he might become a wiser and a better Urchin and not interrupt the said Student any more when he wanted to work. This being done, the Student signed his name at the end, made a beautiful blot of hot red sealing wax and put his signet ring on it, and made Fiona sign her name as witness ("which is probably not legal," he explained cheerfully); then he handed over the deed to the rejoicing Urchin, with the remark that it was quite as good as many lawyers' deeds, and drove the pair of them out of the bookroom. [Pg 24]

"Good," said the Urchin. "Now I've a treasure just the same as you."

"If we find them," said Fiona.

"Well, let's go and start hunting for them at any rate," said the boy.

"Pardon me," said the shore lark, "if I interrupt; but you might be the better of a few hints."

Fiona dropped on her knees and took the little bird in her hands again.

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"So you can talk," she said. "That's jolly. You've a first-rate chance of returning good for evil, and making us feel worms."

"Don't talk of worms," said the shore lark, "you have entirely omitted to provide me with any. Send him to get some, and I'll tell you something. He can't understand what I'm saying, anyhow."

"Urchin," said the girl, "he's asking for worms. Go and get him some."

"One would think you and he could talk to each other," said the boy. "Silly, I call it, going on like that. I suppose that's what girls do."

"Urchin," said Fiona, "when you and I have a row, what happens?"

"*You* happen," said the Urchin. "You've three years' pull; 't isn't fair; just like a girl, to go and have three years' pull of a chap."

"Stop grouching," said the girl, "and get me the worms, there's a dear little boy."

The Urchin flung the nearest book at her, missed as usual, and, having thus made his honor white, departed, declaring in simpler language that the love of worms was the root of all evil.

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"I can't tell you much," said the shore lark, "but one sometimes picks up things, hopping about, and I heard you say treasure. If you mean the Venetian ship, don't start without consulting the finner. He is very old, and I believe that he knows everything that happens in this loch."

"I don't really mean that," said Fiona. "That's half a jest. I mean my own search, the search for the treasure of the Isle of Mist."

"We have all heard of it," said the shore lark, "and we all know that you cannot find it by looking for it. All I can tell you is this: the curlews have a tradition that the last man who found it went up a hill. That is what they tell each other when they call in the spring; and I believe they know."

"They are like the spirits of the hills themselves," said Fiona. "Tell me why it is I can understand you."

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"I have no idea," said the shore lark. "I am only a little bird, and I don't know very much. I chanced speaking to you because I wanted worms."

The girl slipped across into the bookroom.

"Daddy," she said, "come back out of the second century, and tell me why I can understand the shore lark."

The Student looked up with a patient smile in far-away eyes.

"It isn't time to come back yet," he said. "And I have not fully grasped your meaning. You appear to refer to some conversation with some bird. There are precedents, of course. For instance, the philosopher Empedocles, having been a bird himself in a former life, remembered their speech; he ended by leaping into Ætna. Siegfried also, having bathed in the blood of Fafnir, followed the voice of a bird of the wood; he ended by losing his love and his life. There was once a sailor who took the advice of a parrot, and was hanged. Birds are light-minded, as the poet Aristophanes discovered; and it would seem that little good comes of talking to them."

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"My shore lark is a darling," said Fiona. "And I don't intend to be hanged."

"That," said the Student, "is as Providence pleases. One never knows, as my poor ancestor said when he fell into a bear-trap and found the bear there before him."

"O daddy," said the girl, "did he really? And what happened?"

"This ancestor of mine," said the Student, "was a very strong man. If he had not been, someone else would have killed him first, and he would not have been my ancestor; the other man would have been someone else's ancestor, so to speak. Being a very strong man, he naturally killed the bear. He must have, or he would not have lived to be my ancestor. In those days everyone lived in caves, and he lived in a cave too; and he always killed the other man, sometimes fairly, sometimes, I regret to say, otherwise. He courted my ancestress by knocking her down from behind with the blunt end of a stone ax, a method which I do not defend; but when her senses returned she told him he had acted like a man, and they became a most devoted couple. This was partly due, no doubt, to the fact that he never saw the meaning of the things she said; she took good care that he shouldn't, for though slow of wit he was handy with his ax. Their life I think must have been very happy till one day he found a red stone which he could heat and shape with his ax, and he hammered out that copper bracelet you're wearing; and then came the deluge, for metal meant magic then, as you know. Next day my ancestress found him conversing with the local vulture; within a week he was giving exhibitions in the other caves with the vulture's assistance; in a month he had become the tribal god; and about two years after, owing to the persistent failure of some of his magic to come off, he was, for a brief moment, the tribal banquet. Now you know what comes of talking to shore larks."

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"Daddy," she said, "you can't know if that's true or not, can you?"

"It may not all be what *you* call true," said the Student, "but it's true in quite a lot of ways. It's true psychologically, and anthropologically, and palæethnologically; and that does to start with. And I certainly *had* ancestors. And there *is* a bracelet. And you *were* talking strange words about a shore lark. And you must really take care, my dear daughter; for you *ought* now to become a tribal priestess, and be hurled from a high place into the sea the first season that the herring fail."

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CHAPTER III THE HAUNTED CAVE

A sunlit sheet of sea, violet and azure, clothed in slender cloud shadows and heaving gently to the long Atlantic ground-swell. Up through the calm water, to meet the eye of the gazer, came the green clearness of stone, and blinks of unveined sand showing white between the brown tangled blades of the great oar-weed; and you might see a school of little cuddies, heads all one way, playing hide and seek in the sea forest, and caring no whit for the clumsy armored crab beneath them, who crawled sideways, a laborious patch of color in the shimmering transparency. Up out of the deep water the gray rocks rose clear and fine, a mass of platforms and pinnacles, roughened with barnacles and tufted with dulse, whose crimson leaves floated and swung in the white foam of the lipping swell; and above the rocks and beyond the sea's reach the cliff stood up black, showing all the strata that had gone to the making of it outlined with little patches of coarse grass. On one such patch grazed without concern a sheep which had slipped over, happy in her ignorance of the fact that she could never be drawn up again alive; the wiser raven overhead was clanging away with short barks to tell his mate. On a ridge on the cliff side sat a pair of young scarfs, almost invisible save when they twisted their long necks about like two snakes, trying to make up their minds to follow their mother, who had just flopped clumsily into the water, feet first, and had turned there and then into a miracle of easy grace, as she used her head to dash the spray over her back. Out at sea a solan rose steadily in a sweeping spiral, the white and black of him glittering in the sun; suddenly he checked, reversed engines, and fell plump like an inverted cross, his long raking wings clapping to as he struck the water; a moment, and he was up, and there sat, choking and gobbling over his fish, ere he rose again in his majestic rings.

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The two children had grounded their boat on a little pebble beach between the rocks, and were sitting on a big tuft of sea pinks, munching handfuls of the sweet dulse and watching the solan at his fishing. They were by way of fishing themselves, but the afternoon was as yet too early and too clear for them. The Urchin had a pile of stones beside him, and was apparently trying to see how many times in twenty he could miss a large and obvious spur of rock. Fiona had a book of poetry, and was making intermittent efforts to read; but the world was too full of things to give poetry a fair chance.

The Urchin threw his last stone away.

"Silly sitting here," he said; "come and explore."

So, scrambling and sliding, the two made their way across the rocks, stopping at every rock pool to raise its fringe of weed with careful hands and investigate the wonder of the little world below; sea flowers of every hue, white and green, gray and orange, purple and white and gray and purple again, some smooth and satisfied, others with tentacles greedily awash, that could be induced to suck at a small finger dexterously inserted; sea shells of every contour, some living and clutching at the rock, some cast off and dead, others again protruding alien claws, resurrected to a life of artificial movement by the little hermit crabs whose tails they sheltered; here and there the spiky pink globe of a sea urchin, waiting for the tide to float him off. And in one deep little pot, with sides green like a grotto of ferns, they found a miniature battle. A small green crab, who had cast his shell, sat humped in a recess of the grotto, a thing soft and vulnerable, a delight to the enemy; and in front of him, excited and transparent, were half a dozen shrimps, the horn on each forehead pointed at him; from time to time some young gallant would dash in to prod the helpless monster, and at once backwater again into the ranks of his friends. The crab bore his torment with a patience born of the knowledge that each minute his new carapace was hardening; the shrimps had no wit to count the cost, or reckon the odds that the rising tide might bear them away in safety from the day of vengeance.

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On hands and knees, not daring to breathe on the limpid surface of the pool, the children watched the little drama. From the cliff top the heated air rose dancing into the sky. So still were earth and air and sea that the old finner's rise sounded as though the cliff were falling. He had worked nearer in to the rocks than seemed possible for his ninety feet of blubber and muscle, and as his black side rolled over, the water about him boiled like a pot; but he did not splash, for he had been well brought up and always knew what his tail was doing, though it was so far away.

"Shiver these rocks," he began in a rage, as he flung two fountains out of his nose. Then he caught sight of Fiona and the gleam of the red bracelet.

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"Oh my fins and flippers!" he spouted. "I ask pardon, young lady; I haven't the manners of a grampus. And they told me about you."

"Who's they?" asked Fiona, ungrammatically.

"Friends at Court, friends at Court," said the finner. "What a thing to have. 'No need of the old sailorman,' said I. But they said I must go. And I've scraped the barnacles off my precious tail. Will it run to some tobacco?"

"Will what run?" said the girl. "Your tail? What is it you want?"

"Hints are wasted, I see," said the whale. "'One question,' said I. Only one. But magic is magic, you know, even for a tough old sailorman. Come now, one question. I'm too far inshore for my liking."

Fiona understood.

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"Is it about my treasure?" she said.

"Yours, or that boy's there, whichever you like," said the whale. "But only one, only one."

For about two seconds Fiona did some hard mental drill. Then she said:

"Will you please tell me where the Urchin can find his treasure?"

"You do have luck," said the finner. "Think of it, then. O you little fishes, think of it. If you'd asked the other, I didn't know the answer. Wouldn't have got an answer, and my tail all scraped for nothing. And this one, my great-great-grandmother saw it all, and nobody knows here but me and the seals and one man, and he's too fat to count. West cave, Scargill Island; and bring you luck, my dear. Will it run to some tobacco?"

"Thank you so much," said Fiona politely. "And I'm sorry I haven't any tobacco with me. But if you could wait a few minutes . . ."

"Shiver it, I'm scraping again," said the whale. "No tobacco and very few barnacles in this world. O my grandmother's flukes, I might as well be a bottlenose!"

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Once more the water boiled, and beneath it the huge black body shot away for the open sea.

"Fiona," said the boy, "do you really think it's cricket?"

"What isn't cricket?" she asked.

"Fiona," he said, "I've been a brother to you. I have done all the things a brother ought to do. I have taught you to throw like a boy. I have pinched you for new clothes. I have called you names, to make you good-tempered. I have made remarks on your personal appearance, to prevent your being vain. I have even fought with you, solely for your good. And this is how you repay me. The other day you pretended to be talking to a shore lark; to-day it was an old whale, who spouted and banged his tail on the rock. If it's a joke, I don't see it. If it's not a joke, do go into a lunatic asylum, and let me find a simpler job."

Fiona tossed up mentally between hitting him and laughing; it came down laughing.

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"Urchin," she said, "it's all right. I don't understand it much better than you do, but it has something to do with this bracelet of mine. I can really understand them and they can understand me. If you doubt my word, we will fight a duel with the boat stretchers, and I will bury you in the sand here afterwards."

"Oh, I believe you when you talk like that," said the Urchin; "only it's worse than the Latin grammar. *Psittacus loquitur*, 'the parrot talks'; but this thing seemed to be a whale; it was very like one."

"It was a whale," said Fiona. "He said his great-great-grandmother had seen the Spanish captain land his doubloons, and that it was in the west cave on Scargill Island."

"That means the big cave at the end facing the sea," said the boy.

"The cave that no one has ever got to the end of," said Fiona.

"The cave that's haunted," said the boy.

"But of course it's haunted; it's the ghosts of the Spaniards. Silly of us not to have guessed."

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Fiona had a hazy recollection of things her father used to say.

"I expect the haunting is thousands of years older than the Spaniards," she said. "Urchin, are you afraid of ghosts?"

"Not a bit," said the Urchin stoutly. "They would be splendid to throw stones at. It wouldn't hurt them."

"Come on then, let's go," said the girl. "There's lots of daylight."

"None of the people here will go into it, you know," said the Urchin.

"I know," said Fiona. "All the more reason for going on our own. There might really be something

there, if no one ever goes to take it away."

So the boat was launched, and the adventure also. Fiona pulled stroke; the Urchin was a clumsy and unpunctual bow, and the girl had to steer from the stroke oar, which needs more doing than you may think if you haven't tried it. But they made the end of Scargill in time, and then Fiona took both the oars and coasted, while the Urchin got out a couple of bamboo poles, garnished with white flies, and let the casts trail, occasionally getting one of the beautiful little scarlet lythe, that came at the fly with the spring and dash of a sea trout. For even adventurers need supper. And so they came, past many a smaller cave mouth in the black side of the island, to the huge bluff that fronts the full Atlantic, and the great west cave.

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Atlantic was half asleep to-day, and muttered drowsily to the quiet rocks outside. But the great cave was seldom quiet. In the winter, when Atlantic turned himself restlessly and spoke aloud, the sound of his speaking came back from its depths like the roar of a heavy gun; and even in the stillness the lisp of the swell in it echoed as from the roots of the island in a low intermittent boom. Outside, on the calm water, floated the whiskered head of a seal, watching the boat with gentle, fearless eyes,—“the officer on guard,” Fiona whispered;—and from the black cliff's face, like a hanging fringe over the mouth of the cave, the water splashed down, trickle by trickle, in quick, heavy drops. The children rowed in through the little shower, and Fiona paddled gently up the cave. Its huge limestone walls stood up stark on either hand, rising into the darkness above, and sinking below into the green water, as far as eye could follow them. Near the water-line grew a little seaweed, and some white whelks clung; but as they went down the waterway these vanished, and gray cliff and green water alike began to turn black. Looking back, Fiona could see a bright patch, a patch of sky and sky-reflecting sea, framed in the narrow slit of the cave's mouth. The waterway was narrowing now; she shipped her oars and stood up, using one as a paddle, and instructing the Urchin how to fend off the boat's stern with his hands. In front, on a ledge in the cave's roof, it was just possible to make out a row of blue dots in the growing darkness; as the boat drew nearer, the blue dots fluttered, detached themselves from the cliff, and a swarm of pigeons came whirring over the boat and down the cave toward the sunlight;—“Your ghosts, Urchin,” said the girl. Henceforward the cave was void of life, unless some strange, eyeless fish lurked in its inky depths. Darker and darker grew the waterway, and the last gleam of light vanished. Fiona was feeling her way now, aided by the phosphorescent drip from her oar blade; the Urchin, with unusual sense, splashed his hands in the water to increase the pale glow, which just revealed the line of the cliff. Neither dare speak now; possibly, had Fiona not had some idea of what was coming, she would have turned. But already there was a faint gleam ahead, faint as a glow worm, but still a gleam; and as the boat slid forward, and the low boom in the depths of the cave grew closer, the cave walls very slowly began to grow gray again out of the blackness. A few minutes more, and the walls were an outline, and before them, a fringe of white on round wet stones, the end of the waterway. And as the boat grounded, Fiona pointed up, and the Urchin, looking, saw a little round hole; a natural shaft ran down into the cave from the surface of the island, giving light enough for their eyes, now accustomed to the darkness, to distinguish outlines.

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They drew their boat up on the stones far enough for the swell not to dislodge it; then the same impulse seized them both and they burst out laughing, not aloud, for something in the place made it impossible to laugh or talk aloud, but in a kind of mirthless whisper.

"We've come without any lights," said Fiona in an undertone.

"We have," said the Urchin. "But probably the stuff is only a few yards above high-water mark; they wouldn't go far in."

"They might have," said Fiona; "they'd have had torches or something."

"Let's go as far as we can, anyhow, as we are here," said the Urchin.

