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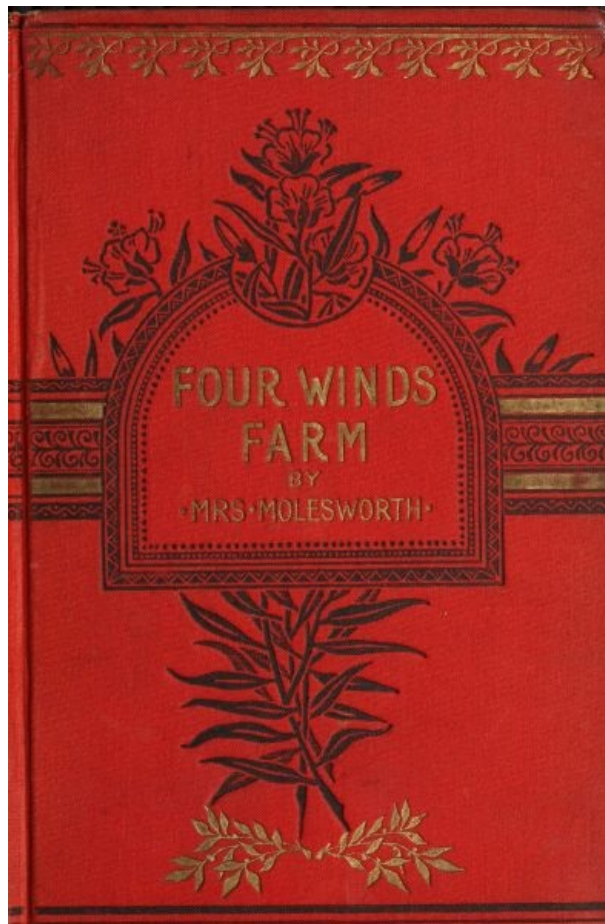
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## FOUR WINDS FARM

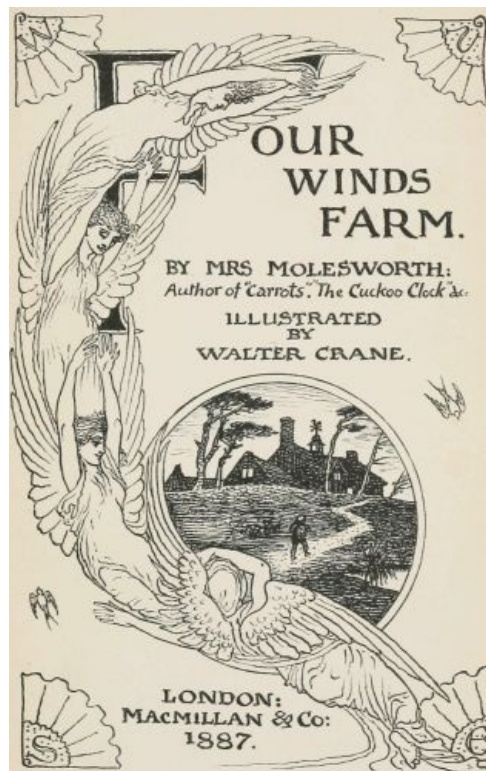
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"In ... his dream he saw a child moving, and could divide the main streams, at least, of the winds that had played on him, and study so the first stage in that mental journey."



**And thus she led him out of the large, cold hall.—*Front.***

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**TO**  
**MY YOUNGEST DAUGHTER**  
**OLIVE**  
**I INSCRIBE THIS LITTLE STORY**  
**WHICH WE THOUGHT OF TOGETHER**

LONDON, *June* 1886.

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## CHAPTER I.

### THE VOICES IN THE CHIMNEY

"Wherefore and whence we are ye cannot know."

"The Winds' Song," *Light of*

*Asia.*—EDWIN ARNOLD

The first thing that little Gratian Conyfer could remember in his life was hearing the wind blow. It had hushed him to sleep, it had scolded him when he was naughty, it had laughed with him at merry times, it had wailed and sobbed when he was in sorrow.

