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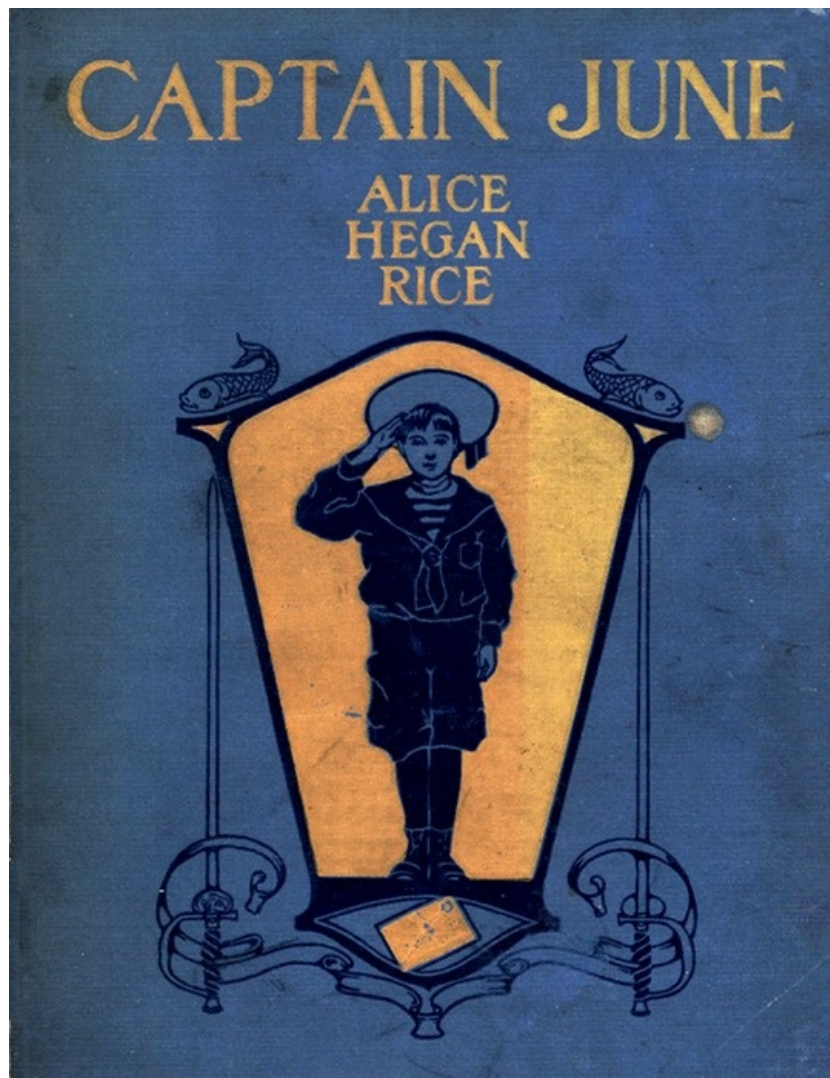
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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK CAPTAIN JUNE ***





"All day long the boys played down by the river."

Captain June

By

Alice Hegan Rice

Author of "Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch,"
"Lovey Mary," Etc.

With Pictures by C. D. Weldon



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TO THE LITTLE BOY I LOVE BEST
FRANCIS BARBOUR HEGAN

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

	PAGE
"All day long the boys played down by the river"	<i>Frontispiece</i>
The Tea-party on the Train	17
"Do you want me to help you?"	37
"It's a Matsuri—a festival,' Seki explained"	49
"Does it spell anything?' June asked"	75
"They peeped through the cracks, gravely discussing the situation"	85
"It was the old sword-hilt that Monsieur had given him"	97

CAPTAIN JUNE

CAPTAIN JUNE

[pg 3]

CHAPTER I

JUNE had never sat still so long during the whole six years of his existence. His slender body usually so restless and noisy was motionless; his hands too fond of teasing and mischief lay limp in his lap, even his tongue was still and that was the most wonderful of all. The only part of him that stirred was a sparkling pair of gray eyes that were looking out upon the strangest world they had ever seen.

The entire day had been one of enchantment, from the first waking hour when he discovered that the engines on the big steamer where he had lived for seventeen days had stopped, and that the boat was actually lying at anchor just off the coast of Japan. Seki San, his Japanese nurse who had cared for him ever since he was a baby, had been so eager to look out of the port-hole that she could scarcely attend to her duties, and the consequence was that he had to stand on the sofa and hook his mother's dress and help her with the little pins at the back of the neck while Seki San finished the packing. June could not dress himself but he knew a great deal about hooks and eyes and belt pins. When mother got in a hurry she lost things, and experience had taught him that it was much easier to fasten the pin where it belonged than to spend fifteen minutes on the floor looking for it.

[pg 4]

At last when all the bags and trunks were ready, and the pilot and the health officer had come aboard, and everybody had waited until they could not wait another moment, the passengers were brought ashore in a wheezy, puffy launch, and were whirled up to the hotel in queer little buggies drawn by small brown men with bare legs and mushroom hats, and great sprawling signs on their backs.

[pg 5]

Since then June had sat at a front window too engrossed to speak. Just below him lay the Bund or sea-road, with the wall beyond where the white waves broke in a merry splash and then fell back to the blue water below. Out in the harbor there were big black merchant steamers, and white men-of-war, there were fishing schooners, and sampans with wobbly, crooked oars. But the street below was too fascinating to see much beyond it. Jinrikishas were coming and going with passengers from the steamers and the coolies laughed and shouted to each other in passing. Women and girls clattered by on wooden shoes with funny bald-headed, slant-eyed babies strapped on their backs. On the hotel steps, a little girl in a huge red turban and a gorgeous dress of purple and gold was doing handsprings, while two boys in fancy dress sang through their noses and held out fans to catch the pennies that were tossed from the piazza above.

[pg 6]

If Cinderella, and Jack the Giant Killer, and Aladdin and Ali Baba had suddenly appeared, June would not have been in the least surprised. It was where they all lived, there could be no possible doubt as to that. Here was the biggest picture book he had ever seen, the coming true of all the fairy-tales he had ever heard.

He was dimly conscious that in the room behind him Seki San was unpacking trunks and boxes, and that his mother was coming and going and leaving hurried instructions. Once he heard her say, "Don't say anything to him about it, Seki, I'll tell him when he has to be told." But just then a man went by with a long pole across his shoulder and round baskets on each end, and in the baskets were little shining silver fishes, and June forgot all about what his mother was saying.

[pg 7]

June's father was a young army officer stationed in the Philippines. June was born there but when still a baby he had been desperately ill and the doctor had sent him back to the States and said he must not return for many years. It was a great grief to them all that they had to be separated,

but Capt. Royston had gotten two leaves of absence and come home to them, and now this summer June and his mother had come all the way from California to meet him in Japan.

June was not his real name. It was Robert Rogers Royston, Junior, but mother said there never could be but one Robert for her, and father did not like the Rogers for a Christian name, so they called him Junior, and Junior soon got bobbed off into June. The name suited him too, for a sunshiner little chap you never saw. He never seemed to know that he was not as strong as other boys, and when his throat was very bad and his voice would not come, why he sat up in bed and whistled, just the keenest, cheeriest, healthiest whistle you ever heard.

[pg 8]

It was on the indoor days that Seki San used to tell him about her wonderful country across the sea, of the little brown houses with the flower gardens on the roofs, of the constant clatter, clatter of the wooden shoes, and the beautiful blossoms that rained down on you like snow.

"Where are the blossoms?" he demanded, suddenly turning in his chair. "You said they came down thick and white and that I could let them fall over my face."

Seki San did not answer, she was kneeling beside a very disconsolate figure that lay on the bed with face buried in the pillows. When June spoke, his mother sat up and pushed back her tumbled hair. She was a very little mother with round eyes and lips as red as June's, only now her eyes were red and her lips trembling.

"You may go in the other room, Seki San," she said, "I want to talk to June by himself."

[pg 9]

June sidled up cautiously and took a seat near her on the bed. The one unbearable catastrophe to him was for his mother to cry. It was like an earthquake, it shook the very foundations on which all his joys were built. Sometimes when the postman forgot to leave a letter, and occasionally when he was sick longer than usual, mother cried. But those were dark, dreadful times that he tried not to think about. Why the tears should come on this day of all days he could not understand.

She put her arm around him and held him close for a long time before she spoke. He could feel the thump, thump of her heart as he leaned against her.

"June," she said at last, "you are going to be a soldier like father, aren't you?"

June's eyes brightened. "Yes, and carry a sword!" he said.

"There is something more than a sword that a soldier has to have."

[pg 10]

"A gun?"

Mother shook her head. "It's courage, June! It's something I haven't got a scrap of. You'll have to be brave for us both!"

"I'm not afraid," declared June. "I go to bed in the dark and go places by myself or anything."

"I don't mean that way," said his mother. "I mean doing hard things just because they are right, staying behind for instance when—when somebody you love very much has to go away and leave you."

June sat up and looked at her. "Who's going away?" he demanded.

Mother's voice faltered. "Father's terribly ill with a fever, June. The letter was waiting here, it is from our old doctor in Manila, he says, 'Come on first steamer, but don't bring the boy.'" The earth seemed suddenly to be slipping from under June's feet, he clutched at his mother's hand. "I am going too!" he cried in quick alarm, "I won't stay behind, I can't, mother!"

[pg 11]

Her arm tightened about him. "But I don't dare take you, June, think of the terrible heat and the fever, and you are the only little boy I've got in the world, and I love you so!"