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So they started scrambling over the stones in the gray half-light. Presently there rose before them a great mass of rock and earth, half blocking the cave; it looked like some old landslip.

"It's easy at this end, Fiona," said the boy; and up they went, to find that the rock barrier blocked most of what little light remained. Beyond was darkness.

"We must go back and get light," said Fiona. "I can't even see the stones below." A pause; then, "Stop swinging your feet, Urchin; I want to listen."

"I'm not," said the Urchin.

Another pause, and then the Urchin spoke again, in a kind of stage whisper, "I'm frightened." The words seemed squeezed out of him.

"We may as well go back, anyhow," said Fiona, in a strained voice. "Down you go, Urchin."

The Urchin did go down at a considerable pace, and ran for the boat. Fiona managed to walk, by repeating to herself all the time under her breath, "You mustn't run, you mustn't run." But once in the boat she did not rebuke the Urchin for standing up and taking the other oar; and the pair paddled out, with many bumpings and scrapings, in a more speedy and less scientific manner than that in which they had entered.

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Once out in the sunlight they felt better. They started automatically to fish home, and presently were talking again. But neither of them referred to the thing that was uppermost in each mind,

though each was wondering if the other knew. For as they had sat on the wall of rock, each had heard clearly, in the utter darkness of the unvisited cave, the sound of heavy footsteps.

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CHAPTER IV

THE URCHIN VANISHES

To most people there is some corner of the earth which means more than all others; and there are two or three in the world whose holy place is the old house on the sea-loch which the Student's humbler neighbors called the "big house." An old square building of gray stone, that matches the gray sky and the gray sea, it has small claims to beauty; it was built in the days of blank windows, and every wind in the island meets and screams round the battered iron balustrade which leads up its steps to the door, and strives to tear down the tendrils of ivy that cling to the east front. To the south front, lashed by the full Atlantic gales, not even ivy can cling; only a few twisted elders and stunted planes grow there, and take the first force of the winter wind; but the old lawn to the north bursts in summer into a cloud of white marguerites, whose ethereal beauty at sunset is like the ghosts of the dreams that haunt the place. For to some of us the old house is full of dreams, that cling to the dark passages and the uneven floors, and play in and out of the little windows that are still propped open with wood, as they were a hundred years ago; dreams of the bright lights and the bright voices that greeted us, coming in out of the blinding rain; dreams of the dance and the song, songs of old lost causes from which all bitterness has died away, leaving to-day nothing but beauty behind them; dreams of faded joys and forgotten sorrows, of loves that have passed elsewhere and of memories that abide; dreams of faces that are seen no more. Some day it will change ownership; it will be sold to someone from whom understanding of these things has been withheld, and who will see only the darkness of the old corridors, the shabbiness of the old doorway; and he will build new doors, and porticoes and a wide verandah, and make it fair within and without, levelling the floors and trimming the lawns; and he will have destroyed the old house and the fragrance of it, and it will never return. But to-day it still stands as it has stood for many a long year, clothed in the memories that never leave it and rich in all that the past has built into it; and to some who may never dwell there again it is yet ever present as the home of their hearts' desire, a true house of faery.

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The Student had let the old house to the Urchin's father. He was a tall, thin man with a hooked nose, and he knew more about one particular family of Coleoptera than anyone living. He had taken the place, not because he wanted it for its shooting, but because one of the beetles of his family was reputed to be plentiful in the neighborhood. He was never there long; he was never anywhere long. For thirty years he had pursued his beetles over five continents; his measurements of their wing cases alone filled nine enormous MS. volumes. His great work on the variation of the length of the wing case in beetles kept in captivity had become a classic. Scientific men had nothing but praise for the book; several even read it. The majority believed that he had re-founded Neo-Mendelism past any overthrowing; a small but persistent minority argued that, on the contrary, he had utterly overthrown the Neo-Mendelians. All, however, agreed that the book was epoch-making, even though they differed utterly as to the sort of epoch which it made. The author himself was a shy and modest person, who never lost his temper except when people sent him unpaid parcels from Timbuctoo or Khamchatka containing beetles of other families in which he took no interest. On the rare occasions when he could be induced to go into society, kind-hearted hostesses, who saw no reason why one crawling thing should not do as well as another had been known to try to please him by starting a conversation about ladybirds or earwigs; and it was said to be worth foregoing one's cigar to hear him explain, with a chuckle, that though earwigs or ladybirds were no doubt meritorious creatures in their several spheres, and possibly legitimate objects of study to others, they were not his subject; his subject was a particular family of Coleoptera. He and the Student had become great friends, and when he was in the island he would often drop in to see the Student's bookroom after dinner and there the two would sit, one on either side of the fire, each smoking at a tremendous pace and talking hard on his own subject. Neither ever expected an answer from the other; neither ever got one. But they had silently established an unwritten law that when one had talked for three minutes by the clock on the mantelpiece he was to stop and let the other have a turn; and when at last they said good night, each felt that they had both had a thoroughly enjoyable evening. And so they had.

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Unlike to unlike. The Urchin's father had married the daughter of a stockbroker, who, on her death, had left him two legacies; one was the Urchin, and the other was an occasional visitation from her brother Jeconiah. Mr. Jeconiah P. Johnson, the well-known promoter of companies, was a short, stout man with a red face and a shifty blue eye, always immaculately dressed in broadcloth with a huge expanse of white waistcoat, over which sprawled his double watch chain and his triple chin. There were possibly some good points even about Jeconiah, if anything so rotund could be said to have points; but there were certainly not many. He was supposed by some to possess what is called "a high standard of business morality"; it would be truer to say that his code was prehistoric. He had so far kept himself right with the law, because he had mastered the sordid maxim which proclaims that honesty is the best policy; no other reason was

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likely to occur to him. With some effort he had succeeded in formulating a rule of conduct of which he was rather proud: Do good to yourself and your friends and evil to those who stand in your way. If anyone had told him that the philosophy of ethics took its rise, some twenty-two centuries ago, in a reaction against a similar rule, he would have remarked jocosely that he never studied back numbers. Of anything more exalted than "policy," anything not to be reckoned in terms of f.s.d., he was as ignorant as a hippopotamus.

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He was never very fond of his right hand's knowing what his left hand did; for while the right hand promoted companies, the left hand, by means of a manager and a registered alias, carried on a very useful little money-lender's business. He was never averse to putting the screw on, if there was anything to be got by it; and sometimes he got rather funny things. Recently he had had a broken debtor on his hands, and had taken what he could get; among other things, an old bureau full of papers. Jeconiah, being a methodical soul, had turned a clerk on to sort the papers; and the clerk had presently brought him the long lost map of the Scargill cave, and a sheet of paper containing somebody's rough explanation of what it was supposed to be. Jeconiah, who had heard the story, scented possibilities, and, it being a slack time in the City, promptly invited himself to his brother-in-law's house to recover from an attack of influenza. That is how Jeconiah comes into this story. It could not be helped, for he had the map. The finner had said he was too fat to count; but that is where the finner was wrong.

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Jeconiah forthwith gave his mind, such as it was, to the subject of caves. Diffidence was not his failing, and he cross-examined every person he could find, concealing, of course, his real object. He collected a splendid amount of rubbish; but he was acute enough where his pocket was concerned, and out of the rubbish he presently dragged forth the fact of the haunted cave which no one would enter. Whereon Jeconiah went over to Scargill to fish, and had a look at the lie of the island; settled with himself that it seemed a good enough place for a wreck, and told the keeper to row him into the west cave. But the keeper, who had no particular liking for Jeconiah, refused point-blank, and told him he would not find a man in the island who would do it; and Jeconiah, who had suddenly lost interest in the fishing, went home in a bad temper. This happened the day after the two children were in the cave; and the day after that the Urchin's father received an excited cablegram from Brazil on the subject of his beloved beetles. He rushed down at once to see the Student.

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"I am going to Brazil, I don't know for how long," he said. "And my boy can't go back to school for a month or more, as they have scarlet fever in the village there. And I don't like to leave him with the housekeeper, and I start in two hours. Will you take him?"

"Delighted," said the Student. "Fiona will look after him."

So the Urchin came, and with him came to Fiona a sense of responsibility for him. She couldn't help it.

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But Jeconiah showed no intention of moving. On the contrary, the after-effects of influenza were still troubling him sorely, it seemed. At last the Urchin's father had to tell him to stay a week or two longer, if he wanted to; the servants would be there anyhow. And Jeconiah thanked him and settled down to stay, as he had meant to do all along. But as soon as his brother-in-law was gone he took the car and went off for the day. The chauffeur said that he went to a lot of places and talked to a lot of people; and a couple of days later two strange men in a boat entered the bay and proceeded to camp out on a part of the shore which was not the Student's property. Jeconiah had, in fact, hired the boat, and found a couple of ne'er-do-wells from the mainland who knew nothing of him and were ready to row him anywhere in pursuit of his business, which was understood to be photographing wild birds for an illustrated paper.

Jeconiah had, however, made one great mistake. He was aware that you must not neglect little things, and he had neglected quite a big little thing—the Urchin. He had never spoken to him about caves, or taken the least notice of the boy's movements. And the Urchin on his side had been hard at work. He had confessed to Fiona on the subject of the footsteps, and she to him; and they had agreed, under the broad healthy light of day, that probably they had been mistaken and afraid of the dark, and that with lanterns it would be all right. They agreed, however, that it was necessary to have a really good light, and the difficulty was to find one. It was the Urchin who came forward as the saviour of society by proposing to win over Jones, the chauffeur, and get the loan of one of the big acetylene head-lamps from the car. Jones, a newcomer, had not yet heard about the cave, and, being English, he had not yet found his feet among his fellows and was glad of any sort of diversion. The Urchin wound up a triumphant half hour of diplomacy by making Jones promise to lend him one of the headlights and show him how to work it. Then the Urchin fell, as many greater men have fallen; he was lifted up with pride, and told Jones that Fiona and he were going treasure-hunting. Jones grinned; but that evening he talked; and in due course Jeconiah heard.

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Fiona was digging in her garden, or rather in the Urchin's, for she had assigned him one bit of it, which she had to cultivate for him; otherwise it would have run waste, for all the work the Urchin put into it. Her garden was one corner of the old walled garden of the Student's house, which was not very well kept now. Once it had been gay with flowers and rich with fruit; but now few flowers grew there save such as could look after themselves, and the fruit had come down to two gnarled old apple trees, in which Fiona had made her earliest experiments in climbing. Most of

the ground, so far as it was in use, was now given over to cabbages and potatoes; but in June the borders were sweet with double white narcissus, and now in September there was a revel of unpruned roses, their blooms growing smaller year by year, and a mass of the dark-red blossoms of the little west coast fuchsia, which knows how to live through the winter. One deserted corner was gay with Turk's turban, which still had strength to push up through the ever-thickening tangle of weeds; and groups of winter crocus were coming up in the borders, and among them a few Shirley poppies which Fiona had sown herself. Fiona had had thoughts of taking the garden in hand, but the space enclosed by the old walls was far too large for her to manage unaided; and as there was no money to pay a proper gardener, she had had to content herself with clearing one corner. Here she had achieved a riot of color. She had made a little rockery of oak-leaf and beech ferns brought down from the hill, sentinelled by tall pink foxgloves; the worn-out plum trees against the wall behind were threaded and festooned with thick trailers of yellow and scarlet nasturtium; and in front of the rockery, her especial pride, was a great bed of velvet pansies, rich with every hue of the rainbow. They were flanked by simple annuals, filmy pink poppies, orange escholtzias and sweet-scented mignonette; and in a bed by themselves were the gold and crimson snapdragons which the Urchin had begged for her from the gardener at the big house.

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She must needs dig up a centipede, one of the small yellow ones. They were her special dislike. The centipede did not like being dug up either, and writhed himself into seven different sets of tangles at once, as is the way of the smaller centipedes.

"You horrid little yellow beast," she said, forgetting that he could understand, and made a dab at him with her spade, which, to her relief, missed him. She felt she had done her duty by hitting at him, but did not hide from herself that she had really missed him on purpose.

"Little's all right," said the centipede, "and yellow's all right; and though I'm not really a beast, we will let it go at that. But I'm not a bit horrid."

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"But I don't like you," said Fiona, "and you wriggle so."

"In the circles in which I move," said the centipede, "my wriggling is much admired. And the mere fact that you do not like me—which, I may remind you, is only a subjective impression and has neither objective validity nor permanent value—does not entitle you to call me names. You ought to have learnt better, with that bangle of yours. For all you know, I may be a model of the more unselfish virtues."

"But you eat the roots of my flowers," said Fiona.

"That is the first I have heard of it," said the centipede. "But one lives and learns. It need not be the same one, though, who does both. So in the present case I propose that I should live and you should learn."

"I wasn't going to kill you really," said Fiona.

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The centipede bowed.

"A little courtesy does oil the creaking machinery of life, doesn't it?" he said. "Please lift me up, for I have something to tell you, and your head is so far away. Shouting at you hurts my throat."

Fiona stooped down and took up the little yellow creature in her hand.

"Congratulations," said the centipede. "We *are* getting on. You wanted badly to shudder, and you didn't. We shall make something of you yet. My old friend the bookworm—who lives in your father's library, by the way—has recently supplied me with a new quotation from the great poet Virgil, who had once, you may remember, quite a reputation as a magician. It was to the effect that if you couldn't get what you wanted by beginning at the top, you should start again at the bottom. I am the bottom. I am not the *very* bottom, but I am near enough to it for your purpose. Now you see what you have gained by not killing me."

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"I don't see anything yet, I'm afraid," said Fiona.

"One must have patience with weaker vessels," said the centipede. "So I will explain. My friend the bookworm, who supplies me with my quotations, has a cousin of the same profession in the library at the big house. It was through him that I got the story I am going to tell you about the fat man."

"Mr. Johnson!" exclaimed Fiona. "He has nothing to do with me." She disliked Jeconiah heartily, so far as she had given any thought to him.

"Oh, yes, he has," said the centipede. "This is where I come in. My bookworm's cousin, who is a great linguist and understands English perfectly, was at work in the library the other evening, and the fat man was having his coffee there. After coffee he lit a cigar and began to walk up and down, and presently he started talking to himself out loud, as my informant says he often does when he is excited. And by piecing his talk together, my informant made out that he had the map of the Scargill cave, which one of your ancestors once gambled away, and that somehow or other he had found out that the cave of the map *was* the Scargill cave, and that he was only waiting for a smooth day to go and locate the treasure."

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"Well?" said Fiona.

"Oh, come now," said the centipede, "it's no use pretending. We all know that you are treasure-hunting—remember we can all understand everything *you* say, whether we are linguists or not—and my advice to you is, to be quick about it, before the fat man can get his oar in."

"Thank you so much," said Fiona. "And I am so sorry I began by being rude. Tell me, why have you told me all this when I began by being rude?"

"Because I am a model of the more unselfish virtues, of course," said the centipede with a suppressed chuckle. "As a fact, I had an earth-phone from headquarters. But we are all backing you, you know. And now will you put me down, please; the upper air is chilly." [Pg 65]

He wriggled into a crack in the ground, and was gone.

That evening Fiona and the Urchin made their final preparations, in case the morrow should fall calm. That evening also Jeconiah heard that he had rivals in the field. His language, as he walked up and down the library, would have been very bad for the bookworm's morals had that intelligent insect been able to understand it all; but the bookworm's English, though good, was literary, and much of the modern idiom employed by Jeconiah slid off its back. Jeconiah's plan had been to make sure that the gold was there, and then charter a launch from Glasgow and take it straight to railway-head; he saw now that he could not afford the time, and that unless he could deal with the children in some way he might have to take the gold off in his boat, which would entail some risk, as well as cost him a heavy sum to buy his two boatmen. Also he made up his mind that he must go the next morning, whatever the weather, if it were possible to launch the boat; he knew that the children, with their little skiff, could only go to sea on calm days. [Pg 66]

Unfortunately for Jeconiah, the night fell calm, and though he rose early, he had no notion of starting without a good breakfast. By the time his boat was launched and he himself aboard, he had the pleasure of seeing through his glasses the children's boat off the east or nearer end of Scargill. The wealth of adjectives which he employed in the circumstances filled his two loafers with awe and admiration.