For the wind has many ways of blowing, and no one knew this better than Gratian, and no one had more right to boast an intimate acquaintance with the wind than he. You would be sure to say so yourself if you could see the place where the boy was born and bred—"Four Winds Farm."

It had not come by this name without reason, though no one still living when Gratian was a boy, could tell how long it had borne it, or by whom it had been bestowed. I wish I could take you there—were it but for five minutes, were it even in a dream. I wish I could make you *feel* what I can fancy I feel myself when I think of it—the wonderful fresh breath on one's face even on a calm day standing at the door of the farm-house, the sense of life and mischief and wild force about you, though held in check for the moment, the knowledge that the wind—the winds rather, all four of them, are there somewhere, hidden or pretending to be asleep, maybe, but ready all the same to burst out at a moment's notice. And when they do burst out—on a blowy day that is to say—ah then, I wouldn't advise you to stand at the farm-house door, unless you want to be hurled out of the way more unceremoniously than you bargained for.

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It was a queer site perhaps to have chosen for a dwelling-place. Up among the moors that stretched for miles and miles on all sides, on such lofty ground that it was no wonder the trees refused to grow high, for it was hard work enough to grow at all, poor things, and to keep their footing when they had done so. They did look battered about and storm-tossed—all except the pines, who are used to that kind of life, I suppose, and did their duty manfully as sentinels on guard round the old brown house, in which, as I said, the boy Gratian first opened his baby eyes to the light.

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Since that day nine winters and summers had passed. He was called a big boy now. He slept alone in a room away up a little stair by itself in a corner—an outside corner—of the farm-house. He walked, three miles there and three miles back, to school every day, carrying his books and his dinner in a satchel, along a road that would have seemed lonely and dreary to any but a moorland child—a road indeed that was little but a sheep-track the best part of the way. He spent his evenings in a corner of the large straggling kitchen, so quiet that no one would have guessed

a child, above all a boy, was there; his holidays, the fine weather ones at least, out on the moor among the heather for the most part, in the company of Jonas the old shepherd, and Watch the collie dog. But he never thought his life lonely, though he had neither brother nor sister, and no one schoolfellow among the score or so at the village school that was more to him than another; he never thought about himself at all in that sort of way; he took for granted that all about him was as it should be, and if things seemed wrong sometimes he had the good sense to think it was very probably his own fault.

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But he found things puzzling; he was a child who thought a great deal more than he spoke; he would not have been so puzzled if he had had more of the habit of putting his thoughts into words. Hitherto it had not seemed to matter much, life had been a simple affair, and what he did not understand he forgot about. But lately, quite lately, he had changed; his soul was beginning to grow, perhaps that was it, and felt now and then as if it wanted new clothes, and the feeling was strange. And then it isn't everybody who is born and bred where the four winds of heaven meet!

What was Gratian thinking of one Sunday evening when, quiet as usual, he sat in his corner? He had been at church and at the Sunday School; but I am afraid he could not have told you much about the sermon, and in his class he had been mildly reproved for inattention.

"You must go to bed," said his mother; "it is quite time, and you seem sleepy."

The boy rose and came round to the table at which sat his father and mother, each with a big book which Gratian knew well by sight—for it was only on Sunday evenings that the farmer and his wife had time for reading, and their books lasted them a good while. In fact they had been reading them fifty-two evenings of each year ever since the boy could recollect, and the marks, of perforated cardboard on green ribbon—his father's bore the words "Remember me," and his mother's "Forget me not"—which once, before he could read, he had regarded with mysterious awe, did not seem to him to have moved on many pages.

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He stood at the table for a moment before his mother looked up; he was vaguely wondering to himself if he too would have a big book with a green ribbon-marker when he should be as old as his father and mother; did everybody? he felt half-inclined to ask his mother, but before he had decided if he should, she scattered his thoughts by glancing up at him quickly. She was quick and alert in everything she said and did, except perhaps in reading.

"Good-night, Gratian. Get quickly to bed, my boy."

"Good-night, mother, good-night, father," he said, as his mother kissed him, and his father laid his hand on the child's curly head with a kindly gesture which he only used on Sunday evenings.

"Gratian is in one of his dreams again," said the mother, when the little figure had disappeared.