"I won't take the fever," protested June. "I'll be good. I'll mind every word Seki says."

"But Seki isn't going. She wants to take you home with her down to a little town on the Inland Sea, where there are all sorts of wonderful things to do. Would you stay with her, June, while I go to father?"

Her voice pleaded with eagerness and anxiety, but June did not heed it. Slipping from her arms, he threw himself on the floor and burst into a passion of tears. All the joys of the enchanted

country had vanished, nothing seemed to count except that mother was thinking of leaving him in this strange land and sailing away from him across the sea.

"Don't cry so, June, listen," pleaded his mother. "I have not decided, I am trying to do what is best." [pg 12]

But June refused to be consoled. Over and over he declared that he would not stay, that he would rather have the fever, and die than to be left behind.

By and by the room grew still, his mother no longer tried to pacify him, only the ticking of the little traveling clock on the table broke the stillness. He peeped through his fingers at the silent figure in the chair above him. He had never seen her look so white and tired, all the pretty smiles and dimples seemed gone forever, her eyes were closed and her lips were tightly drawn together. June crept close and slipped his hand into hers. In an instant her arms were about him.

"I don't know what to do, nor where to turn," she sobbed. "I am afraid to take you and afraid to leave you. What must I do?"

June was sure he did not know but when mothers are little and helpless and look at you as if you were grown up, you have to think of a way. He was standing beside her with his arm around her neck, and he could feel her trembling all over. Father often said in his letters, "Be sure to take care of that little Mother of yours," but it had always seemed a joke until now. He sighed, then he straightened his shoulders: [pg 13]

"I'll stay, Mudderly," he said, then he added with a swallow, "Maybe it will help me to be a soldier when I get big!"

CHAPTER II

[pg 14]

"SEKI SAN, look at the old woman with black teeth! What made them black? What have the little girls got flowers in their hair for? What are they ringing the bell for?"

Seki San sitting on her heels at the car window tried to answer all June's questions at once. The sad parting was over. Mrs. Royston had left in the night on the steamer they had crossed in, and the Captain and the Purser and all the passengers were going to take care of her until she got to Hong Kong, and after that it was only a short way to Manila, and once she was with Father, June felt that his responsibility ceased.

When they first boarded the train, June had sat very quiet. If you wink fast and swallow all the time, you can keep the tears back, but it does not make you feel any better inside. [pg 15]

"If God has got to take somebody," June said at length gloomily, "I think He might take one of my grandmothers. I have got four but one of them is an old maid."

"Oh no," said Seki, "she isn't."

"She *is*," persisted June, "she keeps every thing put away in little boxes and won't let me play with them. Seki, do you guess God would jes' as lieve for me to have a horn as a harp when I go to Heaven? I want a presser horn like they have in the band."

"But you will not go for many long times!" cried Seki, catching his hand as if he were about to slip away. "Look out of the window. See! They are giving the cow a bath!"

In a field nearby an old man and woman were scrubbing a patient-looking cow, and when the creature pulled its head away and cried because it did not want to get its face washed, June laughed with glee. After all, one could not be unhappy very long when every minute something funny or interesting was happening. At every station a crowd of curious faces gathered about the car window eager to catch a glimpse of the little foreign boy, and June, always ready to make friends, smiled at them and bobbed his head, which made the boys and girls look at each other and laugh. [pg 16]

"We bow with our whole self, so," Seki explained, putting her hands on her knees and bending her body very low, "and we never shake with the hands nor kiss together!"

"Don't the mothers ever kiss the children good-night?" asked June incredulously.

"Oh! no," said Seki, "we bow."

While June was thinking about this strange state of affairs, a man came close under the window, carrying a tray and calling: "*Bento! Eo Bento!*"

Seki San took some money from a little purse which she carried in her long sleeve, and handing it out to the man, received two square wooden boxes and a fat little tea-pot with a cup over its head like a cap. [pg 19]



The Tea-Party on the train.

"Are we going to have a tea-party?" asked June, scrambling down from his perch.

"So," said Seki San, reaching under the seat and pulling out a tiny chest, in which were other cups and saucers and a jar of tea leaves, "we will have very nice tea-parties and you shall make the tea."

June, following instructions, put some of the tea in the small pot and poured the hot water over it, then he helped Seki San spread two paper napkins on the seat between them.

"Now," he said, "where's the party?"

Seki San handed him one of the boxes and began to untie the string of the other.

"I have some sticks tied on to mine!" cried June, "two big ones and a tiny little one wrapped up in paper."

"That is your knife and fork and pick-tooth," said Seki San. "You must hold the sticks in one hand like this." [pg 20]

But June was too busy exploring the contents of the two trays that formed his box to stop to take a lesson in the use of chop-sticks. The lower tray was full of smooth white rice. In the top one, was a bit of omelet and some fish, and a queer-looking something that puzzled June.

"What is it?" he asked.

"Guess it!" said Seki mysteriously, "guess it with your nose."

"It's pickle!" cried June.

"Pickled sea-weed," said Seki, "and I have also brought you some Japanese candy that you pour out of a bottle."

There was no bread, no butter, no knife nor fork nor spoon, but June thought it was the very nicest tea-party he had ever been to. Sitting with his stocking feet curled up under him as Seki had hers, he clattered his chop-sticks and spilt the rice all over the seat, while they both grew weak with laughter over his efforts to feed himself.

[pg 21]

"Don't you wish you were a little boy, Seki San?" he asked when most of the lunch had disappeared.

"Why?" said Seki.

"'Cause," said June, "you'd have such a good time playing with me all the time!"

"But no," said Seki seriously, "I must be big womans to take care of you."

"And tell me stories!" added June with policy: "tell me 'bout Tomi now."

"Tomi?" said Seki San, smiling. "You going see Tomi very soon, to-morrow, perhaps to-night. Tomi very bad little dog, makes a cross bark at all big peoples, but loves little children. When Tomi very little his nose stick out, so—Japanese think it very ugly for little pug-dog's nose to stick out, so we push it in easy every day. Now Tomi has nice flat nose, but he sneeze all the time so—kerchoo, kerchoo, kerchoo."

[pg 22]

June laughed at the familiar story, but suddenly he sobered:

"Say, Seki, I don't think it was very nice to push his nose in; I wouldn't like to have my nose pushed in so I would have to sneeze all the rest of my life."

"Ah! but he must be beautiful! Tomi would not be happy if his nose stuck out when other pug-doggies had nice flat nose. Tomi is very happy, he is grateful."

It was quite dark when they reached their destination; June had been asleep and when he slipped out on the platform he could not remember at all where he was; Seki's mother and her sisters and brothers besides all the relatives far and near had come to welcome her back from America, and quite a little crowd closed in about her, bowing and bowing and chattering away in Japanese.

June stood, rather forlornly, to one side. This time last night Mother had been with him, he could speak to her and touch her, and now—it was a big, strange world he found himself in, and even Seki seemed his Seki no longer.

[pg 23]

Suddenly he felt something rub against his leg, and then he heard a queer sound that somehow sounded familiar. Stooping down he discovered a flat-nosed little pug that was kissing his hand just as if it had been brought up in America.

"It's Tomi," cried June in delight, and the pug, recognizing his name, capered more madly still, only stopping long enough to sneeze between the jumps.

Ten minutes later June was sitting beside Seki San in a broad jinrikisha, rushing through the soft night air, down long gay streets full of light and color and laughter, round sharp corners, up steep hills, over bridges where he could look down and see another world of paper lanterns and torches, and always the twinkling legs and the big round hat of the jinrikisha man bobbing steadily along before him.

[pg 24]

"Is it like a story-book all the time?" he asked.

Seki San laughed: "Oh, no, June, story-book land is back in America, where the grown-up houses are, and the rich, fine furnitures, and the strange ways. This is just home, my very dear home,

and I have such glad feelings to be here!"

June cuddled close and held her hand, and if he felt a wee bit wistful, and wiped his eyes once in a while on her sleeve, he did it very carefully, so that Seki would have nothing to spoil the glad feeling in her heart at being home again.

CHAPTER III

[pg 25]

THE new life which opened up for June was brimming over with interest. Seki San lived in a regular toy house, which was like a lot of little boxes fitted into one big one. One whole side was open to the garden and a tiny railed balcony ran around outside the rooms. The walls were made of white paper, and when the sun shone all sorts of pretty shadows danced on them, and when it rained everybody ran about to put up the wooden screens, and fasten the house up snug and tight until the shower was over. A flight of low steps cut in the rock led down to a bamboo wicker, and here green lizards sunned themselves all day and blinked in friendly fashion at the passer-by.

The night June arrived he had looked about blankly and said:

[pg 26]

"But Seki, there isn't any furniture in your house; haven't you got any bed, or chairs or table?"

And Seki had laughed and told the others and everybody laughed until June thought he had been impolite.

"I like it," he hastened to add, "it's the nicest house I ever was in, 'cause, don't you see, there isn't anything to break."

It was quite wonderful to see how easily one can get along without furniture. After one has sat on his heels, and slept on the floor and eaten off a tiny table no bigger than a footstool, it seems the most sensible thing in the world. June did hang up one picture and that was a photograph of his mother. She had left him two, but one was taken with her hat on.

"I don't like for her always to look as if she was going away!" he said to Seki San when she wanted to put them both up.

The life, interesting as it was, might have proven lonely, had it not been for Seki's younger brother, Toro, who was two years older than June. Although neither could understand a word the other said, yet a very great friendship had sprung up between them. "We understand just like dogs," June explained to Seki San.