Fiona, having the Urchin securely under her roof, had breakfasted before dawn, and as soon as it was light enough the children launched their little boat. The Urchin had the precious headlight, ready charged, tied up in an old sack which would also serve to bring away the plunder; and round his waist he had twisted a length of cast-off rope. Its use was not apparent, but he thought it looked business-like. They saw that Jeconiah's boat was still drawn up ashore, and in good heart they started on their long pull. They had reached the island before Jeconiah had his boat out; having no glasses, they could not see if it was being launched or not. But off the eastern end of the island, which is low and grassy, they had a fright, for an empty boat was drawn ashore there. However, when they rowed close in to look at it, Fiona recognized it. [Pg 67]

"It's Angus MacEachan's boat," she said. "He has come to see after the sheep he has on the island. There he is, I can see him; he has got a sheep that has hurt its foot." And indeed they could see Angus tending a sick sheep.

"Fiona," said the boy, "we are too silly for anything. Of course the footsteps we heard in the cave were Angus's. There is another way in somewhere, and he would be looking for a sheep."

Fiona said nothing. As they neared the cave, the problem of the footsteps kept intruding itself more and more vividly upon her; but the Urchin was happy in his theory, and she did not think it necessary to remind him that the footsteps could not possibly have been those of Angus, who walked with a limp. She began to feel a vague sense of disquiet, which she tried in vain to put aside. [Pg 68]

They entered the cave, and the Urchin, with much pride, lit his great lamp. The powerful burner threw a wonderful circle of light on to black water and black walls, making them glow and sparkle with a soft radiance till they looked like the very gateway of fairyland. Outside the circle everything became black as pitch. They paddled quietly up the bright waterway, and grounded on the stones at the end. The Urchin was hot after his long row, and helping to draw the boat up on the stones did not make him any cooler; he took off his jacket and pitched it on to a thwart.

"Yes, it is hot, and stuffy," said Fiona. She recollected some story she had read about a coal mine, and sniffed. "I hope there is no gas here," she said. [Pg 69]

The Urchin grinned.

"Oh, you girls!" he said. "Who ever heard of gas in a sea cave. What you are smelling is the lamp."

Fiona took the lamp up.

"I'm going to take charge of this myself," she said. "You can carry the treasure."

The Urchin picked up the sack and threw it over his shoulder.

"Go ahead, lady with the lamp," he said, and grinned again. He felt very adventurous. He would rather have liked to be photographed.

With considerable caution, necessitated by the heavy lamp, they climbed the rock barrier and descended into the darkness of the inner cave. The walking was better here; the rounded slippery boulders had given place to a floor of pebbles and sand. Quite a short way from the barrier the wall of the cave curved away in a semicircle on the right, its smooth surface forming a kind of [Pg 70]

small recess. Fiona swept the recess with her lamp, and on the sandy floor something gleamed back; the Urchin pounced on it and picked it up. It was a gold coin, not the least like any which the children had ever seen. It was, in fact, a doubloon.

"This must be one of them," said the boy exultantly as he pocketed it; "one that got dropped. Come on, it can't be much farther."

But Fiona held the lamp steady and stared at the sand.

"Look at the marks on the sand," she said. "They are like the marks of heavy boxes. The treasure has been here, Urchin, and it's not here now. Someone has been here and taken it, and dropped one piece."

"I don't think so," said the Urchin. "We shall find them a bit farther on."

So they went on, but not very far. For the light of the lamp suddenly fell on a rock wall before them, the end of the cave. And it had ended, not as the other caves do, by the roof growing lower and lower till it meets the floor; it had ended in this huge chamber of high rocky walls.

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"So this is the cave that no one has ever reached the end of," said Fiona. "Why, it goes no distance at all."

They retraced their steps to the recess, and then back to the end again, looking on this side and on that for openings, but it seemed quite clear that there were none.

"The boxes must have been carried off by sea," said Fiona.

But the Urchin had an idea.

"No one would try to carry great heavy boxes over the rock barrier," he said. "They'd just take the gold out in sacks."

"The barrier may be a rock-fall," said Fiona. "The treasure may all have been cleared out long ago."

And then there came to the Urchin the realization of the fact that he had lost his gun. He turned very red.

"It's a shame," he said angrily, "an awful shame. It was given to me, and someone has taken it. Can't you think where it could be, Fiona? I'd go *anywhere* to find it."

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Whatever Fiona may have been going to say, her words tailed off into sudden silence. For from beyond the cave wall, as it seemed, sounded again the footsteps which they had heard before; and this time they knew that there was no cave there, and that it was walking through solid rock as if along a road. There was no question this time of any concealment or pretence; both frankly turned tail and made for the rock barrier. Halfway there the Urchin tripped and fell heavily on his head. Fiona put the lamp down and helped him up, dizzy and shaking.

"Can you go on, Urchin?" she said. "If not, I'll try and carry you."

The Urchin looked back into the blackness, unrelieved by any ray of the lamp, which faced the other way. The footsteps were steadily drawing nearer, neither hasting nor staying. What the Urchin may have thought he saw Fiona could not guess; he gave one shriek, slid out of her grasp, and bolted for the rock barrier as fast as his trembling feet would carry him.

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For one moment Fiona all but followed him. Then it suddenly came to her that she was responsible for the boy's safety. She never knew afterwards how she managed to do what she did; but she turned, and with the courage of utter desperation—the courage which enables the hen partridge to face the sparrow hawk—stood at bay, swinging up the heavy lamp to see and face whatever should come.

And into the circle of lamplight quietly walked the figure of the old hawker.

The revulsion of feeling was too much for Fiona. She sprang forward and caught the old man's hand and clung to it.

"Oh," she said, "I'm so glad it's you. We heard the footsteps and we were so frightened." The relief of it all was overwhelming; she was almost crying, and went on saying anything, hardly knowing what she said, just for the mere human companionableness of it. "How did you come here? I suppose you came over with Angus in his boat. Of course you would. Then there must be another way into the cave after all, and we couldn't find it."

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"And so I frightened you?" said the old man gently, making no effort to withdraw his hand. "Yes, there is another way in." He made no attempt to answer all her questions.

"Urchin," called Fiona, raising her voice. "Urchin, come back; it's all right."

But there was no answer.

"Urchin," she shouted; "Urchin."

But there was no answer save the echoing of the empty cave.

"He was going down to the boat," she said, loyally repressing the fact that the Urchin had bolted.

"We must go after him, for he had hurt his head, and I am afraid of his falling again."

They climbed the rock barrier, and made their way to the boat. The boat lay there as it had been left, half ashore, with the swell rippling against the stern, and over one thwart the Urchin's jacket, just as he had thrown it down. And the boat was as empty as the cave. [Pg 75]

Into Fiona's eyes came a sudden fear.

"He must have fallen again, and be lying somewhere," she said.

They went back, searching every nook and corner of the cave, turning the light into every crevice, under every rock, making a minute examination of the rock barrier; and there was no sign.

And then Fiona broke down.

"He is drowned," she said, and just sat and sobbed.

After a few moments the old man came and sat down beside her. In his gentle voice he said that the Urchin could not possibly be drowned. The water was quite shallow at the edge, and he was a good swimmer, was he not? And even if he had not been, the swell would have rolled him ashore. He himself had no doubt that all would come right.

Fiona ceased sobbing and turned on him. [Pg 76]

"Do you know where he is?" she demanded bluntly.

"How would I know when you do not know?" said the old man. "Could I see what you could not see?" And then "Listen."

Down the waterway came voices, and the sound of oars. It was in fact Jeconiah's boat entering the cave.

Fiona caught at the straw.

"He may have swum out to the other boat," she said.

But there was no one in the other boat but Jeconiah and his two men. They had powerful lanterns, and the boat was full of sacks. Jeconiah himself was purple with suppressed rage and impatience. The moment he could get ashore, he waddled up to Fiona and shook the map of the cave in her face, exclaiming, "Remember, if you have found anything it belongs to me and I claim it."

Fiona had only one thought in her mind at the moment, and the foolish impertinence of the little fat man was to her merely so much unnecessary sound. Her answer was "Have you seen the Urchin? We have lost him. Did he not swim out to your boat?" She was almost sobbing again. [Pg 77]

"Confound the brat!" said Jeconiah roughly. "I've not come here to play hide-and-seek with a parcel of children. Tell me at once what you've found."

Fiona straightened herself, and looked at Jeconiah as though he were some noxious reptile.

"There was nothing here to find," she said. "And this cave belongs to my father. And anything in it he gave to the Urchin."

"Well, he's not here," said Jeconiah brutally, "and I am. Who finds, keeps."

And calling to his men to bring the lights, he set off, between stumbling and crawling, for the rock barrier. One of the men had the decency to stop a moment and tell Fiona that they had seen nothing of any boy; Jeconiah turned and abused him for a laggard.

With a good deal of difficulty the two men hoisted and shoved Jeconiah over the rock barrier. Once over, he took a light himself, told the men to wait where they were, and after a good look at the map set out for the recess where the Urchin had found the doubloon. Fiona followed him; there was some vague idea in her mind of protecting the Urchin's property; behind that there was still a faint subconscious hope that in some way or other the Urchin would suddenly reappear, and laugh at her terrors. [Pg 78]

Jeconiah reached the recess. He saw and understood the marks of the boxes on the sand. He swung round on Fiona with a snarl like that of a hungry wolf.

"You think you're clever, don't you, you and your father," he said. "I suppose you've had the stuff moved. But I'll have it if I go to the middle of the earth for it."

It was the old hawker who shouted. He had stood apart, a silent spectator of the scene. And at this moment he called out, in a voice of surprising power for so frail a body: [Pg 79]

"Look out above you. Jump."

Fiona, who had learned to obey, jumped back just in time. But Jeconiah had never learnt to obey any orders but his own. He stood, stupidly staring, as a bit of the roof of the cave bowed downward, gave way, and came cascading about him in a shower of earth and big stones, that filled the air with thick dust. When the dust cleared again, they saw Jeconiah lying on his back in the middle of the cliff fall, motionless, and to all appearance dead.

But Fiona was not looking at Jeconiah. She was looking at the place where the roof of the cave had bowed itself before falling; and into her mind came crowding dim forgotten legends, legends of fear and hope. And she was saying over and over again to herself, as though she might miss its purport, that behind the cliff fall, as if impelling and directing it, she had seen a small brown elfin hand.

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It was the old hawker who took charge of the situation. The two men, who at first had looked as if they would run, became amenable when he spoke to them. They carried Jeconiah's body to his boat, and laid it in the stern-sheets. One of the men pointed out that there was no mark at all on his face or head, and that he did not believe he had been struck.

"Died of fright, I expect," he said curtly.

"Lucky we stood out for wages in advance," said his companion. It looked as if this might be Jeconiah's fitting epitaph.

The old man himself went with Fiona in her boat. But he was too feeble to row far, so he landed on the island and went in search of Angus. In due course Angus came down and rowed Fiona home, saying that the old man was going to look after his sheep for him till he returned. It did not occur to Fiona, until they had gone too far to turn back, that it looked as though the old man wished to avoid questions. Her mind was in a helpless whirl in which everything seemed unreal, except the Urchin and that small brown hand. She could not give her father any very coherent account of what had happened; but he went out at once to find a boat and men to search the cave.

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Jeconiah was laid on his bed in the big house, and there was much commotion there; this one must go for the doctor and that one for the Student; scared maids stood and whispered in the corridors; the two loafers, heroes of the hour, feasted happily in the kitchen. Then the doctor came, and went upstairs with a grave face, as befitted the occasion; but he did not come down again, and surmise grew. Half an hour passed before the door opened, and the doctor, smiling and rubbing his hands together, came into the library, where the Student had just entered and was talking to the housekeeper.

"He's not dead at all," said the doctor. "It's catalepsy—suspended animation, you know. Like the frog in the marble. Had a shock, you tell me? Just so, just so. How long? Oh, he may be an hour, and he may be a month; no one can ever say. Never had the good luck to see a case before. Not *very* uncommon, no. Mustn't try to rouse him, you know; might be dangerous. Just wait. Send for me at once if he comes to. Can get two nurses to watch him, if you like; just as well perhaps. Sometimes they are odd when they wake; think they are someone else for a bit, you know, change their habits, and so on. Dual personality? Oh, yes, several well-attested cases; but I don't mean as much as that. Might arise this way, of course; but what I mean is more just queer. But of course he need not be; might wake up as if he'd been asleep. If it lasts long, take away all the almanacs and things, in case he gets a shock. Well, good day, good day."

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And the doctor went; and Jeconiah's body lay still on the bed, waiting till his soul, if he had one, should return to it.

So the Student went home again; and on his way he met the old hawker, who stopped and spoke to him; and for a few moments the two walked together, the old man talking rather quickly. Fiona, watching from the window of the bookroom, could see that her father first looked puzzled and then grave and then considerably relieved; in a dim kind of way she found herself thinking that Angus must have rowed back very fast to Scargill, if the old hawker were already landed. She was wondering who he really was and why her father talked to him.

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"Tell Anne to get us something to eat—anything," said the Student. "The boat will be here directly."

The Student, by straining what remained of old loyalty as far as he dared, had found half a dozen volunteers, good men, to face the haunted cave, provided he went himself.

"Do you want to come, Fiona?" he said. Of course Fiona meant to come.

And while they waited, the Student questioned Fiona, and had the whole story coherently, except the hand. That part Fiona felt she could not tell; there, in the cheerful bookroom, it seemed so impossible. Once or twice he nodded, and said, "That would be so"; and at the end he pointed out that whatever had happened had happened when her back was turned, as she faced the coming footsteps. She had not thought of that. What puzzled her, and hurt her a little, was that, though her father seemed to feel for *her*, he did not appear to be particularly concerned about the Urchin. "I believe it will come right," was all he said.

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The boat arrived, rowed by strong hands; the men worked with a will, and the distance to the cave seemed short. They had brought good lights, and the Student had a powerful electric torch. High and low they searched the cave, and found nothing. One man, who was a good swimmer, dived several times and found nothing there either. Tracking footsteps was impossible; the sand, where there was any, had been hopelessly trampled.

When nothing more could be done, the Student said that he wanted to look for a thing himself

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which he had an idea of. He went down to the end of the cave with his torch and tapped the wall with a geological hammer. Fiona sat on the rock barrier and watched him; what he was seeking she had no idea. He came slowly back down the cave, tapping the wall, till he reached the recess where the Urchin had picked up the doubloon. He went straight to the back of the recess and tapped the wall there; and even as he did so a large piece of stone fell from above, and smashed the electric torch in his hand. He came back to the rock barrier quite unperturbed, looking as if he had found what he sought.

"Not very safe, this cave," he said calmly; and told the men to push off the boat. "There is nothing more we can do," he said; "the boy is certainly not here."

The men's courage was fast ebbing away; they were glad to get out of the haunted place.

Fiona sat in silence all the way home. It was dark before they reached the house. She waited while Anne bustled over supper; she thought she would never see her father alone. At last supper was over, and he went into the bookroom and began to light his pipe; she followed him. Her words came out in a torrent.

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"Daddy," she said, "what does it all mean? and why are you so strange and unconcerned? What did that old man tell you? If I couldn't see, *he* must have seen, for he was facing. What is it you know? And why have you told me nothing?"

"Sit down, little daughter," said the Student. He drew her beside his knee, with her head on his arm. "I will tell you now what I can. The old man gave me a sort of hint. He did not really see, for the lamp was the other way; I fancy he guessed. I wanted to test what he said to me. I have tested it now with my hammer; it all agrees. I am absolutely certain that no harm has come to the Urchin. But I can do nothing for him myself. And I must not even tell you what I think; for if I do it ruins everything. All I may tell you is this, that you are the only person who can do anything. You will have to do it all yourself and by yourself, little daughter. I believe you have ways and means of your own of finding out. Are you going through with it, Fiona?"