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"Ay," said her husband, "it's to be hoped he'll grow out of it, but he's young yet."

Gratian had stopped a moment on his way across the red-tiled passage, at one end of which was the white stone staircase; he stopped at the front door which stood slightly ajar, and stepped out into the porch. It was autumn, but early autumn only. Something of the fragrance of a summer night was still about, but there was not the calm and restfulness of the summer; on the contrary, there was a stirring and a murmuring, and the clouds overhead were scudding hurriedly before the moon, as if she were scolding them and they in a hurry to escape, thought Gratian; for there was a certain fretfulness in her air—a disquiet and unsettledness which struck him.

"Either she is angry and they are running away, or—perhaps that is it—she is sending them messages as fast as they can take them, like the rooks after they have been having a long talk together," he said to himself. Then as a figure came round the side of the house on its way to what was really the kitchen—though the big room which Gratian had just left went by the name—"Jonas," said the child aloud, "is there anything the matter up in the sky to-night?"

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The old shepherd stood still; he rested the empty milkpail he was carrying on the ground, and gazed up to where Gratian was pointing.

"I cannot say," he answered, "but the summer is gone, little master. Up here the winter comes betimes, we must look for the storms and the tempests again before long."

"But not yet, oh not just yet, Jonas; I can't think why they don't get tired of fighting and rushing about and tearing each other—the winds and the rain and the clouds and all of them up there. Listen, Jonas, what is that?"

For a faint, low breath came round the end of the house like a long drawn sigh, yet with something of menace in its tone.

"Ah yes, Master Gratian. It's the winter spirit looking round a bit as I said. They'll be at it to-night, I fancy—just a spree to keep their hands in as it were. But go to bed, little master, and dream of the summer. There'll be some fine days yet awhile," and old Jonas lifted the pail again. "Madge must give this a scalding before milking time to-morrow morning, careless wench that she is," he said in a half-grumbling tone as he disappeared.

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And Gratian climbed upstairs to bed.

He had a candle, and matches to light it with, in his room, but the moonlight was so bright, though fitful, that he thought it better than any candle. He undressed, not quickly as his mother had told him, I fear, standing at the curtainless window and staring out, up rather, where the clouds were still fussing about "as if they were dusting the moon's face," said Gratian to himself, laughing softly at this new fancy. And even after he was in bed he peeped out from time to time

to watch the queer shadows and gleams, the quickly following light and darkness that flitted across the white walls of his little room. It was only an attic, but I think almost any little boy would have thought it a nice room. Mrs. Conyfer kept it beautifully clean to begin with, and there was a fireplace, and a good cupboard in the wall, and a splendid view of moor and sky from the window. Gratian was very proud of his room; he had only had it a short time, only since the day he was nine years old, and it made him feel he was really growing a big boy. But to-night he was hardly in his usual good spirits. It weighed on his mind that the teacher at the Sunday School had been displeased with him; for he knew him to be kind and patient, and Gratian liked to win his smile of approval.

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"It is always the same with me," thought the little boy, "at school every day too I am the stupidest. I wish there were no lessons in the world. I wish there were only birds, and lambs, and hills, and moors, and the wind—most of all the wind, and no books—no books, and——"

But here he fell asleep!

When he woke the room was quite dark; the clouds had hung their dusters over the moon's face by mistake perhaps, or else she had got tired of shining and had turned in for a nap, thought Gratian sleepily. He shut his eyes again, and curled himself round the other way, and would have been asleep again in half a minute, but for a sound which suddenly reached his ears. Some one was talking near him! Gratian opened his eyes again, forgetting that that could not help him to hear, and listened. Yes, it was a voice—two voices; he heard one stop and the other reply, and now and then they seemed to be talking together, and gradually as he listened he discovered that they came from the direction of the fireplace. Could it be the voices of his father and mother coming up from below, through the chimney, somehow? No, their voices were not so strangely soft and sadly sweet; besides their room was not under his, nor did they ever talk in the middle of the night.

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"They are too sleepy for that," thought Gratian with a little smile. For the farmer and his wife were very hard-working, and even on Sunday they were tired. It was a long walk to church, and unless the weather were very bad they always went twice.