[pg 27]

All day long the two boys played down by the river bank, paddling about in the shallow shimmering water, building boats and putting them out to sea, sailing their kites from the hill top, or best of all, sitting long hours on the parade grounds watching the drilling of the soldiers.

Sometimes when they were very good, Seki San would get permission for them to play in the daimyo's garden and those days were red-letter days for June. The garden was very old and very sacred to the Japanese, for in long years past it had belonged to an old feudal lord, and now it was the property of the Emperor.

From the first June had cherished a secret belief that somewhere in its leafy bowers he would come across the Sleeping Beauty. It was all so old and so still that even the breezes whispered as they softly stirred the tree-tops. In the very heart of the garden a little blue lake smiled up at the sky above, and all about its edges tall flags of blue and gold threw their bright reflections in the water below. A high-arched bridge all gray with moss, led from one tiny island to another, while along the shore old stone lanterns, very stiff and stern, stood sentinel over the quiet of the place. Here and there a tempting little path led back into mysterious deeps of green, and June followed each one with the half expectancy of finding the cobwebby old place, and the vine-grown steps, and the Sleeping Beauty within.

[pg 28]

One day when they were there, Toro became absorbed in a little house he was building for the old stork who stood hour after hour under the cool shadow of the arching bridge. June, getting tired of the work, wandered off alone, and as he went deeper into the tangle of green, he thought more and more of the Sleeping Beauty.

[pg 29]

It was cool and mysterious under the close hanging boughs, and the sunshine fell in white

patches on the head of an old stone Buddha, whose nose was chipped off, and whose forefinger was raised in a perpetual admonition to all little boys to be good. Just ahead a low flight of stairs led up to a dark recess where a shrine was half concealed by a tangle of vines and underbrush. June cautiously mounted the steps; he was making believe that he was the prince in the fairy-tale, and that when he should push through the barrier of brier roses he would find the Sleeping Beauty within the shrine.

As he reached the top step, a sound made him pause and catch his breath. It was not the ripple of the falling water that danced past him down the hillside, it was not the murmur of the wind in the bamboos overhead; it was the deep regular breathing very close to him of some one asleep. For a moment June wanted to run away, but then he remembered the golden hair and blue eyes of the princess and with heart beating very fast, he pushed through the underbrush and stumbled over some one lying in the grass.

[pg 30]

CHAPTER IV

[pg 31]

BUT when June picked himself up and turned about, he found a very curious looking man sitting up glaring at him. He had a long pointed nose, and fierce little eyes that glowed like red hot cinders, and a drooping white mustache so long that it almost touched the lapels of his shabby French uniform.

"What do you mean by falling over me like that?" he demanded indignantly.

"I—I—thought you was somebody else," June faltered lamely.

The man glared more fiercely than ever: "You were looking for some one! You were sent here to watch someone! Who did you think I was? Answer me this moment."

He had caught June by the arm and was glaring at him so savagely that June blurted out in terror.

"I thought you was the Sleeping Beauty."

[pg 32]

For a moment, suspicion lingered in the man's face, then his eyes went to and his mouth went open, and he laughed until June thought he would never get the wrinkles smoothed out of his face again.

"The Sleeping Beauty, eh?" he said. "Well, whom do you think I am now?"

June smiled in embarrassment. "I know who you look like," he said, half doubtfully.

"Who?"

"The White Knight," said June.

"Who is he?"

"In 'Alice in Wonderland,'" explained June. Then when he saw the man's look of perplexity, he added incredulously, "Didn't you *never* hear of 'Alice in Wonderland'?"

The man shook his head.

June was astounded; he didn't know that such ignorance existed in the world.

"Didn't you never go to school?" he asked sympathetically.

"Oh yes, a little," said the man, with a funny smile, "but tell me about this White Knight."

[pg 33]

June sat down quite close to him and began confidentially:

"He was the one that met Alice in the wood. Don't you remember just before she was going to be queen? He kept falling off his horse first on one side and then on the other, and he would have to climb up again by the mouse traps."

"The mouse traps, on horse-back?"

"Yes, the Knight was afraid the mice *might* come and he didn't want them to run over him. Besides he invented the mouse traps and course, you know, somebody had to use them."

"Of course," said the man taking June's hand and looking at it as a person looks at something that he has not seen for a very long time.

"He invented lots of things," went on June earnestly, "bracelets for the horse's feet to keep off shark-bites, and something else to keep your hair from falling out." [pg 34]

"Eh! what's that?" said his companion rubbing his hand over his own bald head.

June's eyes twinkled. "You ought to train it up on a stick," he said, "like a vine. That was what the White Knight said, that hair fell off because it hung down. It couldn't fall up, could it?"

At this they both had a great laugh and the man said:

"So I am the White Knight, am I?"

"Just your mustache," said June; "it was when you was mad that you looked like him most. You're lots gooder looking than the picture. What's your real name?"

"Monsieur Garnier,—no, Carré," he corrected himself quickly. "What is your name?"

"June," then he added formally, "Robert Rogers Royston, Junior's the rest of it."

"How did you come here?" asked Monsieur.

June told him at length; it was delightful to find some one beside Seki San who understood English, and it was good fun to be telling all about himself just as if he were some other little boy. [pg 35]

"So your father is a soldier!" said Monsieur, and June noticed that a curious wild look came into his eyes and that his fingers, which had knots on them, plucked excitedly at his collar. "Ah! yes, I, too, was a soldier, a soldier of France, one time attaché of the French Legation, at Tokyo, later civil engineer in the employ of the Japanese Government, now——!" he shrugged his shoulders and his nostrils quivered with anger. "Now a cast-off garment, a thing useless, undesired." He tried to rise and June saw that he used crutches and that it was very difficult for him to walk.

"Do you want me to help you?" he asked.



"Do you want me to help you?"

The man waved him aside. His eyes had changed into red hot cinders again, and he seemed to have forgotten that June was there. "I ask help from nobody," he muttered fiercely, "I live my own life. The beggarly Japanese I would never accept from, and my own country does not see fit to help me." His chest heaved with wrath, and he twisted his mustache indignantly.

[pg 36]

"Why don't you go home?" asked June.

Monsieur turned on him fiercely: "Go home? Mon Dieu, do you suppose there is a waking hour that I am not thinking, longing, praying to be back in France? Do you suppose I have left any stone unturned? Any plan unmade that might take me away from this hateful place? It has been fourteen, fifteen years since I came away. It was a Japanese that had me dismissed from the service; he bore tales to the minister, he told what was not true. Oh, then I had honor, I was too proud to explain, but now!" he lifted a pair of crippled hands to Heaven, and shook them violently at the trees above, "now I know that honor does not pay, it is not worth while. I will give anything to get back to France!"

[pg 39]

June sat still and watched him. He had never seen anyone behave so queerly, and he was very much mixed up as to what it was all about.

"I guess I have to go now," he said, "Toro's waiting."

Monsieur's eyes flashed suspiciously. "Who's waiting?" he asked.

"Toro, he is Seki's brother, he knows how to build awful nice houses and blockades too."

"Blockades?" repeated Monsieur, "what kind of blockades?"

"Like the soldiers make, we watch them all the time; come on, I will show you."

The two made their way down the steps slowly, for Monsieur could go only a little way at a time.

Toro looked mildly surprised when June came back with a companion, but he did not give a second glance at Monsieur, who was evidently a familiar figure about the town.

For a long time the two children played in the sand, and Monsieur sat beside them and acted as interpreter, speaking first to one in Japanese, and then to the other in English, giving directions and suggestions and proving a first-rate play-fellow. [pg 40]

"Why, you know a lot about forts and mines and blockades and things, don't you?" asked June.

Monsieur looked absently across the lake. "Alas!" he said grimly, half to himself, "I know too much for their good and for mine."

When the temple bell from the hillside boomed the supper hour, the boys gathered up their things and started home.

"Good-by," said June to Monsieur, "I hope you'll come back and play with us another day."

Monsieur bowed very politely, but he did not answer, his half-closed eyes still rested on the little forts that the boys had been making in the sand, and his thoughts seemed to be far away.

When June reached the street, he turned to wave a good-by, but Monsieur was hobbling down the hill, his figure, in spite of the crutches, looking very straight and stiff against the evening sky. [pg 41]

CHAPTER V

[pg 42]

It was a long time before June saw Monsieur again, for there were picnics up the river, with lunches cooked on the bank, there were jolly little excursions in sampans, and trips to the tea-houses, and flower shows, and an endless round of good times. Seki San kept June out of doors all day, and watched with glee the color return to his cheeks, and the angles of his slender body turn into soft curves.

At night, she and June and Toro, with Tomi frisking and sneezing at their heels, would join the happy, chattering crowd that thronged the streets, and would make their way to the flower market where tall flaming torches lit up the long stalls of flowers, and where merchants squatting on their heels spread their wares on the ground before them,—curious toys, old swords, and tea-pots with ridiculous long noses. And in front of every door was a great shining paper lantern with queer signs painted on it, and other gay lanterns of all shapes and sizes and colors went dancing and bobbing up and down the streets like a host of giant fireflies. [pg 43]

It was no wonder that June hated to go to bed when so much was happening outside. Only the promise of a story moved him when Seki gave the final word. But for the sake of a story he would have gone to the moon, I believe, and stayed there too.

When at last he was bathed and cuddled down in his nest on the floor with a huge kimono—four times as big as the ones Seki wore—spread over him, Seki would sit on her heels beside him, sewing with an endless thread, which she only cut off from the reel when the seam was finished. And June would watch her pretty, plump little hands, and the shadows of her moving fingers as he listened to queer tales of the sea-gods and their palace under the waves. Sometimes she would tell of the old samurai and their dark deeds of revenge, of attacks on castles, and fights in the moats, and the imaginary clashing of swords and shouts of men would get so real to June that he would say: [pg 44]

"I don't want any more scareful ones to-night. Please tell me about the little mosquito boy."