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"Of course I am, daddy," she said. "How can I do anything else? If only I knew what it is I have to do to find him—how to begin even."

"I cannot even tell you that," said the Student. But his fingers played with the copper bangle on her wrist. And out of some dim corner of subconsciousness she seemed to hear a small voice which said "If you can't get what you want by beginning at the top you must start again at the bottom." Her father, with his learning, was the top; the bottom . . . ?

Fiona went to bed less miserable than she had expected.

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CHAPTER V

THE OREAD

Fiona was out long before breakfast next morning, digging furiously in her garden. Not many minutes passed before she was rewarded by a glint of something yellow in a shovelful of earth, and there was the centipede.

"You dear creature," she said, and caught it up quickly before it could wriggle away.

"How polite we are this morning," said the centipede, swelling with conscious pride. "I suppose we want something."

Fiona's mind was far too completely taken up with her one object to notice or resent any insinuations.

"Yes, I do," she said. "You told me that if I could not get what I wanted by beginning at the top I must start again at the bottom. I can do nothing from the top this time, so I've come to you."

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"Flattered, to be sure," said the centipede. "How frank we are."

"Please don't be cross," said Fiona, humbly. "I am only doing what you told me to do."

"Bless you, child, I'm not cross," said the centipede. "I'm a philosopher."

"Don't philosophers get cross?" asked the girl.

"Never," said the centipede. "And when they do they call it something else. What's the matter with me is, that I've sprained my seventh ankle on bow side, counting from the tail. Don't say you're sorry, for you're not. Anyone can see you're not."

"You are horrid to-day," said Fiona. "And the other day you were so nice."

"That's what makes me such a charming companion," said the centipede. "You never know what to expect. So I never pall."

"I want to know where the Urchin is, and how I am to find him," said Fiona.

"Is that all?" said the centipede. "Fancy interrupting my breakfast on account of that boy. Well, one question at a time. We'll have the last one first; I'm in that sort of mood to-day."

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"How can I find the Urchin, then, please?" asked Fiona.

"Well, you've been told *that* already," said the centipede. "Haven't you a memory?"

Fiona thought and thought, but could make nothing of it.

"My friend the bookworm was there at the time," said the centipede, "and heard the shore lark tell you that the last man went up a hill. Very well. Go up a hill."

"But that was for something quite different," said Fiona. "That was for my treasure. I am not thinking of any treasure now."

"Silly of you, then," said the centipede. "I would be. Ever studied philosophy?"

"No," said Fiona.

"That's a pity," said the centipede. "Then you've never heard of Hegel and the unity of opposites? Black and white are only different aspects of the same thing, you know. And as soon as you begin to think about it, you see at once how sensible it is. Well, a treasure-hunt and a boy-hunt are only different aspects of a hunt, aren't they? Therefore they are the same thing. Therefore what does for one does for the other. Therefore you go up a hill. There's logic for you," and once more he swelled proudly.

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"Thank you very much," said Fiona. "And now will you please tell me where the Urchin is?"

"Tell you!" exclaimed the centipede. "Why, it was you told me. You prophesied the whole thing."

"I'm sure I don't remember it, then," said Fiona.

"What's the matter with *you*," said the centipede, "is that you refuse to exert your intelligence, such as it is. You should take a lesson by me. You humans are all forgetting nowadays that the spoken word is an instrument of great power, and that once it is launched it goes on and on, and can work magic on its own account, quite independently of you. If you say a thing will happen, it frequently does happen."

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"But what did I say?" asked Fiona.

"You told the Urchin that if he hurt the shore lark the Little People would take him. Well, they've taken him. That's all."

And the centipede slid down on to the ground, and with something like a chuckle vanished. He had evidently learned from his philosophy to bear with resignation the misfortunes of others.

But Fiona did not set off up a hill at once. After breakfast she went to the bookroom and spoke to her father.

"I have found out where the Urchin is, daddy," she said. "He was carried off by the fairies."

The Student showed no surprise.

"You have not been long finding out, Fiona," he said. "I thought you had ways and means of your own."

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"But, daddy," she said, "I don't *really* believe it, you know. It sounds so absurd nowadays. Do you believe it?"

"I believe it, yes," said the Student. "I knew yesterday. Now that you know, I may talk to you about it, so far."

"I don't know that I do really know," she said. "Things like that don't *really* happen, do they? Whoever heard of it?"

"You and I have heard of it," he answered. "And that is enough. The proposition that people are not carried off by fairies is a mere working hypothesis, liable to be overthrown by any one case to the contrary. Well, we've got a case to the contrary, and that's the end of the hypothesis."

"I'm arguing against myself, daddy, you know," she said. "I want to believe that we do know where he is."

"No difficulty at all," said the Student, "to anyone with a properly trained mind, like yours and mine. Take it this way. No one has ever crossed the South Arabian desert or explored the snow ranges of New Guinea, have they? Well, for all anyone can say to the contrary, people may be carried off by fairies every day of the week in New Guinea or South Arabia, mayn't they? It may even be the rule there. It may be a working hypothesis among the pygmies of New Guinea that such a thing *always* happens—at death, for instance. It would be just as good a working hypothesis as it is that it *never* happens."

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"But, daddy, it would be so extraordinary, wouldn't it?"

"Not a bit more extraordinary," he said, "than the inside of a bit of radium, or the inside of an egg, for that matter. It is probably simpler for the Urchin to become a fairy than for an egg to become a bird, or a caterpillar a butterfly. It would not be nearly as strange as it is that there is a

water beast which can shed its gills and become a land beast, or that Uranus moons go round the wrong way. You can't knock it out by any reasoning of that kind, Fiona. It's merely a matter of fact; and if we have found a case we *have* found a case." [Pg 95]

"Then you knew yesterday, daddy?" she said.

"I had a very fair idea," he answered. "That is why I was tapping in the cave with a hammer. Can you guess why?"

Fiona saw.

"To find the rest of the cave," she said. "That is where he would be."

"Just so," said the Student. "These caves cannot end in a wall, as that one seems to. I thought the wall must ring hollow somewhere, and the hollow is in the recess where the stone nearly fell on me. The apparent end of the cave is not in the line of the true cave at all."

"It is the same place where the stones fell on Mr. Johnson," said Fiona.

"That is strange," said the Student.

And then Fiona told about the hand she had seen.

"Of course, of course," said the Student. "That explains the whole thing. They threw the stone down on me too. They did not wish me to know that the wall was hollow just there. They must use it as a doorway. They will have carried the boy through at the moment that you turned your back, of course. I suppose he invited them in some way; they could have no power otherwise." [Pg 96]

"He said he would go *anywhere* to find his treasure," said Fiona.

"That would be quite sufficient for them to act on," said the Student.

"Then the stories about the cruelty of the Little People are true," asked Fiona.

"Only in part," said the Student. "I take it that they are all sorts, like ourselves. They are, as you know, the vanished débris of all the peoples that have helped to make this planet what it is. Good people, many of them. But they cannot altogether love those who have driven them under the ground."

"And who is the old hawker, daddy," she asked, "and what has he to do with it all?" [Pg 97]

"I can't talk about anything except what you already know," said the Student. "Have you found out yet how to start?"

"I am to go up a hill," said Fiona. "And I am going up Heleval now. And I came to see if you would come with me."

"I wish I could; I wish very much I could," said the Student. "I do not know what you may find; but I know well that if I went with you, you would find nothing but grass and rock. I am too old to see the things you can see, you know. You have to do it alone, little daughter."

So Fiona filled her pocket with bread and cheese, and started; and the Student, after a useless attempt to settle down to his inscriptions, set up a little three-inch telescope with which he sometimes entertained Fiona on fine nights, gazing at Jupiter's moons or Saturn's rings, and followed her across the moor as far as he could. It was the only way he could go with her. [Pg 98]

There are many worse things in the world than setting out to climb Heleval on a beautiful morning on the first of October, when the grass in unshaded corners is still pearly with the frost of the night, and the whole earth is touched with the wonderful caress of the cool autumn sunshine. Fiona's way lay along the shore road, past the bank of heather and fern which in August had been gay with flowers, napperd and potentilla, blue milkwort and starry eye-bright, and alive with butterflies, blues and small heaths and pearl-bordered fritillaries; but the flowers were faded now, and in their place, in the little burn where the hazelnuts grew, was a tapestry of purple burrs and scarlet hips. The shore road ended at a little burn; here an old stone bridge, grown over with grass, crossed the pool which in times of spate would hold a fat, white sea-trout, and here Fiona and the Urchin had used to come in summer to gather globe flowers. From this point a sheep track led up the valley beside the burn, through great spaces of yellowing bracken, by little swampy springs where late forget-me-nots still lingered and an early snipe might rise with a skeep, and across low-lying wastes of bog-myrtle, perfuming all the air with its dying leaves; then the ground began to rise, and fern and bog-myrtle gave place to short, hard grass tufted with bulrushes, and beds of matted unburnt heather, seamed with rabbit tracks. [Pg 99]

After a time Fiona left the valley and began to climb the hillside, rising steeply through heather and red grass and heather again, most of it dying by now, but with patches still in full flower, worked by the wild bees and making the moorland smell like a honey-pot. Then more grass, and limestone ridges, and she stood on the crest of the moor, which billowed away on her right, wave after wave, till it ran down to the low ground and the sea, and rose up on her left till it ended in the great mass of Heleval, standing up into the cloudless sky. The ground before her was scarred with deep peat-hags, their gray banks touched with the tiny scarlet blossoms of the trumpet- [Pg 100]

moss, while from their crumbling sides projected bits of the whitened trunks of trees long since dead, last vestiges of the forests that had clothed the island ere ever the Gael first fought his way in. Walking became impossible, and she jumped from gray bank to gray bank, occasionally floundering across a little lake of soft peat, where the wild cotton grass still bloomed, and the mountain hares had left telltale tracks. Now and again a hare itself would scurry away before her up one of the peat ditches, rising to the moor level as soon as he thought he was out of gunshot and sitting up on his haunches to watch; now and again an old grouse, his head and hackles red as a berry in the sunlight, would rise, crow, and swing away over the brow of the moor. And presently from behind Heleval came drifting a gray bird with a long bill who on hovering wings wheeled three times in the air above her and gave his full spring call, the most wonderful sound that the hills ever hear; then he stooped close over her head and with wings spread sickle-wise shot away for the sea. One may see a curlew on the moor in October, but he will not give his spring call; and Fiona felt of good courage, for she knew that the bird had called for her, to tell her she was in the right way.

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So she came to the foot of Heleval itself, and started to climb the steep slope of short grass, slippery as polished board, which led up to the rock pinnacle above; the hillside twinkled with the white scuts of rabbits racing up before her to their holes, as round the side of the mountain came their enemy, perhaps the last kite in the island, glittering in the sun as only a glede can, till the beautiful cowardly creature caught sight of Fiona and swept away across the valley. She passed the great cairn where the hill foxes live, and began the last climb to the pinnacle of rock that fronts the flat crest of the mountain. And now something white on the rock, which she had noticed from below without taking account of, began to become insistent. It could not possibly be a patch of snow yet, she thought. Perhaps the shepherd had hung a sheepskin there. But no sheepskin was ever so white.

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Then she came up near the pinnacle, and saw. Standing upright against it was a girl, not much older than herself. Her long dark hair blew back over the rock; her white body was half hidden in a trembling veil of white light, which shimmered and played all about her, waving with every breath of the wind. Her face was beautiful and cold, like a frosty moonrise; her eyes shone like the drip of phosphorescent water under the stars.

"You have come at last," said the girl. "Every day for many days I have watched for you."

"Who are you, you beautiful girl?" asked Fiona.

"I am an Oread," said the girl. "I am the spirit of Heleval."

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"I have heard," said Fiona, "that long ago people used to believe that everything had a spirit of its own, mountains and rivers and trees. Is it true then?"

"It *was* true," said the girl. "The world was full of my sisters, once. There were the Naiads in the streams, and the Hamadryads in the woods, and we, the Oreads, in the mountains. Men were wiser and simpler in those days. But now my sisters are nearly all gone. When a tree has become so many cubic feet of timber, how can it shelter a Dryad? When a stream is merely so many units of waterpower, how can a Naiad dwell there? Only the barren mountains, if they contain neither gold nor iron, have been left unappraised and unexploited; and a few Oreads still linger here and there. Once in a while a man fancies that he sees one of us; then he must climb and climb till the day he dies, hoping to see her indeed; down in your world people call him mountain mad."

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"How is it then that I have seen you?" asked Fiona.

The Oread touched her bracelet.

"Partly because of this," she said. "But chiefly because you are a child, and can still see. What is it you have come to ask me?"

"How to find the Urchin," said Fiona.

"You know of course where he is?" the girl asked; and Fiona said, "Yes, he is in Fairyland; but I do not know the way to go."

"That is easily told," said the Oread. "The King of the Woodcock will let you in, and any of his people can tell you where to find him. But do you know the danger? If you do arrive, which is very doubtful, the fairies will make you wish a wish; and if your wish be one that does not find favor with them, they will keep you there forever, till you lose your memory and yourself and become even as one of them."

"I will take the risk," said Fiona, "for I must go and try to bring him back."

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"Why do you want to bring him back?" asked the Oread. "He is much better where he is. Will he thank you for bringing him back? Not a bit. You will have the labor and the danger, and he will take it all for granted. And then he will become a man, and what use is that? He may be a financier, and cheat somebody; or a politician, and slander somebody; or a learned man, and hinder wisdom. He is much better in Fairyland. Why are you going?"

"I can't help it," said Fiona. "You can't leave people in the lurch, you know."

"Of course you can," said the Oread. "Be sensible and go home; eat, drink, and be merry."

"O, don't you understand?" said Fiona. "Don't you see that there are some things you *can't* do,

whatever anybody says? It's not the reason of the thing; it's only just because I am I, and he is lost. You are so beautiful; haven't you any heart?"

"Neither heart nor soul," said the Oread. "So I ought to be perfectly happy. You have a heart and a soul, and you are not. Which of us is the better off?" [Pg 106]

"I wouldn't change, anyhow," said Fiona.

The Oread laughed.

"Of course you wouldn't. It is I who would change if I could. But as I have no soul, and cannot get one, and do not know what it would mean to get one, it is no use worrying; it is best to be happy as I am. In any case, I would not care to be like men and women. I would not mind having a child's heart, like you. I had a heart once, but it is so long ago that I have almost forgotten what it was like. How old do you think I am?"

"You *look* about seventeen," said Fiona.

"I am exactly as old as Heleval," said the girl. "And that is more hundreds of thousands of years than you or I could ever count. I am older than any of the fishes or birds or beasts; far older than men or fairies. Look at that," and the Oread swept her arm over the glorious prospect around her; the two great wings of the Isle of Mist stretched far out into the sea, the Atlantic throbbing and sparkling under the blue sky, and across the loch the jagged gray range of the Cuchullins, peak upon peak. "Isn't it all beautiful? We came into being together. Heleval was a giant in those days, a king among other kings; and there was no sea there, and the Cuchullin Hills stood right up into the sky, and twisted and bubbled while the Earth cooled and cracked, and my sisters of the Fire came out of the cracks and taught us mountain spirits the fire dance, and we danced it all night on the great peaks till the stars reeled to watch us. And then the fiery summits cooled and sank down, and my sisters of the Fire sank with them, and a mighty river went foaming out down the valley yonder to a distant sea; and every evening my sisters the Naiads came floating up in a circle with garlands of green on their hair, and they taught us mountain spirits the water dance, and we danced it all night on the moonlit water, while the Ocean crept nearer and nearer to gaze. And then the sea came up, and the river carved Heleval out as you see it, and shrank away, and my sisters the Naiads shrank away with it; and the island was covered with great forests, and my sisters the Hamadryads came out of the tree-trunks and taught us mountain spirits the tree dance, and we danced it all night in the forest glades, till one night men saw; and men felled the forests to capture my sisters of the trees and enslave them, but they vanished as the trees vanished. And to-day only the hills are left, and we, the Oreads, a people few and fading away; and we no longer dance, for we have lost all our sisters, and we no longer have hearts." [Pg 107] [Pg 108]

The girl's face had filled with color as she spoke, and her eyes had become soft, and her voice sounded like the music of waters far away. Fiona looked at her in wonder.