Gratian listened again, more intently than ever. The voices went on; he could distinguish the different tones—more than two he began to fancy. But how provoking it was; he *could* not catch the words. And from the strain of listening he almost began to fall asleep again, when at last—yes, there was no doubt of it now—he caught the sound of his own name.

"Gratian, Gra—tian," in a very soft inquiring tone; "ye—es, he is a good boy on the whole, but he is foolish too. He is wasting his time."

"Sadly so—sad—ly so—o," hummed back the second voice. "He only dreams—dreams are very well in their way, they are a beginning sometimes, so—me—ti—imes. But he will never do anything even with his dreams unless he works too—wo—orks too."

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"Ah no—no—o. All must work save the will-o'-the-wisps, and what good are they? What good are the—ey?"

Then the two, or the three, maybe even the four, Gratian could not be sure but that there were perhaps four, voices seemed all to hum together, "What good are the—ey?" Till with a sudden rushing call one broke in with a new cry.

"Sisters," it said, "we must be off. Our work awai—aits us, awai—aits us."

And softly they all faded away, or was it perhaps that Gratian fell asleep?

He woke the next morning with a confused remembrance of what he had heard, and for some little time he could not distinguish how much he had dreamt from what had reached his ears before he fell asleep. For all through the night a vague feeling had haunted him of the soft, humming murmur, and two or three times when he half woke and turned on his side, he seemed to hear again the last echoes of the voices in the chimney.

"But it couldn't have been them," he said to himself as he sat up in his little bed, his hands clasped round his knees, as he was very fond of sitting; "they said they were going away to their work. What work could they have—voices, just voices in the chimney? And they said I was wasting my time. What did they mean? *I'm* not like a will-o'-the-wisp; I don't dance about and lead people into bogs. I——"

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But just then his mother's voice sounded up the stairs.

"Gratian—aren't you up yet? Father is out, and the breakfast will be ready in ten minutes. Quick, quick, my boy."

Gratian started; he put one pink foot out of bed and looked at it as if he had never seen five toes before, then he put out the other, and at last found himself altogether on the floor. It was rather a chilly morning, and he was only allowed cold water in a queer old tub that he could remember being dreadfully afraid of when he was a *very* little boy—it had seemed so big to him then. But he was not so babyish now; he plunged bravely into the old tub, and the shock of the cold completely awakened him, so that he looked quite bright and rosy when he came into the kitchen a few minutes later.

His mother looked up from the pot of oatmeal porridge she was ladling out into little bowls for the breakfast.

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"That's right," she said; "you look better than you did last night. Try and have a good day at school to-day, Gratian. Monday's always the best day for a fresh start."

Gratian listened, but did not answer. It generally took him a good while to get his speeches ready, except perhaps when he was alone with Jonas and Watch. It seemed easier to him to speak to Jonas than to anybody else. He began eating his porridge—slowly, porridge and milk spoonfuls turn about, staring before him as he did so.

"Mother," he said at last, "is it naughty to dream?"

"Naughty to dream," repeated his mother, "what do you mean? To dream when you're asleep?"

"No—I don't think it's that kind," began the child, but his mother interrupted him. Her own words of the night before returned to her mind. Could Gratian have overheard them?

"You mean dreaming when you should be working, perhaps?" she said. "Well, yes—without saying it's naughty, it's certainly not good. It's wasting one's time. Everybody's got work to do in this world, and it needs all one's attention. You'll find it out for yourself, but it's a good thing to find it out young. Most things are harder to learn old than young, Gratian."

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Gratian listened, but again without speaking.

"It's very queer," he was thinking to himself—"mother says the same thing."

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## CHAPTER II.

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### AT SCHOOL

"But there all apart,  
On his little seat  
A little figure is set awry."

C. C. FRASER TYTLER

Gratian shouldered his satchel and set off to school. He had some new thoughts in his head this morning, but still he was not too busy with them to forget to look about him. It was evident that old Jonas had been right; the storm spirits had been about in the night. The fallen autumn leaves which had been lying in heaps the day before were scattered everywhere, the little pools of water left by yesterday's rain had almost disappeared, overhead the clouds were gradually settling down in quiet masses as if tired and sleepy with the rushing about of the night before.