Then Seki would begin: "Very long times ago, lived very good little boy, who never want to do anything but reverence his mother and his father, and his grandfathers and grandmothers. All times he think it over to himself how he can serve his parents. One night the wind blow up from the south and bring a thousand hundred *ka*, mosquito you call him, and they bite very much. So good little boy takes off all his clothes and lies at the door of his house so mosquitoes bite him and get so full of boy that they have not room more for father and mother." At which point June would never fail to laugh with delight, and Seki would look hurt and puzzled and say, "Not funny, June, very fine, kind, and noble of good little boy." [pg 45]

After Seki had put out the light and joined the rest of the family in the garden, June would lie

very still and the thoughts that had been crowded down in the bottom of his heart all day would come creeping up and whisper to him. "Mother is a long way off; suppose she has gotten lost and never comes back again. Perhaps I haven't got a father any more, maybe the soldiers have put him in the ground as they did Teddy's papa. Suppose I have to live here always and grow up to be a Japanese man, and never see the ranch in California nor my pony any more?" And a big sob would rise in his throat and he was glad of the dark, for the tears would come no matter how hard he tried to keep them back. But he never called Seki, nor let any one know. Sometimes he got up and got his little gun and took it back to bed with him; it was so much easier to be a soldier if you had a gun in your hand.

[pg 46]

But one morning when he awoke, two delightful things happened. First he saw up in the air, apparently swimming about over the house-tops, an enormous red fish as large as he was, and when he ran to the door there were others as far as he could see waving and floating about tall poles that were placed outside nearly every house.

Without waiting to be dressed he rushed into the garden to ask Seki San what it all meant. When she saw him, she dropped the letter she was reading and came toward him as fast as her little pigeon toes would carry her.

"It's from your mother," she cried, her face beaming with joy. "She did never get losted at all. She is with your father now, and he will have the strength again, and they will come back so sooner as he can journey. Oh! I could die for the happiness!"

[pg 47]

June jumped up and down, and Seki San giggled, and Tomi barked until the family came out to see what was the matter.

"And what did she say? Tell me!" demanded June.

"All this, and this, and this," said Seki, spreading out the closely written sheets. Then with many pauses and much knitting of brows and pointing of fingers, she read the letter aloud. There was very little about the sad journey, or the dreadful fever, or the life at the hospital. It was mostly about June, whether he was well, whether he was very unhappy, if he coughed at night, if he missed her very much.

"And these at the end I sink I can not read," concluded Seki, pointing to a long row of circles and dots.

[pg 48]

June looked over her shoulder. "Why Seki!" he exclaimed, "that's the only part I can read! They are kisses and hugs, I showed her how to make them. That long one is a pink kiss, and this starry one is silver with golden spangles," he laughed with delight; then his eye catching sight of the fish overhead, he said:

"Say Seki, why did they put out the fish? Is it because my father is getting well?"

Seki San smilingly shook her head.

"It's a matsuri, a festival," she explained; "this is the boys' day and wherever a boy live, they put out a big paper fish with round mouth open so—, and when the wind flow in, the fish grow big and fat and make like swim in the air."



"It's a Matsuri—a festival,' Seki explained."

"But why do they put out fishes?" persisted June.

"'Tis the carp fish," said Seki San, "because the carp very strong and brave, he swim against the current, fight his way up the waterfall, not afraid of the very bad discouragings, like good boy should be." [pg 51]

June was much more interested in the fish than in the moral, and when Toro brought a big red one for him and a paper cap and banner, he hastened away to be dressed so that he could be ready for the festivities.

Taking it all in all, it was about the happiest day he had ever spent in his life. When he and Toro started forth the streets were already full of people, men and women in holiday attire, little girls in bright red petticoats and fancy pins in their hair, every boy with a fish on a stick, small children with bald-headed babies tied on their backs, all trotting merrily along to the matsuri.

Everywhere June went a crowd went behind him, for a little foreign boy with gray eyes and fair hair, and strange foreign clothes was one of the greatest sights of the day. Sometimes a woman would stop him and look at his hat or his shoes, and a circle would close in and Toro would be bombarded with questions. But the people were always so polite, and their admiration was so evident, that June was rather pleased, and when he smiled and spoke to them in English, they bowed again and again, and he bowed back, then they all laughed. [pg 52]

It was a terrible trial to June not to be able to ask questions. He was brimful of curiosity and everything he saw and heard had a dozen questions hanging to it. Usually Seki San supplied the answers but to-day Toro was in command, and while he was a very careful little guide, keeping tight hold of June's hand, pointing out all the interesting sights, and trying to explain by sign and gesture, still he did not know a single word of English.

After passing through many gay streets they came to a tall red gate which June had come to recognize as the entrance to sacred ground. But inside it was not in the least like any churchyard he had ever seen. It was more like the outside of a circus where everything delightful was [pg 53]

happening at once. On one side was a sandman making wonderful pictures on the ground with colored sand. First he made a background of fine white sand, then out of papers folded like cornucopias he formed small streams of black and red sand, skilfully tracing the line of a mountain, using a feather to make the waves of the sea, and a piece of silver money to form the great round moon, and before you knew it there was the very picture you had seen on fans and screens and tea-pots ever since you could remember, even down to the birds that were flying across the moon.

Then there were jugglers and tight rope walkers, and sacred pigeons that lit on your head and shoulders and ate corn out of your hand. June thought he had never seen such greedy pigeons before. Two or three perched on his hand at once, and scolded and pushed each other, and even tried to eat the buttons off his blouse!

[pg 54]

Up the mountain side, flanked by rows of stone lanterns, ran a wide flight of steps and at the top was the gate-way to the temple itself. On either side were sort of huge cages, and in them the most hideous figures June had ever seen! They were fierce looking giants with terrible glass eyes and snarling mouths with all the teeth showing, just as the Ogre's did in the fairy tale. One was painted all over green, and the other was red, and they held out clutching fingers as if ready to pounce upon the passer-by. While June was looking at them and feeling rather glad that they were inside the cages, he saw two old men dressed in white, climb slowly up the steps and kneel before the statues. Bowing their heads to the earth and muttering prayers, they took from their belts some slips of paper, and after chewing them into wads began gravely to throw them at the fierce green demon behind the bars.

[pg 55]

June giggled with joy, this was something he could quite understand. Taking advantage of Toro's attention being distracted, he promptly began to make wads too, and before Toro could stop him he was vigorously pelting the scowling image. In an instant there was angry remonstrance and a group of indignant worshipers gathered around. Fortunately Seki San appeared on the scene in time to prevent trouble.

"But I was only doing what the others did!" explained June indignantly.

"It is no harm done," said Seki, reassuringly after a few words to those about her, "you not understand our strange ways. These are our Nio or temple guardians that frighten away the evil, bad spirits."

"What makes the pilgrims throw at them, then?" asked June.

"They throw prayers," answered Seki San very seriously, "they buy paper prayers from the old man at the gate, and throw them through the grating. If the prayer sticks, it is answered, if it falls down it is not answered. Come, I will show you!"

[pg 56]

They went very close, and looked through the bars; there on the grating, on the floor and even on the ceiling above them were masses of tiny paper wads, the unanswered prayers of departed thousands.

"Well, three of mine stuck!" said June with satisfaction. "Do you suppose it's too late to make a prayer on them now?"

Seki thought after considering the matter that it was not.

"But I haven't got anything left to pray for!" said June, regretting the lost opportunity. "Father's getting well, and he and Mother are coming home, and I have got pretty near everything I want. I believe I'd like another fish though, and oh! yes, I want a little pug dog, jes' 'zactly like Tomi."

[pg 57]

"It's tiffin time," said Seki San, "and after that will be the fire-work."

"In the day-time?" asked June.

"Oh yes, very fine nice fire-work," said Seki.

They left the temple grounds, and made their way up the river road, where everybody was having a tea-party out under the trees. Seki San secured a tiny table for them and they sat on their heels and ate rice out of a great white wooden bucket, and fluffy yellow omelet out of a round bowl, and the sunshine came dancing down through the dainty, waving bamboo leaves, and everybody was laughing and chattering and from every side came the click-clack of the wooden shoes, and the tinkle of samisens and the music of falling water.

Suddenly Toro pulled June's sleeve and motioned excitedly to the road-way. Coming toward them in a jinrikisha, looking very pale and thin and with both arms in bandages, sat Monsieur.

[pg 58]

June broke away from Seki and raced after the jinrikisha. "Oh! Mister," he cried, "Mr. Frenchman."

Monsieur, hearing the English words, stopped his man and turned around. When he saw a very flushed little boy in blouse suit and a wide brimmed hat, he smiled.

"Ah!" he cried, "my friend of the garden! My prince who found the Sleeping Beauty." Then he began to laugh so hard that it started up all his rheumatic pains, and he had to sink back and rest before he could speak again. "I am very bad since I saw you last," he said; "these dogs of Japanese will let me die here. One day in France will make me well. I may have it yet—I must get back some way—some way!" His eyes looked excitedly over June's head out into space as if trying to span the miles that lay between him and his beloved country.

"My papa will take you home when he comes," said June; "he's a soldier."

[pg 59]

Monsieur shrugged his shoulders: "Your papa would not care *that*," he said, snapping his fingers; then seeing June's disappointment he added kindly, "But you—will you not come to see me? I will make you more forts, I will show you my goldfish."