"Indeed, indeed, you have your heart still," she said. "And you are far more beautiful even than I thought you were. Come home with me, and I will love you as you loved your sisters." [Pg 109]

"It is not possible," said the Oread. "It is not free to me to leave Heleval. I *am* Heleval. And I shall be here till one day men find iron or copper in my mountain, and come up with great engines to carve it and tear its flanks and carry it away; and then I shall go too, as my sisters have gone."

"Will you die?" asked Fiona.

"I do not know what death means," said the girl. "I shall just go back, like a drop of water when it falls into the sea. But do you know what you have done to-day? For a few moments, because you are brave and loyal, you have given me back my heart, which was lost thousands of years ago. It will all fade away again; but before it fades, will you kiss me?"

So Fiona took her in her arms and kissed her, and then turned and went down the hill. Once she faced round, and saw the Oread standing, frosty and white, against the pinnacle of rock, holding out her arms; and she started to go back to her. And even as she moved the whiteness vanished, and there was nothing there but the rocky pinnacle, shining in the slanting sunlight. Rather sadly she went home. [Pg 110]

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CHAPTER VI

THE KING OF THE WOODCOCK

That night Fiona told her father that she believed she had found the way to go. They also discussed the question of catching a woodcock; with the result that Fiona was up at dawn and off to the kennels behind the big house, where the Urchin's father kept his dogs. She understood that she must take advantage both of the night frost and the habits of the keeper, who was apt to lie in bed awhile when no one was about.

The two setters stood on their hind legs to greet her, and pawed at the bars, whining and dancing with joy. Artemis was white and brown and Apollo was white and black. Fiona threw open the

door, and they were out in a moment, tumbling over each other as they made wild rings round the grass, and dashing back in between to lick her hand. She had to sit down and wait till the first exuberance was over, and they came and lay down at her feet with their tongues out.

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"It is good to be out so early," said Apollo.

"It's so slow in the kennel," said Artemis. "And we can't even talk to each other, because Apollo was broken in English and doesn't know any Gaelic, and I was broken by another man in Gaelic and don't know any English."

"You'll interpret, won't you?" said Apollo. "Of course we've the international code, but it doesn't take one much further than the passwords."

So for the rest of the morning Fiona had not only to interpret but to make every remark twice over, once in each language. But it will do if the reader takes this for granted.

"What are we going to do?" asked Apollo.

So Fiona explained to them that she wanted to catch a woodcock and ask him a question, and she hoped they would help her.

"Of course we will," said Artemis. "We know all about woodcock. When we go out with himself, we find them for him and stand still, and then he makes a noise and they fall down dead."

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"Sometimes," said Apollo.

"Generally," corrected Artemis, loyally. "Will you make them fall down dead?"

Fiona explained that she only wanted to catch one and talk to it.

"We never saw that done," said Apollo. "But we will find one, and then you can catch it."

"It's very early for woodcock," said Artemis. "There won't be any in the heather on the second of October. But there may be an early pair in the ferns."

"The first ones always pitch in the ferns on Glenollisdal," said Apollo.

So to Glenollisdal they went, down the shore road and across the little bridge and then by the shepherd's track along the top of the black cliffs, over grass and stones all rough and white with the frost. The cold morning air was like new wine, and Fiona had to shade her eyes from the low sun. Then the track left the cliffs and began to climb up a sunless valley, across little burns beautiful with fading ferns, till between two great moorland crags it reached the pass, more a watercourse now than a track; and then came the cairn at the summit of the pass, with its glorious view of sea and mountain, and down at one's very feet the deep narrow valley that was Glenollisdal, seamed from crest to foot by its deep burn, which ran half its length through faded brown heather and then out to sea through a huge bed of dying bracken, the whole bathed in the bright morning sun.

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"We always come here the first day," said Apollo. "Oh, we are going to have fun."

The three followed the track down to where it passed the top of the fern bed. There was a good deal of grass there, dotted with sheep, and in one place, looking well out to sea, a curious little hard circle in the grass, where no sheep ever came.

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"That is the fairy ring," said Artemis. "Where they dance, you know."

"They dance on All Hallows E'en," said Apollo. "But no one ever sees them."

"Because everyone's afraid to go and look," said Artemis.

"Please, may we start?" said Apollo.

"All you have to do is to wait till we point," said Artemis, "and then come to us."

And the two dogs dashed off into the great fern bed, crossing each other backwards and forwards like a pair of scissors as they quartered it.

They were not long about it. Apollo's gallop became a sort of run, a yard or two of stealthy crawl, and he stopped dead, tail stiff and throat distended, like a dog of marble, and looked round for Fiona. Artemis was just crossing him; she whipped round in her stride as if shot and became a second marble image where she stood.

Fiona walked down to Apollo. But the ferns rustled a good deal as she made her way through, and as she reached the dog's side the cock rose, five yards away, with a lazy careless flap as if it felt only the bother of being disturbed. For a moment she had a vivid impression of the white patches at the end of its fan of tail feathers, and then it gradually gathered speed and swept away over the side of the valley; for an instant it showed black as it crossed the sky line, and then it was gone.

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Apollo turned to Fiona with unhappy eyes and licked her hand. But Artemis never moved a muscle.

"Come to me," she said in a low whisper.

Very quietly Fiona reached her side.

"The other bird is here," whispered Artemis, "just under my nose. Stoop down."

Fiona bent down between the stalks of the bracken. The woodcock was sitting with its back to her, a little brown bunch of feathers. Very gently she put her hand out, and even as she did so she became aware of a wise black eye looking at her, though the bird faced the other way. Her hand closed on the empty air, and the woodcock, with a wonderful spring, was well on its way to seek its mate.

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"I believe I could have put a foot on it," said Artemis regretfully. "But of course we are not allowed to."

"I don't know how I came to be so foolish," said Fiona. "I ought to have spoken to it instead of trying to catch it. But I forgot."

"Better luck next time," said Apollo; "we must try again."

But though the dogs worked the whole of the ferns carefully, there was no other bird there.

They came back and lay down beside Fiona, tongues out and panting.

"It's no use trying the heather yet, I know," said Artemis. "Birds are never in it at this time of year."

"There are some more ferns two miles on," said Apollo doubtfully. "I saw a bird there once, three years ago."

"I wish I knew what to do," said Fiona.

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"We can leave it for a day or two and come back," said Artemis. "Those two birds will be back again to look for each other."

"But they won't be so confiding again," added Apollo.

They were all so preoccupied that they never noticed the shepherd till he was quite close to them. He was striding down the track, a big, raw-boned man with red hair; a plaid was thrown loosely across his shoulder; at his heels followed a jet black collie.

The dogs saw him first. It would seem that they did not like him. Every hair on their necks bristled; they shrank close to Fiona, making little moaning noises in their throats, and flattening themselves as if they were trying to burrow into the ground. Their eyes were full of terror.

"Why, Artemis, Apollo, what's the matter?" said Fiona. Then she looked up and saw the shepherd. "Why, it's only the new shepherd and his collie. There's nothing to be afraid of."

"Collie!" said Apollo. "That thing's not a collie. Can't you see?"

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"Shepherd!" echoed Artemis. "That thing's not a shepherd. Oh, can't you see?"

The shepherd came up to Fiona, and said that Miss Fiona was out early and was there anything he could be doing for her. He spoke in the soft correct English of the Gael.

"I came out to catch a woodcock to talk to it," said Fiona, "and we can't catch one."

It occurred to her, even as she spoke, that the statement sounded a little out of the ordinary. But the rough shepherd never let the least sign of this show on his face. He answered in the most matter-of-fact way, with the gentle courtesy of the west coast, that there would not be many woodcock in yet, and would he try to catch one for Miss Fiona?

"Oh, do you think you could?" said Fiona eagerly. "I should be so grateful."

Then the shepherd saw the trouble of the dogs. He said something to them in a language that was neither English nor Gaelic, and waved his own dog to go. The collie went straight off up the moor, and sat down on the top of the nearest rock ledge, an odd little blot of black on the brown and yellow moorland. Apollo and Artemis got up and shook themselves violently.

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"It was the international password," said Apollo. "Goodness knows where he got it from. But we have to recognize it."

"I'm not happy," said Artemis. "I was well brought up. I never associated with this sort of thing before."

Fiona, who knew that a new shepherd had been coming, could make nothing of their trouble, and did her best to smooth them down. The shepherd led the way up the hill, and on to a little rough plateau broken with rocks and bits of heather, lying under the main rise of the hill where it rounds away toward the Glenollisdal burn. "I am thinking that there should be a woodcock about here," he said.

"This is one of the earliest places in all the heather," whispered Artemis to Fiona. "He must know this moor very well."

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"It's too early yet, all the same, even for here," said Apollo.

It looked as if Apollo were right. For when at the shepherd's request Fiona threw the dogs off, they quartered the whole plateau and found nothing.

But the shepherd stuck to his guns.

"I am thinking that there should be a bird here," he said. "Will Miss Fiona give me leave to try my own dog?"

Fiona nodded and called the setters to heel; the shepherd waved his hand, and the black collie came racing to him. Some collies will work a ground like a spaniel, and some will even do a little pointing, but the black collie troubled himself neither with one nor the other. When the shepherd spoke to him, he just cantered straight forward to a small patch of heather on the sunless side of a rock, where the frost still lingered, and there sat down quite unconcerned, as though the matter in hand were altogether beneath the scope of his talents.

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"I think he has a bird," said the shepherd.

"I tried that place," said Apollo. "There's nothing there."

But the shepherd had gone up to his dog and was peering carefully into the heather. Then he beckoned Fiona.

"Does Miss Fiona see the bird?" he asked, pointing.

Fiona looked long before she saw. The woodcock had squeezed himself right into the roots of a frost-covered clump of heather, and even when the heather was parted nothing showed but his little orange tail, with its white and black points.

"Shall I catch him for Miss Fiona?" asked the shepherd; and Fiona said, "Oh yes, please, if you will."

The shepherd knelt down and brought his two great hands slowly to either side of the tuft of heather; then he closed them with a snap, and drew out the largest woodcock Fiona had ever seen. It struggled and thrashed at his wrists with its powerful wings.

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"Will Miss Fiona take the bird now?" he said. "Just behind the wings, with her thumbs on its back."

So Fiona took her bird, and as she did so its back-seeing eye caught the glint of her copper bangle. It stopped thrashing with its wings and lay quite still in her hands.

"Oh, I say," he said, "why didn't you say before, instead of employing these people and frightening an honest bird out of his senses?"

"My dogs couldn't find you," said Fiona. "And I think it was so good of the shepherd to find you for me."

"Shepherd!" said the woodcock. "That wasn't a shepherd. And it wasn't a collie either."

Fiona suddenly recollected that she had not yet thanked the shepherd, and turned to do so. But the shepherd and collie were gone. They must have walked very quickly to have turned the corner of the hill already.

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"Where did he go?" she asked Artemis. Artemis shivered.

"To his own place, I hope," said Artemis severely. "Well brought up dogs should not be asked to associate with things like that."

"But it was only the new shepherd," said Fiona.

"There's the new shepherd," said Artemis, nodding toward a distant slope, where a figure with a brown collie could be seen gathering sheep.

"What were they, then?" asked Fiona.

"Two of the Little People, of course," said Apollo. "Oh dear, oh dear, I'm afraid you'll have trouble."

"One generally dies," said Artemis, with cheerful consolation.

"But they were very nice to me indeed," said Fiona.

"Of course they were," said the woodcock. "You're privileged, you know. *We* all know it. And don't you mind the dogs, my dear. They are good creatures, but they and their forbears have lived so long with humans that they have forgotten most of the things we know. They are nearly as blind as humans now, saving your presence, my dear. And now what is it you want with me?"

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"I want to find the King of the Woodcock," said Fiona.

"Bless your heart," said the bird, "and who do you suppose *We* are? You never saw a woodcock Our size before, did you?" And indeed Fiona never had; for he was as big as a young grouse.

"Eighteen and a half ounces, if I'm a pennyweight," said the woodcock. "I am the heaviest king that we have ever had. Will you please put me down if you want to talk to me? It is hardly consonant with my royal dignity to be held. I shan't fly away; *noblesse oblige*, you know."

So Fiona put him down, and he arranged himself like a bunch of feathers on the ground, his head well back between his shoulders and his beady black eyes looking all round him at once.

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"Why didn't Apollo find you?" asked Fiona.

"No scent," said the woodcock, proudly. "I am not like a common bird. No dog can find a king woodcock; and no dog ever has. We can be beaten out of a wood, of course; my great-great-grandfather was shot like that when the family lived in Norfolk, many years ago. So we came up here to the open heather, and have been quite safe ever since. And now what do you want, my dear?"

"I was told you could let me into Fairyland," said Fiona.

"I can let you in by the back door," the bird said. "But are you really going to Fairyland? You'll need some courage, you know, if you are going the back way."

"Is there another way?" asked Fiona.

"There's the front door, of course," said the bird. "But no one can go that way without an invitation. Have you an invitation?"

"No," said Fiona.

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"A pity," said the woodcock. "There is no danger that way. But without an invitation you could not even find the door. As it is, you'll have to go in by the back way and take your risks."

"I have to go, whatever they are," said Fiona.

"*Noblesse oblige*," said the woodcock. "Quite so, quite so. Have you been told about the wish?"

"Yes," said Fiona. "I know about that."

"The other thing," continued the bird, "is that you must stick to the main path. Remember that. You must not turn out of it for any reason of any kind. You'll see lots of side paths, and you'll see other things too; but if you once leave the main path by so much as one step you'll never get home again. There are no short cuts to Fairyland."

"Thank you so much," said Fiona. "But how shall I know the main path?"

With his long bill the woodcock tweaked the point feather out of one of his wings and gave it to her.

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"This will take you through," he said. "It will point the right way for you; that's why it is called the point feather. Just follow it. If you are frightened and want to leave your search and come home, tap on the ground with it and you will be back in Glenollisdal. But somehow I don't think you will. And whatever you do, don't lose it. When you reach the fairy grove, show it to the guardian, and he will let you in; and mind you don't go in unless he shows you its fellow. Oh, I'm all right, thank you; I'll have grown others long before they are needed. There is no great rush to Fairyland on the part of people who haven't *got* to go, my dear."

"It all sounds so much more difficult than I thought," said poor Fiona.

"Nothing worth while is ever easy," said the woodcock. "And now I'll show you where to start. By the bye, you can't take the dogs with you."

"This dog wouldn't go," said Artemis, shivering. "That black collie's there somewhere."

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"Don't bother about us," said Apollo. "We'll be home long before the keeper is out of bed."

So Fiona took a warm farewell of the two dogs, who lamented her sad fate and wished her luck all in one breath, and then set off homeward with their long swinging gallop.

"And now, if you want to be in time for the great gathering, which you humans call Hallow E'en, you'll have to hurry," said the woodcock.

"But it's nearly a month to Hallow E'en," said Fiona.

"You'll want every minute of it," said the bird. "Come on."

And they started off for the fairy ring, the woodcock pattering along on his little feet at a pace which would have surprised anyone who had never seen a woodcock do it.

"How come you to be doorkeeper?" asked Fiona, as they went.

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"Hereditary," said the bird. "We used to go to all the lost lands, you know, like Lyonesse and Lemuria and Bresil and Atlantis. We still cross Ireland once a year and pass on into the Atlantic to salute the site of Plato's island, before we settle in Britain. And Fairyland is only another of the lost lands. Here we are."

They had come to the fairy ring.