It was always fresh up at Four Winds Farm, but to-day there was a particularly brisk and inspiriting feeling in the air; and as Gratian ran down the bit of steep hill between the gate and the road which he partially followed to school, he laughed to himself as a little wind came kissing him on the cheek.

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"Good morning, wind," he said aloud. "Which of them are you, I wonder?" And some old verses he had often heard his mother say came into his head—

"North winds send hail,  
South winds bring rain,  
East winds we bewail,  
West winds, blow amain."

"I think you must be west wind, but you're not blowing amain this morning. Never mind; you can when you like, I know. *You* can work with a will. There now—how funny—I'm saying it myself; I wonder if that's what the voices meant I should do—work with a will, work with a will," and Gratian sang the words over softly to himself as he ran along.

As I said, his road to school was great part of the way nothing but a sheep-track. It was not that there did not exist a proper road, but this proper road, naturally enough, went winding about a good deal, for it was meant for carts and horses as well as or more than for little boys, and no carts or horses could ever have got along it had the road run in a direct line from the Farm to the village. For the village lay low and the Farm very high. Gratian followed the road for the first half-mile or so, that is to say as long as he could have gained nothing by quitting it, but then came a corner at which he left it to meander gradually down the high ground, while he scrambled over a low wall of loose stones and found himself on what he always considered his own particular path. At this point began the enjoyment of his walk, for a few minutes carried him round the brow of the hill, out of sight of the road and of everything save the sky above and the great stretching moorland beneath. And this was what Gratian loved. He used to throw himself on the short tufty grass, his elbows on the ground, and his chin in his hands—his satchel wherever it liked, and lie there gazing and dreaming and wishing he could stay thus always.

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He did the same this morning, but somehow his dreams were not quite so undisturbed. He was no longer sure that he would like to lie there always doing nothing but dreaming, and now that he had got this idea into his head everything about him seemed to be repeating it. He looked at the heather, faded and dull now, and remembered how, a while ago, the bees had been hard at work on the moors gathering their stores. "What a lot of trouble it must be to make honey!" he thought. He felt his own little rough coat, and smiled to think that not so very long ago it had been walking about the hills on a different back. "It isn't much trouble for the sheep to let their wool grow, certainly," he said to himself, "but it's a lot of work for lots of people before wool is turned into a coat for a little boy. Nothing can be done without work, I suppose, and I'd rather be

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a bee than a sheep a good deal, though I'd rather be old Watch than either, and *he* works hard—yes, he certainly does."

And then suddenly he remembered that if he didn't bestir himself he would be late at school, which wouldn't be at all the good start his mother had advised him to make as it was Monday morning.

He went on pretty steadily for the rest of the way, only stopping about six times, and that not for long together, otherwise he certainly would not have got to school before morning lessons were over. But, as it was, he got an approving nod from the teacher for being in very good time. For the teacher could not help liking Gratian, though, as a pupil, he gave him plenty of trouble, seeming really sometimes as if he *could* not learn.

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"And yet," thought the master—for he was a young man who did think—"one cannot look into the child's face without seeing there are brains behind it, and brains of no common kind maybe. But I haven't got the knack of making him use them; for nine years old he is exceedingly stupid."

Things went better to-day. Gratian was full of his new ideas and really meant to try. But even trying with all one's might and main won't build Rome in a day. Gratian had idled and dreamed through lesson-time too often to lose the bad habit all at once. He saw himself passed as usual by children younger than he, who had been a much shorter time at school, and his face grew very melancholy, and two or three big tears gathered more than once in his eyes while he began to say in his own mind that trying was no good.

Morning school was over at twelve; most of the children lived in the village, and some but a short way off, so that they could easily run home for their dinner and be back in time for afternoon lessons; Gratian Conyfer was the only one whose home was too far off for him to go back in the middle of the day. So he brought his dinner with him and ate it in winter beside the schoolroom fire, in summer in a corner of the playground, where, under a tree, stood an old bench. This was the dining-room he liked best, and though now summer was past and autumn indeed fast fading into winter, Gratian had not yet deserted his summer quarters, and here the schoolmaster found him half an hour or so before it was time for the children's return.