"Yes, I'll come," said June. "When?"

But before Monsieur could answer, Seki had called June and the jinrikisha had started on its way.

Late in the afternoon, as the revelers straggled home tired but happy, June slipped his hand into Seki's. The merry noises of the day had given place to the quiet chirp of the crickets and the drowsy croaking of the frogs, and the little breezes that stirred overhead sounded sleepy and far away.

"Seki," said June, "I didn't make any prayer on that paper that stuck on the old giant's nose, do you think it too late?"

"No," said Seki San, willing to humor him.

[pg 60]

"Well," said June sleepily, "I pray that the French gentleman will get back home."

CHAPTER VI

[pg 61]

ONE morning several weeks later, June was lying on his back in the garden wishing he had someone to play with. Toro was away at school and Seki San was having her hair dressed. He had watched the latter performance so many times that it had ceased to interest him. Seki would sit for hours on a white mat before the old hair-dresser who combed, and looped and twisted the long oily strands into butterfly bows of shining black.

The only person on the premises who was at leisure was Tomi, but that was just the trouble, he was so much at leisure that he refused to stir from his warm spot on the sunny steps no matter how much June coaxed. To be sure there was a yellow cat next door, but she did not understand English as Tomi did, and when June called her, she humped her back and would have ruffled her tail if she had had one, but Japanese cats do not have tails, so when they get angry they always look disappointed.

[pg 62]

Just as June was getting a bit lonesome the postboy came trotting in with a letter for Seki San and June ran in to take it to her.

"For me?" said Seki San, looking very comical with one loop of black hair hanging over her eye, "from Meester Carré? I sink it is a mistake, I do not know Meester Carré."

"Read it," demanded June impatiently.

"It say," went on Seki San slowly, "that Meester Carré is not able to write hisself but he desire the writer to ask me will I permit the little American boy to come to see him to-day. He is sick on the bed, and have the low spirit. He will keep safe care of the little boy and send him home what time I desire."

[pg 63]

"Oh, let me go, Seki! Please let me go!" cried June.

"But who is Meester Carré?"

"He is the Frenchman," said June. "He is a soldier and has got the rheumatism. He has goldfish too, and a sword. Oh Seki, please let me go! Oh, do let me go!"

"Ah yes," said Seki, "one leg is shorter than the other leg and he walks with sticks, and he has long white whiskers on his lip, ah! yes, I know."

"Can I go?" begged June.

Seki San took a long while to think about it. She consulted her mother and the old man next door, and the doctor who lived at the corner, but by and by she came back and said he could go.

"I will send you in good Tanaka's 'rikisha, he will take good care of you and bring you back at tiffin time." [pg 64]

June was greatly excited over the prospect and stood unusually still while Seki San buttoned him into a starched white blouse and pinned a scarlet flower in his buttonhole.

"Can't I pin my flag on too?" he begged, and Seki, who could not bear to refuse him anything, fastened the bit of red, white and blue silk on the other side.

"Now keep your body still," cautioned Seki San as she put him in the jinrikisha and gave final instructions to Tanaka who was bowing and grinning and bowing again, "Tanaka will wait for you, and you must come when he calls you. Be good little boy! *Sayonara!*"

June had never felt so important in his life. To be going out all by himself in a jinrikisha was quite like being grown up. The only thing lacking to make him quite happy was a pair of reins that he might imagine he was driving a horse instead of a little brown man with fat bare legs and a big mushroom hat who looked around every few moments to see if he was falling out. [pg 65]

They trotted along the sunny streets, passing the temple grounds where the green and red Nio made ugly faces all the day, and where the greedy pigeons were waiting for more corn. They passed over the long bridge, skirted the parade ground, then went winding in and out of narrow streets until they came to a stretch of country road that ran beside a moat.

Here there was less to see and June amused himself by repeating the few Japanese words he had learned. "Ohayo" meant "good-morning," and it was great fun to call it out to the children they passed and see them bow and call back "Ohayo" in friendly greeting. He knew another word too, it was "Arigato," and it meant "thank you." He used it on Tanaka every time he stopped by the wayside to pluck a flower for him. Once when they rested June saw a queer old tree, with a very short body and very long arms that seemed to be seeing how far they could reach. June thought the tree must have the rheumatism, for it was standing on crutches, and had knots on its limbs just like Monsieur had on his fingers. But the strange part of it was that from nearly every branch fluttered a small strip of paper with something written on it. June had seen this before on other trees, and he remembered that Seki San had told him that these little papers were poems hung there when the tree was covered with cherry blossoms. [pg 66]

Now June always wanted to do everything anybody else did, so when they started off again, he decided that he would make up a poem to hang on the tree as they came back. He knew one that he had learned from a big boy coming over on the steamer, and he said it over softly to himself:

"King Solomon was the wisest man;
He had some ready cash,
The Queen of Sheeny came along
And Solly made a mash." [pg 67]

To be sure he didn't understand at all what it meant, but it sounded nice and funny and always made him laugh.

"I'd like to make up one out of my own head though," he thought, and he sat so still that Tanaka glanced back uneasily.

It was a very hard matter indeed, for when you write a poem you have to get two words that sound alike, and then find something to write about them. It took him so long that by the time he finished, the shaft of the jinrikisha came down with a jerk and he looked up to find that they had stopped in front of a house all smothered in vines, with two inquisitive little windows peering out like eyes behind a tangle of hair. Everything about the place looked poor and neglected.

As June and Tanaka made their way up the path, June gave an exclamation of delight. There [pg 68]

about the door were bowls and jars and basins of goldfish. Every available receptacle had been pressed into service, and big fish and tiny ones in every shade of radiant gold swam gaily about in the sunshine.

It was such an engrossing sight that June almost forgot to go in and speak to Monsieur who lay in a bed, near the door.

"Ah, at last," cried the sick man. "My little friend is welcome. There, sit in the chair. Though I am poor, I live like a gentleman. See, I have a bed and chairs and a table!"

June looked about the shabby crowded room, at the dusty flag of France that was draped over the window, at the map of France that was pinned on the wall beside the bed, at the cheap pictures and ornaments and the soiled curtains, then he remembered Seki San's room, clean and sweet and airy with nothing in it but a vase of flowers.

"I'd rather sit on the floor," he said as he took his seat beside the bed, adding immediately, "I can stay until twelve o'clock!" [pg 69]

Tanaka had gone to take a bath after his warm run and to drink tea at the little tea-house across the road.

Monsieur lay propped up in bed with his bandaged hands lying helpless on the cover-lid. But his eyes were soft and kind, and he had so many interesting things to talk about that June found him a most entertaining host. After he had shown June his sword and told a wonderful story about it, he returned to the goldfish.

"Alas, there are but twenty-one now," he sighed. "Napoleon Bonaparte died on Sunday. Have you seen the Grand Monarch? He is the great shining fellow in the crystal bowl. Those smaller ones are his gentlemen-in-waiting. Here is Marie Antoinette, is she not most beautiful?"

June was introduced to every one in turn and had endless questions to ask in regard to the story of each. Monsieur was the only person he had ever met who always had another story on hand. Everything suggested a story, a story was hidden in every nook and corner of Monsieur's brain, they fairly bubbled over in their eagerness to be told, and June was as greedy for more as the pigeons were greedy for corn, and he thought up new questions while the old ones were getting answered. [pg 70]

Once Monsieur recited something in verse to him, and that reminded June of his own poem.

"I made up one coming," he announced, "do you want to hear it?"

Monsieur did. Monsieur was very fond of verse, so June recited it with evident pride:

"Oh Gee!" said the tree, "It seems to me That under my branches I see a bee!"

"Bravo!" said Monsieur, "you will be a poet and a soldier too!" [pg 71]

"I'd like to write it down," said June, "so I can hang it on the tree."

"To be sure, to be sure," said Monsieur, "you will find pen and ink in the table drawer. Not that!" he cried sharply as June took out a long sealed envelope. "Give that to me!"

June handed the packet to Monsieur in some wonder and then continued his search.

"Here's a corkscrew," he said, "and some neckties, and a pipe. Here's the pen! And may I use this fat tablet?"

When the materials were collected, June stretched himself at full length on the floor and began the difficult task.

"I never did write with a pen and ink afore," he confided to Monsieur, "you will have to tell me how to spell the big words."

The room grew very silent and nothing was heard but the scratch, scratch of June's clumsy pen, and the occasional question which he asked. A strange change had come over Monsieur; his face, which had been so kind and friendly, grew hard and scheming. He had drawn himself painfully up on his elbow and was intently watching June's small fingers as they formed the letters. Presently he drew the long envelope from under his pillow and held it in his hand. It was a very fat envelope with a long row of stamps in one corner, but there was no address on it. Twice he put it [pg 72]

back and shook his head, and twice he looked longingly at the map of France, and at the flag over the window, then he took it out again.

"Will you write something for me now, at once?" he demanded in such a hard, quick voice that June looked up in surprise.

"Another poem?" asked June.

"No, a name and address on this envelope. Begin here and make the letters that I tell you. Capital M."

"Do you like wiggles on your *M's*?" asked June, flattered by the request and anxious to please. [pg 73]

"No matter," said Monsieur impatiently, "we must finish before twelve o'clock. Now—small o—"

June put his tongue out, and hunching up his shoulders and breathing hard proceeded with his laborious work. It was hard enough to keep the lines from running uphill and the letters from growing bigger and bigger, but those difficulties were small compared to the task of guiding a sputtering, leaking pen. Once or twice he forgot and tried to rub out with the other end of it and the result was discouraging. When a period very large and black was placed after the final word, he handed the letter dubiously to Monsieur.