"There's nothing more I can do now," said the woodcock. "A straight step and a stout heart, my dear."

Fiona took the feather in her hand and stood in the fairy ring.

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CHAPTER VII

FIONA IN THE FAIRY-WORLD

It was very, very dark. Fiona could not see her hand if she held it close before her eyes. It was just blackness. Only one thing broke it; far away—many miles it might be—was a tiny speck of white, like the point of a pin. All round her in the dark were little soft sounds; they brushed against her feet, and passed before her face; little soft sounds, apparently without bodies. She held the tiny point-feather firmly in the fingers of her left hand, and touched it from time to time with her right, as she felt her way, one foot before the other—she could not walk—towards the point of light. And with her and about her went the small soft sounds; one would have said that they whispered and chuckled in the darkness.

How far and how long she went she could never guess; there was nothing by which to measure time or distance, and evidently she was not going to feel hunger or fatigue. [Pg 132]

At last she became conscious of a change. The white speck of light was growing brighter and larger; and the small soft sounds were becoming tangible. One brushed past her face, and she felt it; she put out a hand, and there was a scuffing and chuckling, as if they were playing blind man's buff with her. Then the light began to take shape; it was a circular pool lying on the floor and wall of the avenue of blackness down which she was passing; and it came from something on the other side. And the little soft sounds crowded round her; they laughed, they whispered, they clutched at her dress; they were trying to guide her in a certain direction. She tried to shake them off, and found that, though they could touch her, she could not touch them. And then she came into the pool of light.

The light came down a sort of short passage between rocks, with a well-trodden floor; and at the end of it, not twenty yards from where she stood, she could see the fairy grotto. One grand white carbuncle, as big as an arc lamp, hung from the roof, filling the grotto with dazzling white light; and the radiance of the carbuncle was flung back in a million points of new splendor from the walls of the grotto, shifting and shimmering like the rainbow across a waterfall, ruby and orange, yellow and emerald, sapphire and violet, changing as each new facet came into play; for the walls of the grotto were set thick with cut jewels of every hue and color. A glorious sight it looked; and Fiona suddenly became aware that the soft things that clutched at her dress and the soft things that whispered in her ear, were all trying to draw her toward the beautiful grotto. But she felt her feather, and it pointed straight on into the dark. So she moved forward; and with the first step she saw the trap. The floor of the beautiful grotto yawned wide, showing the horrible abyss beneath it; and the darkness was full of soft flutterings, and the chuckling of mocking laughter. But they touched her no more at the time; and suddenly the darkness fell away on each side like a wall, and she stepped out into daylight. [Pg 133]

She was in the desert. The yellow burning sand stretched all round her, a mass of glittering particles that made the eyes sore; wave after wave, it went billowing away to the red burning hills that faced and flung back the burning sun. Mile after mile she stumbled along in that aching heat; and then, as she topped a great hillock of sand, she suddenly saw the fairy city. Very beautiful it looked, rose-pink on a wooded island in a fair lake of water, whose blue mirror gave back every trembling cupola and minaret; and toward it, down a broad track marked by tamarisk bushes, went a goodly company of merchants, with tinkling bells on their camels' necks and golden ornaments on their camels' heads, the company of a chief who rode ahead on a white Arab steed with his long jezail laid across his saddle-bow. Here could no doubt be; and Fiona all but stepped on to the broad path in the track of the caravan. But even as she turned she caught sight of the feather and checked herself just in time; and the beautiful city of mirage melted away, and there was no caravan there, but only sand marked by the bones of men, and in place of the tamarisk bushes were gray vultures feasting in a row. She followed the feather straight on across the burning desert; and on a sudden she walked out of the sand into shade. [Pg 134]

She was out in the forest. Huge trees rose like the pillars of a cathedral nave, branching far above her head and shutting out the daylight; and up their trunks ran starred creepers of every hue, fighting their way up to the sun. Down from the branches hung orchids of all fantastic shapes, in long still streamers, and great moon moths fluttered round them, taking their joy in the dim light. And the farther she went the thicker grew the forest, and the more oppressive the airless heat. Trailing plants ran across her feet and tried to trip her up; the great trunks closed together till there was barely room to force a way between; the thorns of the creepers tore at her flesh, and instead of the beautiful orchids there came on the trees huge funguses red as blood. And the small soft voices began again; they had caught her up; the forest was full of the same little sounds which she had heard before, whispering and chuckling and fingering her dress. And then, just as it seemed impossible to fight a way farther through the dense jungle, she came to the open glade. Full of grass and flowers and sunshine it was, and across it ran a gurgling brook, crossed by a little plank bridge; a sweet breeze moved the grass, and beyond the brook two little spotted deer were feeding; far in the distance were tiny peaks of snow. The soft fingers were all tugging at Fiona's dress, impelling her down the glade; but she had had ample warning of those soft fingers, and she saw that the feather pointed straight on through the tangled forest. And even as she moved she saw that the little bridge was the back of a great water-python; and the fingers loosed their hold of her dress, and the air was full of soft whisperings and laughter. And she walked straight on into the tangled thicket before her; and the forest parted to right and left, and she walked out. [Pg 135]

She was in a fair country of green grass and temperate airs, where the path lay true and straight before her through vineyards and groves of oranges. Here and there a cherry tree swung its crown of white blossom above her head, or a cypress stood up tall and straight as a sentinel on duty. Purple flags bloomed under the rocks, and on a clump of brown orchises sat two little jewelled butterflies, burnished green as old copper; up the path of the sunlight came a swallowtail with its stately glancing flight. Everything spoke to her here of fair peace and security; and when she heard the air still rustling with little soft sounds and chuckles, and knew that they had followed her, she began to wonder how it was that, now that she knew their ways, they should think it worth while. And they were becoming most active. The soft sounds brushed all round her; the soft fingers grasped her arms; tiny weightless bodies behind her seemed to be impelling her forward.

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And then before her she saw the inevitable two paths: the broad flat path that passed through a fair orchard of lemon trees, where the sunlight threw chequers on to the grass beneath, starred with scarlet and purple anemones; and the narrow stony track, terribly steep, which toiled away up the bare hillside in heat radiated from the rocks. Never had the soft sounds been so insistent; a myriad gentle hands were trying to steer her, even to push her by force, toward the lemon trees. She saw the folly of them so very clearly; and her foot was actually raised to take the first step up the hill path, when she felt the feather turn of itself in her hand, and she became ice from head to foot as she realized that she had all but destroyed herself by despising her opponents. They had striven this time to force her into the *true* path, believing that she would certainly take the opposite one.

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She saw now the end of the fatal hill path, the sudden crumbling precipice which flung men on to pointed rocks far below; and the air behind her became full of woe, voiceless wailings and silent howls of rage, and she saw what she had fought against; a troop of small formless black things, like immature bats, with pale fingers, that fled moaning down the path of the sunlight. She knew now that they would not vex her again.

She passed on through the lemon orchard, and out on to a bare hillside, rough with stones and dotted here and there with great oak trees; plants of asphodel were thrusting their blossoms up among the coarse tufts of grass, and far below, in all its laughing splendor, lay the sea. And as she turned the shoulder of the hill she saw the temple, a fair Doric temple of gray marble, standing in lonely beauty among the scattered oak trees. Its metopes were carved with the figures of gods and heroes of an older day, and round it ran a frieze of warriors who fought with Amazon women. The singing was just over, it seemed; and the double choir of white-robed girls, who had been giving strophe and antistrophe of some festival ode, had broken into groups, these playing at ball, those reclining in the shade or strolling about with their arms round each other's waists. In her chair in the cool portico sat the fair-faced matronly priestess, still crowned with red roses, and before her two little boys poured wine into a crystal goblet. And as she saw Fiona she rose from her chair and greeted her by name, calling her happy that she had now come safely through the path of danger and that her troubles were ended.

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"Come here to us," she said, "and rest, for it is but a little way now that you must go, and there is ample time; slake your thirst at this crystal goblet, and lie awhile in the shade, while these maidens crown you with flowers."

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But Fiona had learnt her lesson, and she looked at her feather; and the feather pointed straight along the hillside. So she passed on without a look or a word; and as she passed came a noise as of the earth opening; and the pillars of the temple bowed themselves, and the middle of the building collapsed stone by stone, till only the outer columns remained among a mass of fallen blocks, and triglyph and metope and sculptured frieze lay in fragments about them. And among the ruins a red fox with two cubs sat and snarled, as she watched a company of toads crawling in the dust; and of that fair scene all that had not changed was the pallid asphodel, the asphodel whose home is in those other meadows where walk the pallid dead.

And as Fiona passed on, the hillside itself dissolved in mist, and there before her lay the fairy grove. And the guardian of the grove, with white beard sweeping the ground, and old trembling hands, came out to meet her. And she showed him her feather, and from his belt he drew out and held up its fellow; and she knew that the path of danger was over.

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"No one has come through by the way you have come for more years than my old memory can follow," he said. "They always fail at the lemon orchard. How did you escape?"

And Fiona told him how the feather had turned in her hand of itself.

The old man bowed almost to the ground.

"That was the direct grace of the King," he said. "You must be a person of the greatest consequence."

And when Fiona said, "I am just an ordinary girl," he again bowed low and said: "Young lady, I take leave to doubt it."

Then he gave Fiona her directions for finding the King, and warned her that she must not loiter in the fairy grove, for the fairies were already gathering for All Hallows E'en.

So Fiona walked swiftly through the grove, not seeing one half of its beauties, though she would have loved to have lingered among the trees. For in the grove grew every tree and plant famous

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in legend or in history, of which not the tenth part can be told here. There was the Norse ash, whose roots bind together the framework of the earth; there the Irish hazel, of whose nuts could a man but taste he would know all knowledge and all wisdom; there the African pomegranate, but for whose sweetness the Corn-spirit would have disdained to stay beneath the earth, and the race of men would have perished. There stood Deborah's terebinth and Diotima's plane, and the Bô-tree beneath whose branches Gautama Buddha sought and found the path of Enlightenment. There grew the paper-reeds of Egypt, the repository through many centuries of a whole world's learning, the paper-reeds that grow no longer in their old home, even as the prophet Isaiah foretold; and there the clove, for whose perfumed pistils great nations had warred together and brave men died under torture. There stood the English trees, the oak and the white acacia, which had built the three-deckers for the greatest sea captain the world has seen. There was that great traveller, the mulberry, which had left its home on the Yangtse to follow the old Silk Route across Asia; which had crossed the stony Gobi, where wild camels run and the Djinn light their lamps at night to decoy travellers; which had seen the Khotan girls wading knee-deep in the Khotan River, searching for the previous white jade which should make gods for China, as erstwhile for Nineveh and Troy; which had skirted the wandering lake of Lop-nor, and had tarried awhile in old dead cities, now buried under the sands of the dreaded Taklamakan; which had seen the turquoise mines of Khorassan, and voyaged on the broad Oxus stream, till from Iran its way lay clear to the west. There grew the cedars of the Atlas, which had aided their great mountain to support the sky, and had sailed south with Hanno to the Guinea Gulf, to bring home those gorilla hides which lay on the altar of Melcarth at Carthage; and there the most famous of all the trees of the forest, the proud cedars of Lebanon, which had once exulted with their voices over the fall of the king of Assyria, which had built for Solomon his temple and his house for the daughter of Pharaoh, and which had given to the princes of Tyre the ships in which, greatly daring, they had ranged the three seas, bringing home the gold of India and the silver of Spain and the tin of Cornwall, the wealth of the east and the west, myrrh and frankincense and purple dye, ivory and apes and peacocks. And last of all was the twisted gray olive, beloved of gray-eyed Pallas Athene, the symbol of all that raises man above the savage, the tree in whose train, as it moved out from its home in Asia, had grown up all the civilizations that ringed the Mediterranean.

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So Fiona passed through the grove and came out on a broad place of grass, and right before her stood the fairy ring. But not such a one as the ring on Glenollisdal which she knew. This ring was of vast size, and round it grew in a circle huge red toadstools splotched with white, the red toadstools from which the witches of Lapland had used to brew philtres of love and death. But vast as it was, it could not hold all the creatures that swarmed round it. It was a gathering such as Fiona had never dreamt of. On the outskirts stood an innumerable host of little strange beings, of every sort and shape, elves and brownies, gnomes and pixies, trolls and kobolds, goblins and leprechauns; and the babel of them as they whispered together was like the noise of a flock of fieldfares. And within them and around the ring itself stood the fairies.

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All the lost peoples and nations and languages, it seemed, were there in miniature; everyone that Fiona had ever heard her father speak of, and many another of which even he knew nothing.

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There were fairies of the Old Stone peoples, brave-eyed, clad in pelts of the saber-tooth, bearing the blade-bones of bisons on which were carved pictures of the mammoth and the reindeer. Fairies from Egypt, clad in fine white linen with girdles of topaz and aquamarine, with fillets round their brows from which the golden uræus lifted its snake's head, bearing blossoms of the blue lotus. Fairies from Babylon, glowing in coats of scarlet or of many colors, their eyes deep with immemorial learning, bearing clay tablets on which were signs like the footprints of birds. Fairies from Crete, light of foot in the dance, in flounced skirts adorned with golden butterflies, crowned with yellow crocuses and bearing vases on which were painted the creatures of the sea, nautilus and flying fish and polyp. Fairies of the Iberians, black-haired and black-eyed, clad in black cloaks, small and shy and dusty, bearing ingots of tin. Fairies from Cappadocia, in peaked shoes, and pelisses of lion's skin trimmed with the fur of hares, moving to the clash of cymbals, bearing grapes and ears of corn. Fairies from Mexico, with heavy cheek bones, resplendent in mantles woven of the plumage of the quetzal bird, carrying bricks of gold. Fairies from Ethiopia, black as the black diamond, clad in leopard skins and plumed with the feathers of ostriches, carrying tusks of ivory. Fairies from the land of Sheba, well skilled in riddles, in cloaks of camel's hair buckled with clasps of onyx, bearing caskets of agate filled with spices. Buddhist fairies of the Naga race, with the sevenfold cobra's hood springing from their shoulders and shadowing them, languorous and heavy-eyed, carrying crimson water lilies. Fairies from Cambodia, in stiff dresses of cloth of gold, with gilded faces and scarlet eyebrows, bearing pagoda bells which tinkled. Fairies of the Golden Horde, bandy-legged, with pug noses and slits of eyes, clad in dyed sheepskins and carrying the tails of horses. Fairies of the Picts, tattooed to the eyelids, their plaids dyed with crotal and the root of the yellow iris, wearing badges of mountain fern or bog-myrtle and bearing jars of heather ale. Fairies of Britain, in deerskin cloaks fastened with brooches of enamel, with golden torques circling their throats, bearing sprays of mistletoe. Fairies of the Tuatha-dé, with all the youth of the world in their eyes, clad in robes of saffron, crowned with rowans and bearing harps. Fairies from Greece, erect and lissom, beautiful as a sculptor's dream, crowned with wild olive and bearing each the roll of a book. Fairies of old England, in Lincoln green, with feathers of the gray goose in their caps, bearing bows of yew and branches of the may. Fairies from Baghdad, radiant as visions of the night-time, their turbans and their crooked scimitars jewelled with rubies of Badakshan, bearing magic lamps. Fairies from Quinsay, dainty as porcelain, their silken robes embroidered with blossoms of the almond and the peach tree, bearing jars of coral lac wrought in the likeness of dragons, and on their heads the poppy flowers that bring sleep.

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And in the middle of the ring stood a throne carved out of a single beryl, green as the sea; and on the throne sat the King of the Fairies, with eyes bright as the dawn and deep as the sea caves, in a cloak of Tyrian purple with clasps of amethyst. His crown and sceptre were of white gold, white gold which has long since perished out of the upper world, and in the end of his sceptre was set a double pentacle of clear crystal brought from the Island of Desire. And in the beryl throne, if he looked at it through the crystal, were shown to him the reflections of all things that he might wish to see. If he looked directly, he saw all that had happened in the world in the past; and if he reversed the crystal, he saw all that should happen in the future; but if he held the pentacle edgewise, then he saw the present, which no man ever sees, and was the greatest magic of all. Round the throne stood his guards, black as Moors, in jackets and trousers of emerald green clasped with orange zircons; half of them bore trumpets of silver, and half of them carried spears with heads of green obsidian as sharp as steel. And on either side of the throne, on a stool, sat a strange creature, a little wizened elf with a large book on his knee. One wore a white cap, and he bore an inkhorn and a bundle of long quills; the other wore a black cap, and he bore a penknife.