"Does it spell anything?" he asked. Monsieur eagerly read the scrawling address. "Yes, yes," he answered, "now put it inside your blouse, so. When you get home wait until nobody is looking, then put it in the mail-box. Do you understand? When nobody is looking! Nobody must know, nobody must suspect, do you understand?" [pg 74]



"Does it spell anything?" June asked.

"Oh, I know, it's a secret!" cried June in delight. "I had a secret with mother for a whole week once. I wouldn't tell anything if I said I wouldn't, would you?"

June was looking very straight at Monsieur, his round eyes shining with honesty, but Monsieur's eyes shifted uneasily.

"I would never betray a trust," he said slowly, "if I were trusted. But they believed lies, they listened to tales that the beggarly Japanese carried. They have made me what I am."

June was puzzled. "Who did?" he asked.

But Monsieur did not heed him; he was breathing quickly and the perspiration stood out on his forehead.

"And you will be very careful and let no one see you mail it," he asked eagerly, "and never, never speak of it to anybody?"

"Course not," said June stoutly, "that wouldn't be like a soldier, would it? I am going to be a soldier, like you and Father, when I grow up." [pg 77]

Monsieur shuddered: "No, not like me. I am no longer a soldier. I am a miserable wretch. I—I am not fit to live." His voice broke and he threw his arm across his eyes.

June looked off into the farthest corner of the room and pretended not to see. He felt very sorry for Monsieur, but he could think of nothing to say. When he did speak he asked if goldfish had ears.

When the noon gun sounded on the parade grounds, Tanaka came trotting to the door with his jinrikisha, smiling and bowing and calling softly: "Juna San! Juna San!"

June gathered his treasures together, a new lead pencil, an old sword hilt, some brass buttons and, best of all, a tiny goldfish in a glass jar.

"Good-bye," he said as he stood by the bed with his hands full, "I am coming back to-morrow if Seki will let me;" then a second thought struck him and he added, "I think you *look* like a soldier anyhow." [pg 78]

And Monsieur smiled, and stiffening his back lifted a bandaged hand in feeble salute.

CHAPTER VII

[pg 79]

"SEKI SAN, have you got a big enderlope?" June asked the question from the door-step where he was sitting with his chin in his hand and a very worried look in his face.

It was two days after his visit to Monsieur and the big letter was still buttoned in his blouse. He had started to mail it as soon as he reached home, but just as he was ready to drop it in the box, he discovered that every "s" turned the wrong way! It was a dreadful blow to his pride, for the rest of the address was quite imposing with big flourishing capitals that stood like generals over the small letters, and dots that would have surely put out all the "i's" had they fallen on them. He never could send Monsieur's letter with the "s's" looking backward, he must try to set them straight again. [pg 80]

So, very carelessly, in order not to excite suspicion, he asked Seki for pen and ink. He had written many letters to his mother and father, but always in pencil, and Seki hesitated about giving him ink.

She said: "Our ink not like your American ink, live and quick as water, it hard like paint. We not use pen, but brush like which you write pictures. I sink it more better you use pencil."

But June insisted and when he gained his point, he carried the small box into the garden and took out his letter. The jar containing his goldfish was close by, so he dipped his stick of paint into the water and rubbed it vigorously on the paint box. At the last moment just as his brush was poised in the air, he had a moment of misgiving, "maybe 's's' do turn that way!" he said, but the brush full of paint was a temptation not to be resisted, so he took each little "s" by its tail and turned it inside out. The paper was soft and thin and took the ink like blotting paper. June watched with dismay as the lines spread into ugly blots, and when he tried to make the letters plainer he only made the blots bigger until they all seemed to join hands and go dancing over the envelope in [pg 81]

fiendish glee at his discomfort.

For two days he had tried to think of a way out of the difficulty but before he could find one he would get interested in something else and forget about the letter. It was only when it felt stiff inside of his blouse that he remembered, and then he would stop playing and try again to solve the problem. At last in desperation he appealed to Seki San for an envelope.

"It is not so much big," she said, bringing out a long narrow envelope and a roll of paper. "Why you want to write such big letter to your mother? She coming home soon!" [pg 82]

"It isn't big enough," said June fretfully, then an idea struck him. "Seki, I want to go see Monsieur to-day."

Seki San sat down on the step beside him and shook her head positively:

"No, no," she said, "not to-day, nor to-morrow, nor any day. He is not a good man, I made mistakes in letting you go."

"He *is* a good man!" cried June indignantly, "he told me stories, and gave me lots of things."

"I tell you 'bout him, June," said Seki San. "One time Monsieur very skilful smart man in Tokyo. He write pictures of the forts and show the Japanese how to find coast in time of war. He know more plenty than anybody about the coast and the mines. Then he is not behave right, and get sent out of the service, and he get sick in the hands so he can make no more maps, and he come down here and live all alone by himself. That was long time ago, but yesterday a high up messenger come from Tokyo, and asked for Monsieur Carré. The Emperor have desire to buy his old maps and reports, and get his help in making new plans. When the messenger come, they say Monsieur fall back on the bed very white and afraid, and say he will not give up the papers. Then messenger say maybe he has sold his papers to a foreign country and he get very much angry, and say if Monsieur Carré do not give the papers in twenty-four hours, he will have him arrested and take him to Tokyo. Still Monsieur keep the tight lips, and a guard is waiting outside his house." [pg 83]

With troubled eyes, June listened to every word. "*Did* he sell the papers, Seki?" he asked anxiously.

"He will not say," said Seki, "they say he will not say, but it was a bad, wicked act if he sold our secrets, and he may die for it!"

June stirred restlessly, and the packet in his blouse caught in his belt. He put up his hand to straighten it, and as he did so, a startled look of inquiry passed over his face. Could those papers in the long envelope have anything to do with Monsieur's present trouble? Why had Monsieur not wanted him to tell? Had his mistake about the "s's" anything to do with it all? The secret, which at first had seemed such a mysterious and delightful possession, suddenly grew into a great and terrible burden that he longed to cast at Seki's feet and ask her to share. [pg 84]

But the thought of telling what he knew never crossed his mind. He had given his word, and he felt that to break it would be to forfeit forever his chance of becoming a soldier. But something must be done, he must go to Monsieur and tell him the truth at once.

"Seki," he said persuasively, "Monsieur is sick in bed, don't you think it would be nice for me to take him a little cake?"

"You can not ever go there any more," repeated Seki San positively. "I did a mistakes in letting you go." [pg 87]

In vain June pleaded, every argument that he could think of he brought to bear, but Seki was firm. By and by he began to cry, at first softly, begging between the sobs, then when he got angry he cried very loud and declared over and over that he would go.

Seki San was amazed at his naughtiness. It was the first time since his mother left that she had known him to be disobedient. When persuasion and coaxing proved in vain, she carried him into the house and carefully closing the paper screens left him alone. Here he lay on the floor and cried louder than ever. Seki San and her mother and the old man next door stood on the outside and peeped through the cracks, gravely discussing the situation. Even Tomi sniffed uneasily, and gave sharp, unhappy barks.



"They peeped through the cracks, gravely discussing the situation."

After ever and ever so long the cries grew fainter and gradually ceased, and Seki peeping around the screen whispered to the others to be very still as he was going to sleep. [pg 88]

June lay quiet on his face, but he was not asleep. Once in a while he opened his eyes a very little and peeped out, then he closed them quickly and listened. By and by he heard Seki go back to her work, and the old man next door hobble across the garden. Inch by inch June crawled over the mats until he reached the screen, which he carefully slid back. After waiting for a few breathless minutes, he reached out and got his shoes from the door-step and put them on. Back of the house he could hear Seki singing at her work, and not six feet away Tomi lay snoozing in the sun. Softly and cautiously he slipped out of the house, across the strip of a garden where all the leaves seemed to be shaking their heads at him, through a narrow passageway, then out of the gate that divided the little world he knew from the vast unknown world that lay beyond.

CHAPTER VIII

[pg 89]

EVEN more than usually quiet and deserted was the narrow street. The noon sun glaring down on the town had sent everybody into the shade, and at first June attracted little attention as he trudged off in the direction of the parade grounds. He knew the way that far, for Toro often took him there to watch the men drill. Soldiers passed him now in twos and threes, looking very smart in their buff uniforms with swords clanking at their sides, and as they passed they laughed and turned to look curiously at the small foreign boy. In fact curious eyes were peering out of many of the open front shops, and mothers were even holding up their babies and pointing to the strange little person who was passing. [pg 90]

Here and there children were dipping water with their hands from pails and sprinkling the dusty

street, and when they saw June they paused and gazed open-mouthed, or shouted derisively: "Eijin! Eijin!" The whole world seemed strange and unfriendly, and even the sun tried to see how hot it could glare down on June's bare head.

When he reached the parade ground, he stopped to rest, but no sooner had he sat down than a circle gathered around him, two jinrikisha men, four boys, a girl with a baby on her back and an old fish woman. There was no chatter, they were all too interested to talk, they just stood and looked and looked until June felt that their eyes were pins and that he was the cushion. After a while he turned to one of the men and said: "Do you know where Monsieur Carré lives?"

They looked at each other and smiled. It was much as if a new bird had twittered a strange note, and one boy tried to imitate the sound and repeated "Carré lives?" to the great amusement of the rest.

[pg 91]

"Monsieur Carré!" went on June, getting angry, "he's a Frenchman. Don't you know where he lives?"