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Fiona edged herself as far forward as she could into the ring of strange beings, and found herself next an old Leprechaun with a face like a wrinkled apple, who seemed quite inclined to be friendly.

"A human!" he said. "We do not see as many as we used to. But they say there are two to be tried to-night. As you see, we have attempted something out of the ordinary in the way of a welcome." And he waved his arm proudly round the enormous assembly. "Had far to come?" he asked.

Fiona told him how long it had taken her.

"That's nothing," he said. "There are people here to-night who, as soon as the dance is over, will start travelling as fast as they can, and will only just arrive in time for next year's meeting. Good for the shoemaking trade!"

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"Where do they try the prisoners?" she asked him.

"Here, in the ring," said the Leprechaun. "The King tries them. There's the Public Prosecutor," and he pointed to a fairy of pompous aspect, with a hooked nose and a Roman toga, and a roll under his arm. "He's a terrible fellow. And there's the King's Remembrancer, those two with the books."

"Why are there two?" asked Fiona.

"One to remember and one to forget, of course, stupid," said the Leprechaun. "Whereever were you educated? Do you think kings want to remember *everything*?"

"It must be very easy forgetting," said Fiona.

"Hardest job in Fairyland," said the Leprechaun. "I suppose you know lots of people with perfect memories; but you never knew one with a perfect forgetfulness, eh? Whitecap there only has to write his book up; but poor Blackcap—he's the one that forgets—his book is written up to start with, and he has to get the pages clean again with his penknife. He never gets them *quite* clean. They say he has nightmare every night over the things he can't forget altogether."

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The King had been talking to one of the officers of his guard. He now rose and held out his sceptre, and there was a great silence round the Fairy ring.

"Before we dance to-night," he said, "we have, as you know, to try two prisoners." He turned to the officer of the guard, and said, "Let them be produced."

The officer at once produced the Urchin from nowhere in particular, as a conjurer produces half-crowns. The boy looked rather large among the Little People, but otherwise he was much as Fiona had last seen him; his shirt and knickerbockers were covered with earthstains and he still had the same length of useless rope coiled round his waist.

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But Jeconiah? Was this the prosperous financier, this wretched apology for a living being which the officer held out on the palm of his hand? Not two inches high, its white waistcoat hanging in loose flaps, speechless, and wide-eyed with terror and abject entreaty, it was like the ghost of a parody; the officer had to set it on one of the great toadstools, and mark the place with a stick, lest it should be lost. The King regarded it with interest.

"I understood that the elder prisoner was a very stout man," he said.

"That was so, your Majesty," said the officer. "He was so stout that we thought it useless to attempt to take him through the doorway as he was, so we left his body behind and only brought away the essential part of him. This is all that there really is of him, sire; the rest was wind. When we began to sift him we were afraid that he had no real existence at all, and that there would be nothing to bring before you."

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"Well, well," said the King, "there's enough of him to be tried, anyhow. Are the prisoners provided with counsel?"

The Public Prosecutor was understood to say that they were not yet represented.

"Counsel had better be assigned them in the usual way," said the King. "Catch, somebody."

He took a guinea from his pocket and flung it, apparently without looking, into the crowd. But

thick as the crowd was, the guinea passed straight through the forest of hands held out for it, and fell into a tiny brown hand behind them. Fiona knew where she had seen that hand before.

The owner of the hand at once stepped forward into the ring. He seemed to be the most singular being in Fairyland. Fiona's first impression was that he was just a large bald head, the color of parchment and wrinkled all over; and this impression remained, even when she realized that he did possess a small body, with the usual allowance of arms and legs. Out of his great head looked a pair of quite incongruous eyes, bright as beads, and full of happy drollery. Behind him came a couple of stout goblins, each laden with dusty law books. They piled the books up in a stack on the ground, and the singular creature with the head proceeded to climb to the top of the stack, where he sat down, cracking his fingers and laughing hugely at some jest of his own, evidently on the best of terms both with himself and his audience. Then he caught Fiona's eye, and deliberately winked at her; but somehow it carried no offence, for the creature seemed absolutely free from malice.

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"Privilege honorable profession defend oppressed," he remarked; "duty clients submit large number points," and he patted the books he sat on. He had a habit of clipping his words as he spoke which was totally destructive of the smaller parts of speech, and made his remarks sound like a series of unedited cablegrams.

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"We will take the younger prisoner first," announced the King; whereupon the Public Prosecutor proceeded to read, all in one breath, the indictment against the Urchin, to the effect that he did on or about the 20th day of September then last past in despite of the peace of the realm and the safety of the lieges with a stone or some other missile or thing throw at and break the wing of or otherwise hit, cut, hurt, maim, destroy and do wrong to one of the said lieges, to wit, a shore lark, and so forth. When he had finished, instead of evidence being taken, the King merely glanced into the beryl throne.

"True in fact," he said. "Any defence?"

The creature on the bookstack began at once.

"Please Majesty duty client submit series points. First point no intention."

But Fiona did not wait to hear what it had to say. Forcing her way into the ring, she said:

"Please, your Majesty, it was my fault. I told him he couldn't."

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The King turned to look at her.

"So this is the young lady," he said. "Very good of you to come, you know. We rarely receive visitors now. We shall try to make you welcome when the trial is over." He turned again to the bookstack, and said: "I will hear the defence."

"It was my fault, your Majesty," said Fiona again.

With grave patience the King started to explain to her.

"Your part of it was your fault, of course. But we are not trying you, for you have come here of your own free will, so we can neither try nor punish. But his part of it was equally his own fault, and unless there is a good defence he will have to be punished."

The creature on the bookstack was nodding and signing to Fiona, but she was too engrossed with a single thought to notice him.

"Then I claim my wish, your Majesty," she said.

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"Quite in order," said the King. "The trial will be suspended while the young lady wishes. Officer!"

And immediately the fairy ring was strewn with a strange collection of objects, looking rather like the contents of an old curiosity shop that had gone bankrupt. The officer held them up one by one for Fiona to see.

"When we heard you were coming," said the King, "we collected a few little things for your inspection. It is so long since we had any use for any of them that many of them seem to have developed serious defects, which we regret; but they are the best we could find at short notice. This," he pointed to an old ring, "is a common wishing ring. It used to do all the usual things. The genie attached to it has unfortunately become very deaf with age; but if you can make him hear, we believe he is still in fair working order. This," as a frayed girdle was held up, "is the famous cestus of Aphrodite, which she lent to Helen of Troy. Its wearer used to become the most beautiful and unpopular creature in the world. It will still confer beauty, though hardly suited to the modern style; the unpopularity we guarantee. This," pointing to a huge book, "contains the truth of that which in your world passes as knowledge. It would delight your father. He might publish selected chapters, and watch the critics cut them to pieces. This," as a battered trumpet was exhibited, "is Fame. Your praises would be sung all over the world; and the world would say, 'Never mind what she has *achieved*; tell us about her faults.' This," and he contemplated an old iron sceptre, "is Power. You would become a great ruler, and would probably die in exile. And under this," and he pointed to a sheet of black velvet, thrown loosely over some object, "under this is the treasure of the Isle of Mist, which I am told that you have heard of. Do any of these please you? If not, we have others."

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Fiona never thought about it for a moment, of course. She had not done all that she had done to

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hesitate now. She did not look at the King's face, and she took not the least notice of the creature with the head, who was dancing about in a perfect agony, trying to attract her attention.

"Please your Majesty," she said in breathless haste, "I came here to find the Urchin and take him home with me. That is my wish."

She had hardly spoken the words when her instinct told her something was wrong. A sort of chill seemed to run through the air, and the color seemed to go out of the fairy world. The creature with the head stopped dancing about and began to wring its little hands. She looked up at the King's face, and read there, was it disappointment? was it regret? She hardly knew.

"A very natural and proper wish," said the King gravely. "We shall of course accept it as such, and grant it with great pleasure. The younger prisoner is discharged. Take the next case."

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And then Fiona saw. She saw the thing which had once been Jeconiah, with that look of abject terror and entreaty in its eyes; and she realized that it would have meant nothing to her to have included Jeconiah in her wish, and that for Jeconiah it would have meant everything. And she realized also that, worthless and evil as he had been in life, selfish, mean, a thief and a liar, he was still a human being, and had a soul and possibilities of which the fairy world could know nothing. She felt a wave of humiliation pass over her; and she resolved that, whatever he was, and whatever happened, she would not go home without Jeconiah.

The charges against Jeconiah were then read: stealing a treasure, and being a worthless character.

"Any defence?" said the King.

The creature with the head got to work.

"Please Majesty," he said, "admit second count. Character worthless. Object pity however not vindictive punishment. Behalf client offer submit State cure. First count plead not guilty; intention steal treasure admitted but did not succeed."

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Fiona, in her new-found humility, had been listening to what the creature with the head was saying. And suddenly it dawned on her that, all through, both he and the King had been trying to help her, so far as was consistent with their own rules; and that perhaps the creature with the head, for all his oddity, knew what he was doing. She asked the Leprechaun who he was.

"You might have asked that with advantage before you interrupted him," said the Leprechaun severely. "He is our Chancellor here. He is the King's most intimate friend, and far the ablest lawyer in Fairyland."

"Defence to first count not admitted," the King was saying. "Your client cannot plead his own bungling of the theft in mitigation of his wrongdoing. Only the intention counts here."

The Chancellor looked immensely relieved at the King's words, though it passed Fiona's wit to see why.

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"Apply formal ruling," he said. "Take down," this to Whitecap.

"I hold that nothing counts here but the intention," said the King.

"Majesty pleases," said the Chancellor. "Settles point. Retire defence this prisoner. Submit excellent point younger client."

"We will pass sentence here first," said the King. "Jeconiah P. Johnson, your counsel has very properly thrown up his brief. You are convicted of stealing a treasure, and it is admitted that you are a worthless character. On the first count, I sentence you to be handed over to the executioner to be extended until you become a proper size. If you survive, you will then undergo, as offered by your counsel, the State cure at the hands of the State hypnotizer." He turned to the Chancellor. "Any further submission?"

Fiona had gone over to the stack of books, and bent down over the little creature with the head.

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"I have made a most terrible mistake," she said, in a low voice. "I have spoilt everything. I see that you are kind; can you help us?"

"Should have come me first," said the creature, quite gently. "Tried attract attention. Never neglect anyone merely because odd and ugly. May have good heart. Sad mess now; but think see daylight. Any influence that boy?"

"Oh, yes," said Fiona eagerly.

"Right," said the creature. "Make boy wish. Now follow my argument." And he turned to the King.

"Please Majesty submit good point. Majesty just ruled nothing counts here but intention. Younger prisoner no intention hurt shore lark; therefore on Majesty's ruling same as if did not hurt it. Therefore never was guilty. Human prisoner adjudged not guilty is just same as if came here own free will; so held Majesty's father"; and by some extraordinary trick he got the top book open and flopped down among the leaves, from which position he read out bits of an ancient judgment. "Consequently younger prisoner both entitled and bound wish."

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The King consulted Whitecap.

"It seems a sound chain of reasoning," he said. Then he turned to the Public Prosecutor. "Have you anything to urge against it?"

"Only that, if he wishes wrong, we can't detain him, because of the young lady's wish," said that official.

"Daniel come judgment," cried the Chancellor triumphantly. "Heads win, tails can't lose. Younger prisoner wish."

He turned to Fiona and whispered to her, "Mind he wishes right."

Fiona started to go over to the Urchin; instantly the guard crossed their spears before her.

"No interference allowed with anyone who is going to wish," said the officer.

Then she tried to call to him, and found that she could not speak. It was like a nightmare. She looked helplessly at the Chancellor; he nodded, and spelt on his fingers the word "think."

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Then Fiona understood what he had meant by asking her if she had any influence over the Urchin. She knew that she had a good deal; and bits of conversations with her father came back into her mind. She had made one bad blunder, and she had to correct it as best she could; and without more ado she concentrated her whole mind on taking possession of the mind of the Urchin. Could it be done at all? And if so could it be done in time?

The King stretched out his sceptre, and there was silence.

"The younger prisoner is going to wish," said the King. "Officer!"

And immediately there appeared in the middle of the ring six great boxes, old sea chests made of Spanish chestnut, battered and stained and clamped with bands of iron; and on each was the picture, half obliterated by time and salt water, of the Madonna of the Holy Cross. The officer flung back the lids, and showed each chest full to the brim of glittering golden doubloons.

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"That is the treasure from the Venetian galleon which you were seeking," said the King. "We removed it long ago into our safe custody, lest it should tempt men; but it would seem that it tempts them none the less. Now wish."

The Urchin, his eyes bulging out of his head, stared at the shining gold. He murmured "gun," but fortunately so low that the King did not hear him.

Fiona kept her eyes fixed hard on the boy, and bent every effort of mind and will to the one thought, that he must wish as she wished. If only he would turn round. She had already lost sight of the fairies; she now lost sight of the King; she was conscious only of the abject wretched creature that was Jeconiah, and of the back of the Urchin's head. He was still staring at the gold, but he had not yet spoken; that was to the good, and—no, it was not fancy—his ears were turning pink, as they always did when he was in a difficulty. Then he began to shuffle his feet uneasily. Fiona felt that every atom of life and force in her was being concentrated on that one act of will; she did not think she could go through with it many seconds longer, or she would collapse. And then the Urchin turned his head toward her; his face was scarlet, and his eyes were wavering before the fixed gaze of her own; he *must* do as she wished. She flung everything into one supreme effort—the last reserves which no one thinks they possess till utter necessity teaches them the contrary; and then the Urchin spoke, in a strange voice and all in one breath:

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"I want my uncle to go free."

Fiona's will let go with a snap; she felt so dizzy that she had to lean against one of the great toadstools or she would have fallen. Round the assemblage ran a sound like the wind through the tree tops, the noise of thousands drawing in breath at once; and the Chancellor started a war dance on his stack of books, and nearly fell off on his head. The King rose from his throne, but he took no notice of the Urchin; he turned straight to Fiona and bowed to her.

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"My compliments, young lady," he said; "the prettiest piece of thought-transference it has ever been our privilege to see. Where did you learn to do it?"

"I never learnt," stammered Fiona. "I made a great mistake, as your Majesty saw, and something had to be done, and your friend suggested this way."

"You needn't mind having made a mistake," said the King. "If you don't make mistakes sometimes you'll never make anything else. And you have made something else this time with a vengeance. As for you, sirrah . . ." and he shook his fist at the Chancellor.

The creature snapped all its fingers in reply.

"Majesty pleases," it began triumphantly. "Duty younger client submit new point arising young lady's action. Client entitled wish. Did not wish himself; young lady wished. Therefore client still entitled wish. Propose develop point considerable length with authorities."

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The King raised his hand.

"I think I shall have to intervene," he said. "I believe you would submit points till cockcrow."

"Submit points till next year, if Majesty pleases," said the creature, gleefully.

"If these proceedings don't end soon," said the King, "there will be no time to dance; and if we didn't dance no one knows what would happen to the world above. Even I don't know that. So as we do not generally have three human beings here at once, and as substantial justice has been done, I propose now to exercise the royal prerogative of generosity. Jeconiah P. Johnson, you will, as requested, go free, so far as we can set you free. We cannot set you free from your own worthless character. In order, however, to do the best for you that can be done, before you leave us the State hypnotizer will take you in hand and instil into you a few decent feelings. He won't hurt you, and you won't remember. The effect, I fear, will not be permanent, but it will ease our conscience. And as a sign to the world above that we have treated you liberally, you will find that you will be unable to attend to business until you have told your nephew a fairy tale. Urchin! A doubt exists as to whether you have had your wish or not. You shall have the benefit of the doubt, so far as is good for you. You will find that you will get your gun."

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And then the King turned to Fiona.

"Young lady," he said, "you have given us a display of courage which we are not likely to forget. You have rescued your friend; you have, which is much more to the point, rescued your enemy. You have got *two* wishes out of us, which no one ever did before; and you have asked nothing for yourself. And now what are we to do for you?"

"I think I have everything I want, now, thank your Majesty," said Fiona.

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"Did we not hear talk of a treasure?" said the King.

"Yes," said Fiona; "but—I was not thinking about a treasure, your Majesty."

"I know," said the King. "But I was; all the time."

"I must leave it all in your Majesty's hands," said Fiona.

"It is not here," said the King. "What you saw was only a pretence. And we cannot send for it to-night. But if you will honor us sometime by returning to our kingdom, we will see what can be done in memory of your visit. Any time you like. And by the front door, please. You will run no risks that way."

"And now," said the King, stretching out his sceptre over the great throng, "we will dance." He turned to Fiona and the Urchin. "It will be a little while before Mr. Johnson is ready to accompany you home," he said. "Perhaps you will honor us meanwhile by attending the dance also."

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So the fairies danced before the King; and the fairy ring whirled and blazed with the color of them, till it was gayer than a gorse-bank in blossom, and brighter than a swarm of dragon-flies on a June grass-field, and more vivid than a fall of shooting stars; and the music that they made was wilder than the wind in the strings of a harp, and sweeter than the blackbird's song, and dearer than all the burns on the moor murmuring in unison. And the two children sat at the King's feet on the steps of the beryl throne and watched the dancers; and the Chancellor sat between them, and held Fiona's hand, and told them such stories as they had never heard before, till between laughter and tears they nearly fell off the steps of the throne, and the Chancellor laughed and cried with them for sheer joy in his own story-telling; and if there were three happier people in the world that night I do not know where they were. And the night itself passed away as a dream that men dream, and its hours seemed to them but as a few minutes—and then across the music and the dance cut the shrill harsh scream of a peacock as he greeted the day. The children saw the King rise from his throne and stretch his sceptre out over the ring; and the ring and the dancers were shrouded in a white mist which rose from the ground and wreathed its arms about them; and the beryl throne dissolved in mist, and the figure of the King above them, pointing, grew dim and huge, and spread and grew, a purple shadow that hung over them, . . . and they were standing alone in the fairy ring on Glenollisdal, under the purple sky, with the white mist wreathing itself about their feet, and the pale November dawn coming slowly up out of the sea.

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Did the Urchin fling himself on the grass at Fiona's feet and thank her in broken accents for all she had done for him? I regret to state that the first thing which the Urchin did was to feel in his pocket and draw out the doubloon which he had found in the cave.

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"I've got this one, anyhow, Fiona," he said. "But I wonder how I'm going to get that gun."

Then something seemed to prick him; he began to look uncomfortable and shuffle his feet, while his ears turned pink; and at last he managed to blurt out:

"I say, Fiona, it was jolly decent of you, you know."

Fiona only smiled, the wise smile of perfect understanding.

That morning the doctor was hastily summoned with the news that Jeconiah was awake. The nurse met him in the passage, wide-eyed and rather frightened.

"He's so strange," she said.

"Tut, tut," said the doctor; "told you he might wake like that. Kind of change in personality? Just so. Often happens. Seldom permanent though. What's he done?"

"Well, doctor, of course we all know Mr. Johnson's reputation," said the nurse. "He's thanked me three times, and hoped I didn't tire myself; and he had all the servants up and said he'd see their wages were raised, and the cook gave notice on the spot because she said she didn't like practical jokes; and he says he wants to go out and gather buttercups and daisies, and play with the little frogs; and he's sent for some old gun that he says he's got to buy for his nephew; and he hasn't opened any of the telegrams that have been waiting for him; he says he mayn't attend to business till he has learnt a fairy tale, and he's had the library ransacked, and he's tearing his hair because there's no such thing in it."

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"Oh, well," said the doctor, "we must just have patience, nurse. I expected something of the sort. Just humor him; if you can't find a fairy tale, try him with a history book; he'll never know the difference; and I'll send him up a nice soothing mixture. Very interesting case; ve-ry interesting."

And the doctor, calling up his best professional smile, bustled into Jeconiah's room.

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It was the same afternoon, a still afternoon of Indian summer, that the old hawker, accompanied again by the black terrier, was going down the shore road. He must have had business at the cottage on the beach. But his business was probably not urgent; for he stopped to watch with interest a group on the shore. It consisted of Jeconiah and the Urchin, and they sat on the little patch of sand at the mouth of the burn. The Urchin had across his knees the rusty old gun bought for him by Jeconiah, who had nevertheless exacted the doubloon from him in exchange. He fingered the gun lovingly, while he gazed with undisguised impatience at the proceedings of his uncle. Jeconiah's coat lay on the grounds beside a sheaf of unopened telegrams, and he was putting the finishing touches to a noble castle of sand; its drawbridge was supported by his double watch chain, and its turrets bore a suspicious resemblance in contour to the inside of his hat. He patted his work and gazed at it with pride.

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"Fine, isn't it?" he said.

"You'd better hurry up with that fairy tale," said the boy. "If you've got to, you've got to, you know; and you won't keep me much once I get some cartridges."

Jeconiah began to look alarmed.

"But I haven't found one yet," he said, and glanced anxiously at the pile of telegrams.

"Make one up, then," said the boy. "Anybody can do it."

Thus adjured, Jeconiah started.

"Once upon a time there was a very grizzly old bear, and he lived in a beautiful place called Capel Court, and he used to hunt the wild bulls and the stags and the poor little guinea pigs that abounded in that salubrious locality. And there were two young ladies there, called Cora and Dora. . . ."

"Are those the princesses?" asked the boy.

"No, I think not," said Jeconiah. "They were of quite ordinary stock. Well, the old bear thought they were too high and mighty, and that he would like to take them down a point or two. . . ."

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"Oh, this won't do," said the Urchin rudely. "This isn't a *real* fairy tale at all. You must do something better than that."

The wretched Jeconiah groaned, and looked again at his telegrams. Then he started afresh.

"Once upon a time there was a great dragon with seven heads, and he ate seven princesses every day for dinner. . . ."

"That's better," said the boy, encouragingly, as he settled himself to listen.

The old hawker resumed his walk.

"They haven't made a very good job of him, after all," he remarked aloud, apparently to the terrier. "But I expect that sort is incurable."

Was it a flicker of sunlight? Or did the black terrier really wink?

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CHAPTER VIII

FIONA FINDS HER TREASURE

And Fiona?

Fiona sat on the hearthrug in the bookroom, and told her father the whole story from beginning to end, as it has been told here. And sometimes he asked a question, and sometimes he said,

"Yes, that would be so," and sometimes he stroked her hair and said nothing. And when she had ended, he said, "So you never found your own treasure after all, Fiona?"

She said, "I suppose I can have it now, if I go back."

"Do you think you will go back?" he asked.

She replied with another question.

"Have you found out what my treasure is, daddy?"

"I believe I could guess," he answered. "But you have found a good many things already, apart from treasure, haven't you, little daughter?"

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She sat silent and looked into the fire.

"I suppose I have," she said.

"We won't enumerate them," said the Student. "It spoils things entirely, sometimes, to put them into words. But I will tell you something an old writer once said. He was talking of that particular kind of treasure which men call Truth; and he said that if he were offered Truth itself on the one hand, and the everlasting search for it on the other hand, he would choose the search. I expect you can understand that now; for you have seen what has happened to you over your own search."

"I think I can understand," said Fiona. "I must be growing older, daddy."

"You'll be too old soon to go back to Fairyland at all, little daughter," said the Student. "If you are going, you will have to go at once."

"What do you think, daddy?" she questioned.

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"I can only tell you that, in my case, I went back," the Student answered.

"Why, daddy, have you been in Fairyland too?" cried Fiona. "And you never told me."

"Yes," said the Student. "Even a musty old scholar like myself was young once, you know," and he looked into the fire with eyes which seemed to see things very, very far away. "It was not quite the same as the Fairyland you have been in, Fiona; but we called it Fairyland."

"Can't you come back with me if I go daddy?" asked the girl.

"I'm too old now, little daughter," he said. "For good or for bad, I could never find the way again. I can only see it now through your eyes. I'll come as far as the door with you, and that's all that an old man can do. I suppose you know where the door is?"

"I never felt there was any doubt," said Fiona.

"Then we'll start first thing to-morrow, if it's calm enough," he said.

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But that evening was the last of the golden autumn; and when Fiona woke in the morning, the Isle of Mist was justifying its name. The southwest gale was raging round the house like a live animal, seizing it and shaking it, and wailing in the chimneys pitifully, like an unburied ghost; and before the gale the long lead-colored rollers were racing in from the Atlantic, smashing themselves on the crags and shooting up heavenward in columns of spray thrice the height of the cliffs, while the noise of the surf in the Scargill cave came booming across the water like the roar of a battleship's guns. The hills were all shrouded in mist, and the mist was fine salt rain that rolled in from the sea, driving in billows over the moor and across the fields; the gulls were tossed about in it like little bits of waste paper, and every green thing on the island opened its heart to the rain and drank till it could drink no more. Toward evening Fiona and the Student, in oilskins and sou'-westers, went down to the rocks and out seaward as far as was possible, and there stood, unable to speak for the noise. They balanced themselves against the gusts, and felt the tingling drops of salt spray rattle like hail off their coats, while they watched the cliff waterfalls, unable to fall for the wind, go straight up heavenward in clouds of smoke, and the sea foam and tear at the rocks below; and once for a moment the cloud-mist parted, and the hills started out, their dark sides all gashed and seamed with white streaks where every tiny runlet and burn was rushing in spate down toward the sea. Fiona managed to shout, with her clear young voice, "No one can really love this island who only knows it in summer;" and then they went home, out of the dusk and the lashing of the wet wind, to the quiet bookroom and tea things, and lamps, and books; for man may love Nature, but he loves still better the contrast between Nature and the things which he has fashioned for himself.

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For three weeks the wind blew; and though there were days when the sea-mist lifted, there was no day on which the sea was calm enough for the launching of their small boat. Then one afternoon came change. The warm air turned chill, and the warm rain became sleet; that night the wind backed to the north, and next day was a blizzard of snow. And the night after the wind fell away, and the snow ceased, and Orion and his two dogs shone huge in a frosty sky; and Fiona woke to the glories of a scarlet sunrise on a great field of white.

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"We must hurry, daddy," she said. "It's perfectly calm."

"It's a pet day," said the Student, sniffing the air. "It won't last; the wind backed too suddenly. But it's all right till sunset."

Directly breakfast was over they launched the little boat, and started. The snow shone white in the sunshine, and the calm sea against the snow was as blue as a blue lotus; but the shadows on the snow were a wonder, and the woven complexity of their colorings would have taxed every hue on an artist's palette. So they pulled down and into the cave, at whose mouth the great bluff looked barer and blacker than ever against the world's whiteness; and they grounded their boat and climbed the rock barrier. There the Student sat down and filled and lit his pipe. [Pg 187]

"This is as far as I can go," he said. "If I mistake not, you will find that they have opened the door for you."

So Fiona went on to the recess where the Urchin had found the doubloon, and where the torch had been smashed in her father's hand; and the solid wall of the cliff had opened, and there was an archway leading into the black vaulting of the long cave behind. Fiona passed through into the darkness . . . and the darkness parted to right and left of her, and she stood again in the fairy ring where she had stood on All Hallows E'en.

But how changed. Of all the bright throng of fairies that had clustered round it, not one stood there to-day. The circle of scarlet toadstools was broken down and shattered, as though by a great storm; and the ring itself was no longer grass, but was covered deep in snow. Of all the things she had seen there that evening, only one remained. The beryl throne still stood lonely in the midst of the bare ring; and on the throne sat the King of the Fairies. His face rested on his hand, as though he were deep in thought; his eyes were looking at something far away. On the steps of the throne sat the Chancellor, the King's inseparable friend; and he, too, was deep in thought. It was a view of the fairy world which Fiona had never expected. [Pg 188]

The King must have heard her step, for he rose from his throne and came down to meet her.

"Have you come for your treasure, Fiona?" he said.

And she said, "I have come because you asked me to come back."

The King held out his sceptre to her; and again the mist came up from the ground and enwrapped the beryl throne, and the figures of the King and the Chancellor wavered and became dim before her. *Were* they the King and the Chancellor? Was not what she saw, so dim through the mist, the figures of the shepherd who had helped her on Glenollisdal and his black collie? But the mist was wavering again about them, and again all was a blur; and then the mist suddenly cleared, and there was no one there at all but just the old hawker and the little terrier which followed him. [Pg 189]

"So you were the King of the Fairies all the time," said Fiona.

"All the time," said the old man gently. "We go about in the world as you see us. And some still entertain angels unaware. Have you come for your treasure, Fiona?"

And this time Fiona answered, "Yes."

"You have earned it," said the King. "And you have found much more than any treasure. Your father has told you that?"

And again Fiona said, "Yes."

"I cannot really give you your treasure," said the King, "for you have it already. I think you have had it all the time; but you did not know. But now you have learnt." [Pg 190]

"What is it?" asked Fiona. "But I think I can guess now."

"It is the spirit of the island which you love," said the King, "and which henceforth loves you. You have spoken face to face with bird and beast and with the beings who knew and loved the land before your race was. To-day you have the freedom of the island, and of all living things in it; they are your friends forever. And to the dead in its graveyards you are kin. All that is there has passed into your blood, the old lost loves, the old impossible loyalties, the old forgotten heroisms and tenderesses; all these are yours; and yours are the songs that were sung long ago, and the tales which were told by the fireside; and the deeds of the men and women of old have become part of you. You can walk now through the crowded city and never know it, for the wind from the heather will be about you where you go; you can stand in the tumult of men and never hear them, for round you will be the silence of your own sea. That is the treasure of the Isle of Mist; the island has given you of its soul. You have found greater things already; you will find greater things yet again. But such as it is, it is the best gift which we of the fairy world have to give." [Pg 191]

"And now," continued the King, "you will not see us again. And I will take back the bracelet. It would be no further use to you, for you are no longer a child. You are too old for Fairyland."

"But my father could see you," said Fiona.

"He could only see me as I really am through your eyes," said the King. "It may be that some day you too will see me again through the eyes of a child. But for the present it is farewell."

So Fiona stooped down and stroked the little dog, who looked at her with wistful eyes, and took her farewell of the King; and the King raised his hand, and the mist rose again and enwrapped the fairy ring and those in it . . . and Fiona walked out through the archway into the cave, and there sat the Student on the rock barrier, just as she had left him, knocking the ashes out of his pipe. And even as she came to him there was a noise behind her, and when she looked round it was to see the archway blocked by a great fall of rock. [Pg 192]

"You will not use that way again, little daughter," said the Student.

"I shall not use any way again now, daddy," she said. "I am too old. But oh, daddy, it has been worth it."

Then they launched their boat and paddled slowly out of the cave, out of the dark into daylight; and before them lay the quiet sea bathed in the winter sun, and the Isle of Mist dreaming under its mantle of white.

THE END.

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Transcriber's Note: The following typographical errors present in the original edition have been corrected.

In Chapter II, a quotation mark was deleted after "the love of worms was the root of all evil".

In Chapter III, a quotation mark was added after "if you could wait a few minutes . . .".

In Chapter IV, *said Fiona, "and you wriggle so."* was changed to *said Fiona, "and you wriggle so."*, and *"Urchin," she shouted; "Urchin."* was changed to *"Urchin," she shouted; "Urchin."*

In Chapter V, quotation marks were added after "Go up a hill." and "the true cave at all."

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE TREASURE OF THE ISLE OF MIST ***

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