"Where he lives?" mimicked the boy and they laughed more than ever. June was so angry by this time that he could not tell which he wanted most to do, to cry or to fight.

Beyond him was a wilderness of criss-cross streets with strange eyes peering at him from every quarter. What if he should get lost and swallowed up for ever in this strange place where nobody knew him nor loved him nor spoke his language?

Instinctively he looked back toward the way he had come. He had only to retrace his steps past the parade ground, hurry back in a straight line until he came to the big red gate that marked the entrance to the temple, and then turning to the right run breathlessly down the street to the little gate in the wall, and after that to throw himself into Seki's arms and tell her all his troubles!

[pg 92]

But what would become of Monsieur? It must be very dreadful to be sick in bed with a guard waiting to arrest you if you do not get some papers for him, papers which you do not possess. And if Monsieur was arrested he never would get back to France!

All this flashed through June's mind as he sat under the pine tree, trying with all his might to keep the black eyes all around from seeing that he was about to cry. Just then a soldier went by holding himself very erect and looking neither to the left nor the right. Suddenly June remembered that soldiers did not cry, and with resolution he got up and turning his back to the temple gate and the parade grounds, he continued courageously on his way.

Far in the distance he could see, high on a hill, the old castle which he knew he must pass before he should come to Monsieur's. There were many streets to be passed, and many obstacles to be overcome, for as June got further from home the curiosity concerning him increased. It was very warm and he was tired but he dared not sit down for he dreaded the gaping crowd and the curious eyes. By and by he came to the old moat which circled the castle, and as the road led out into the country, the boys who had followed him gradually fell back until he realized with joy that there were no more wooden shoes clattering after him.

[pg 93]

In the moat big lotus leaves floated on the water and working among them were coolies, naked, except for a loin cloth. They were too busy to take any notice of a strange little boy, so he sat on a rock under a tree for a long time and wondered how it would feel to be down there under the lily pads and the lotus leaves, and if the same hob-goblins and sprites that live under the sea did not sometimes come to play in the moats, and take moonlight rides on the big broad leaves?

[pg 94]

The sun which had beaten so fiercely on his head was slowly dropping toward the distant mountain when he started once more on his way, and a long shadow went beside him. The shadow was a great relief for it kept him company without staring at him. By and by even the shadow deserted him and he trudged along the country road following a vague impression that somewhere around the foot of the mountain Monsieur lived.

It was very quiet and lonesome with only the crickets and the frogs talking to each other out there in the grasses, and June's feet were tired and his head ached and he was hungry. A big lump kept lodging in his throat no matter how often he swallowed. Now that the gray twilight was creeping on, all sorts of fears assailed him. Ever since he could remember Seki San had told him of the hob-goblins and gnomes that haunt the woodlands and mountains in Japan. There were the Tengu, half bird and half man, that play all sorts of mischievous pranks on the farmers, there was the "Three-eyed Friar," and the "White Woman" who wanders about in the snow, and worst of all was a bogie with horns, whose legs dwindled away to nothing at all, but whose body was very large and horrible with a long neck twisted like a snake.

[pg 95]

As he thought about it his heart began to thump, and he quickened his steps to a run. All the trees seemed to be reaching out clutching hands as he sped by, and the darkness kept creeping

closer and closer. The sobs which he had held back so long came faster, and at last breathless and panic-stricken he sank exhausted by the roadside and waited in dumb terror for what might happen.

Looking fearfully around he saw just above him a kind, white face peering out of the twilight. It was only a stone face, and it belonged to an image that was sitting cross-legged on a mossy stone, but June felt as if he had met a friend. Of all the gods and goddesses that Seki San had told him about, the one he knew best was Jizo, the friend of little children. The drooping figure, the gentle face, and the shaven head had become as familiar to him as the pictures of Santa Claus at home. He had met him in the temples, in the woods, on the river road, in big stone statues and little wooden ones, and now when he found him here in this lonesome night world, he felt a vague sense of relief and protection.

[pg 96]

Climbing up on the stone he fingered the pebbles that filled Jizo's lap, and touched the red cotton bib that was tied about his neck. He knew what it all meant for Seki San had told him many times. Jizo was the guardian of dead children, and the red bib and the pebbles had been placed there by mothers who wanted the kind god to look after their little babies who had passed away into another world. There were hundreds of pebbles about the statue, in its lap, about its hands and feet, and even on its bald head, and June was very careful not to disturb any of them. He wished he had something to give the good god, but he was too tired to go down and look for a pebble. He searched through his pockets but nothing seemed to suit. Finally he separated one object from the rest, and placed it gently in Jizo's upturned hand. It was the old sword hilt that Monsieur had given him.

[pg 99]



**"It was the old sword-hilt that Monsieur
had given him."**

Then, because he was very sleepy and tired, and because he was afraid of the dark, he nestled down in the niche under Jizo's upraised arm, and all the hob-goblins and evil spirits slipped away, and the stars came out and the big white moon, and the monotonous droning of the crickets and frogs seemed to be Seki San humming him to sleep, and the stone figure against which he leaned seemed to sway toward him in the moonlight and the face changed to the gentlest, sweetest one he knew, and instead of the little pebbles on the head there was a crown of thorns.

How long June slept there he did not know, but he was awakened by someone shaking his arm and holding a paper lantern close to his face. When he got his eyes open he found that it was a jinrikisha man and that he was talking to him in Japanese.

"Where's Seki?" June asked, looking about him in bewilderment.

The man shook his head and continued to talk excitedly in Japanese.

"I want to go to Monsieur Carré's," said June very loud as if that would help the man to understand.

"Wakarimasen," said the man.

"Monsieur Carré!" shouted June, and again the man shook his head and said, "Wakarimasen."

[pg 101]

Over and over June repeated "Monsieur Carré," and pointed down the moonlit road. Finally in desperation he scrambled from his perch and seizing a stick thrust it under his arm like a crutch, then he humped his shoulders, drew down his brows, and limped along saying with a groan, "Mon Dieu! Mon Dieu!" as he had heard Monsieur say it.

In an instant the man clapped his hands and laughed. "Hai, Hai," he said and when the jinrikisha was wheeled about and June was invited to get in, you may be sure he lost no time in doing so. He even forgot to give a good-by look to Jizo, who sat smiling out into the moonlight with the little pebbles on his head.

It was a wonderful ride, through the soft shiny darkness, with only the pitter patter of the kurumaya's sandals to break the silence. June, curled up on the seat, was not thinking of poor Seki San and her anxiety concerning him, neither was he thinking of the mother and father who would soon be coming to him over the sea, nor of Monsieur with the guard at his door. He was wondering if the stars were the moon's children, and who woke the sun up in the morning.

[pg 102]

And all the time a light at the foot of the hill was getting closer and closer, and before he knew it, they had stopped at the little brown house where the windows peeped through the vines.

A voice spoke sharply in the darkness and before June could get down a man in uniform with a star on his breast, stopped him. The jinrikisha man seemed to be explaining and the soldier to be asking questions, and while they talked June sat very still with his heart beating furiously against the long envelope in his blouse.

He was just as frightened as he had been back in the woods when the hob-goblins were after him, only it was different. Then he cried and ran away, now he was not thinking of himself at all, but of Monsieur who might have to go to prison and die if he should fail to get the papers to him.

[pg 103]

After what seemed to him hours of time, the guard evidently came to the conclusion that a sleepy little boy who had lost his way could do no harm, so he lifted him down and took him up the path.

June was too full of anxiety even to glance at the goldfish as he passed them. He walked straight up the path and into the room where Monsieur lay. On the bed was an old man who looked as if he might have been Monsieur's father; his body seemed to have shrunk to half its size and his face was old and white and drawn. Only the eyes made June know that it was Monsieur himself, and the fierce startled look in them recalled the day he had stumbled over him in the Daimyo's garden.

"I was coming to see you and I got lost," began June, but Monsieur held up a warning hand.

[pg 104]

"The guard will inform me in Japanese," he said so coldly that June wondered if he were angry with him.

After a great deal of talk, the guard went away leaving June sitting half asleep on the floor with his head against the bed. In an instant Monsieur was leaning over him shaking his shoulder.

"Tell me!" he demanded, "tell me quickly why did you come?"

June rubbed his eyes and yawned; at first he could not remember, then it began to come back:

"I made the 's's' the wrong way," he murmured, "and when I tried to fix them I spoiled your letter."

"Yes, yes," cried Monsieur, now out of bed and on his knees before the child, "and you tore it up, you destroyed it?"

June shook his head wearily, "It is inside here, but I can't undo the buttons."

[pg 105]

Monsieur's hands, bandaged though they were, found the packet and drew it eagerly forth. "Thank God! thank God!" he whispered, pressing the unbroken seal again and again to his lips.

"Did I save your life?" asked June making a mighty effort to rouse himself, and enjoy his reward.

"Not my life, boy; that did not matter; it is my honor you have saved, my honor." And Monsieur lay back upon the bed and sobbed like a little child.

"He's coming!" warned June, and Monsieur had only sufficient time to wipe away the tears from his withered old cheeks before the guard returned with the jinrikisha man.

After a consultation in Japanese, Monsieur said to June, "I have told the man how to take you home. They will be very anxious about you. You must start at once."

"I'm hungry," said June, "I'd like some of those little crackers that you gave me before."

[pg 106]

The guard, obligingly following directions, produced a paper bag from the table drawer.

"I wish they were animal crackers," said June, "I like to eat the elephant first, then he gets hungry and I have to eat the bear, then the bear gets hungry and I have to eat the pig, and the pig gets hungry and I have to eat the rabbit until there aren't any left in the bag."

"You have not spoken to any one about the letter?" whispered Monsieur as he pretended to kiss June good-by.

"Course not!" declared June indignantly. "It's a secret!" Then as if remembering a lost opportunity he added: "Oh! you couldn't tell me a story, could you? Just a teeny weeny one?"

"Not to-night," said Monsieur laughing, "why, it is eleven o'clock now. But to-morrow, next day, always when you come, the stories are waiting, all that my brain and heart can hold."

[pg 109]

And with this promise June was bound to be content.

It was hard to believe that the way back was as long as the way he had come, for before he knew it the wall beside the moat appeared by the roadside, then the parade grounds dim and shadowy in the moonlight, then the crowded streets of the town. He did not know that he was the chief cause of the commotion, that for two hours parties of searchers had been hurrying along every road leading out of town, that people were telling where they had seen him last, and that anxious groups were looking over the low wall into the black waters of the moat.

He only knew that from the moment he reached town a crowd followed his jinrikisha, that his kurumaya could scarcely push his way through the questioning throng, and that at last they stopped and a shout went up, the crowd parted, and through the opening dashed Seki San, her hair hanging limply about her face, her eyes full of joy, and her arms out-stretched.

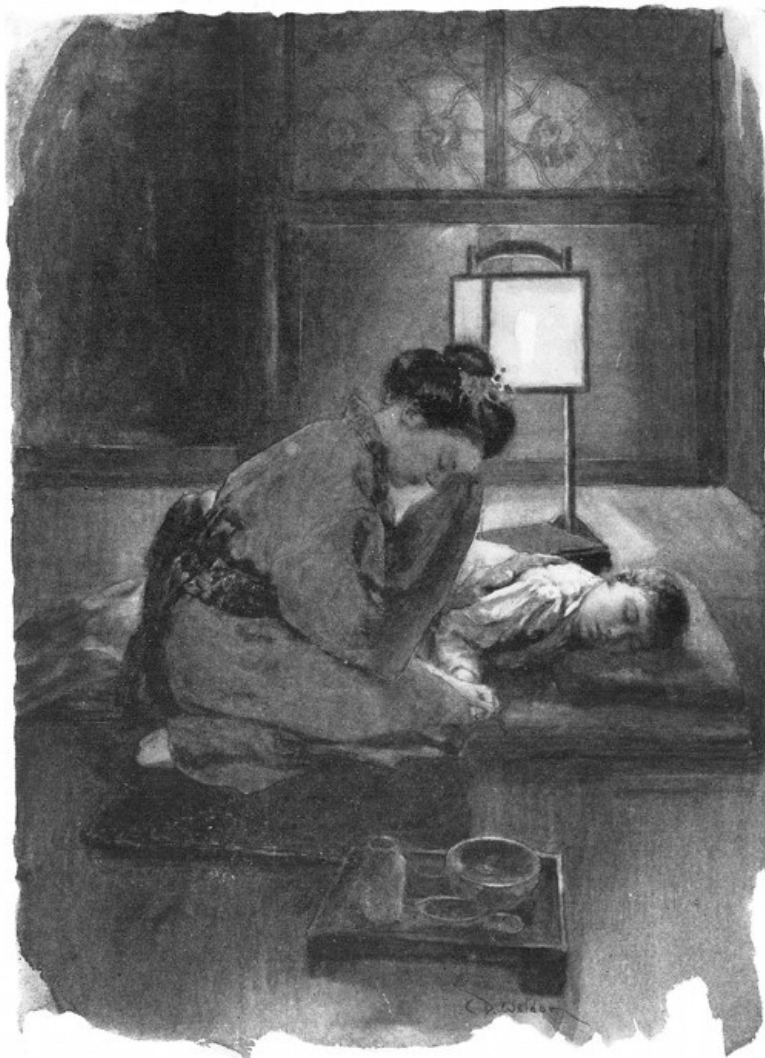
[pg 110]

"Oh! My little boy darling!" she cried. "You have given me many troubles. Where you been, where did you go?"

But June attempted no explanation; the papers were safe with Monsieur and he was safe with Seki San, and whether or not he had done right was too big a problem to wrestle with.

After Seki had fed him and bathed him, and kissed his many bruises to make them well, he put his arms about her and gave her a long, hard hug.

"I am awful sorry I had to run away," he said and Seki's English was not good enough to understand just what he meant.



"Long after he was asleep she sat beside him."

Long after he was asleep she sat beside him on the floor, crying softly into her sleeve, and holding fast to his hand while she gave thanks not only to her new Christian God but to some of the heathen ones as well for sending him back to her. [pg 111]

CHAPTER X

[pg 112]

LATE in the summer, when the tiny maple leaves were turning blood-red and the white lotus was filling every pond and moat, June and Seki San journeyed back to Yokohama. They were going to meet the big steamer that was on its way from China to America, and June was to join his mother and father and go back with them to California. He was so happy over the prospect that he could not sit still a minute, but kept hopping from one side of the car to the other and asking Seki more questions than she could possibly answer.

"Do you s'pose my mother'll know me now I've got so fat? Has my father grown any since I saw him? Will he carry a sword? What do you s'pose they will bring me?" and so on until there were scarcely any questions left to be asked. [pg 113]

"One more day," said Seki San sadly, "and Seki will have no more little boy to hold her sleeves behind and tease and tickle her under her necks. She will have a very, very lonely heart."

June's merriment ceased for a moment and he looked serious. The fact that Seki could not go back with him had been a misfortune that he had not yet faced.

"I'm going to get my father to come back for you next year," he said at last, "you and Tomi and Toro, and your mamma with the black teeth too. We will have a little Japanese house on the

ranch, and Toro can ride my pony."

But Seki shook her head and wiped her eyes.

"You will go back to your dear, affectionate home," she said, "and be big mans when I see you once more. But I will hear your lovingest little boy voice down in my heart alway!" [pg 114]

It was a happy meeting the next day on the steamer when June actually saw his mother, and clung about her neck as if he would never let go again. Then he had to be taken up on the shelter deck and introduced to a strange, pale man reclining in a steamer chair, who they said was his father. At first it was a dreadful disappointment, and he submitted to being kissed with an effort. But when the man lifted one eyebrow and puckered his mouth into a funny shape, and said, "Why, Mr. Skeezicks, you haven't forgotten your old Pard?" a dark spot seemed suddenly to go out of June's mind and in its place was a memory of the jolliest, funniest playfellow he had ever had in his life. With a rush he was in his lap. "You used to tell me about the Indians," he cried accusingly, "I remember now. What became of Tiger Tooth and the little white child?" [pg 115]

"We will have just fourteen days to tell stories," said Captain Royston. "I shall probably be a dumb man by the time we land in San Francisco. You must sit down here now and tell this little mother of yours the story of your life. Where did you get these red cheeks and fat legs?"

And with Seki San sitting on the floor at their feet, and with a frequent hug from mother and many a laugh from father, the story of the summer was told.

When the last launch brought the passengers out from the shore, who should come aboard but Monsieur Carré. He was regularly engaged in Government service at Tokyo now, and when he saw in the paper that Master Robert Rogers Royston, Junior, would join his parents and sail for America on the S. S. *Mongolia*, he made the short trip to Yokohama to say good-by.

He was so dressed up that June scarcely recognized him. His white mustache was waxed until it stood out very straight, and his hair was parted all the way down the back. He still carried a heavy cane and limped when he walked, but his hands, though knotted and gnarled, were free from bandages. [pg 116]

Captain and Mrs. Royston welcomed him cordially as a friend of June's and even Seki San, who still looked upon him with suspicion, was discreetly silent.

"Are you going back to France?" asked June.

"Next year," answered Monsieur. "I will have made sufficient money to go home, and then! Ah, Mon Dieu! I will never leave it again."

"I will write you a letter," said June, adding slyly, "I'll be sure to make the 's's' turn the right way."

Monsieur put his finger on his lips and June nodded understandingly.

"What secret have you there?" asked Captain Royston. [pg 119]

Monsieur put his hand on June's head, and looking straight in the Captain's eyes, he said:

"Your boy will make a fine soldier; he has courage and honor, and he can keep a secret. I congratulate you!"

Just then a gong sounded and the first officer ordered everybody who was going ashore to hurry. There was general bustle and confusion, June had a vague impression of Monsieur kissing him on both cheeks, and disappearing down the rope ladder, of Seki San kneeling before him while he clung to her neck and begged her not to leave him, then he was sitting on the railing, with Father's arm about him, and Mother holding one hand while with the other he waved good-by to the friends below.



"June waved good-by to the friends below."

The little launch grew strangely blurred as it danced away over the water. June did not see the crowd on the deck, nor the pilot at the wheel, nor even the white and orange flag that floated from the mast. He was watching the pink rose in Seki's hair growing fainter and fainter in the distance. [pg 120]

"And now," said Father, with decision, "I think it's about time to get busy with the Indians."

Transcriber's Notes:

Throughout the dialogues, there were words used to mimic accents of the speakers. Those words were retained as-is.

The illustrations have been moved so that they do not break up paragraphs and so that they are next the text they illustrate. Thus the page number of the illustration might not match the page number in the List of Illustrations, and the order of illustrations may not be the same in the List of Illustrations and in the book.

Errors in punctuations and inconsistent hyphenation were not corrected unless otherwise noted below:

On page 90, "chlidren" was replaced with "children".

On page 116, a comma was placed after "with suspicion".

On page 116, the single quotation mark after "leave it again." was replaced with a double quotation mark.

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