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"Are you not cold there, my boy?" he asked kindly.

"No, thank you, sir," Gratian answered, and looking more closely at him the master saw he had been crying.

"What is the matter, Gratian?" he asked. "You've not been quarrelling or fighting I'm sure, you never do, and as for lessons they went a bit better to-day, I think, didn't they?"

But at these words Gratian only turned his face to the wall and wept—wiping his eyes from time to time on the cuff of the linen blouse which he wore at school over his coat.

The schoolmaster's heart was touched, though he was pretty well used to tears. But Gratian's seemed different somehow.

"What is it, my boy?" he said again.

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"It's—it's just that, sir—lessons, I mean. I did try, sir. I meant to work with a will, I did indeed."

"But you did do better. I knew you were trying," said the teacher quietly.

Gratian lifted his tear stained face and looked at the master in surprise.

"Did you, sir?" he said. "It seemed to me to go worser and worser."

"No, I didn't think so. And sometimes, Gratian, when we think we are doing worse, it shows we are really doing better. We're getting up a little higher, you see, and beginning to look on and to see how far we have to go, and that we might have got on faster. When we're not climbing at all, but just staying lazily at the foot of the hill, we don't know anything about how steep and high it is."

Gratian had quite left off crying by now and was listening attentively. The master's words needed no explanation to him; he had caught the sense and meaning at once.

"Everybody has to work if they're to do any good, haven't they, sir?" he asked.

"*Everybody*," agreed the master.

"But wouldn't it be better if everybody *liked* their work—couldn't they do it better if they did?" he asked. "That's what I'm vexed about, partly. I don't *like* lessons, sir," he said in a tone of deep conviction. "I'm afraid I'm too stupid ever to like them."

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The schoolmaster could scarcely keep from smiling.

"You're not so very old yet, Gratian," he said. "It's just possible you may change. Besides, in some ways the beginning's the worst. You can't read very easily yet—not well enough to enjoy reading to yourself?"

"No, sir," said the boy, hanging his head again.

"Well, then, wait a while and see if you don't change about books and lessons."

"And if I don't ever change," said Gratian earnestly. "Can people ever do things well that they don't like doing?"

The schoolmaster looked at him. It was a curious question for a boy of nine years old.

"Yes," he said, "I hope so, indeed," and his mind went back to a time when he had looked forward

to being something very different from a village schoolmaster, when he could have fancied no employment could be less to his liking than teaching. "I hope so, indeed," he repeated. "And if you work with a will you—get to like the work whatever it is."

"Thank you, sir," said the boy, and the master turned away. Then a thought struck him.

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"What do you best like doing, Gratian?"

The boy hesitated. Then he grew a little red.

"It isn't doing anything really," he said; "it's what mother calls dreaming—out on the moors, sir, that's the best of all—with the wind all about, and nothing but it and the moor and the sky. And the feel of it keeps in me. Even when I'm at home in the kitchen by the fire, if I shut my eyes I can fancy it."

The master nodded his head.

"Dreaming is no harm in its right place. But if one did nothing but dream, the dreams would lose their colour, I expect."

"That's something like what *they* said, again," thought the boy to himself.

The schoolmaster walked away. "A child with something uncommon about him, I fancy," he said in his mind. "One sees that sometimes in a child living as much alone with nature as he does. But I scarcely think he's clever, and then the rough daily life will most likely nip in the bud any sort of poetry or imagination that there may be germs of."

He didn't quite understand Gratian, and then, too, he didn't take into account what it is to be born under the protection of the four winds of heaven.

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But Gratian felt much happier after his talk with the master, and afternoon lessons went better. They were generally easier than the morning ones, and often more interesting. This afternoon it was a geography lesson. The master drew out the great frame with the big maps hanging on it, and explained to the children as he went along. It was about the north to-day, far away up in the north, where the ice-fields spread for hundreds of miles and everything is in a sleep of whiteness and silence. And Gratian listened with parted lips and earnest eyes. He seemed to see it all. "I wish I knew as much as he does," he thought. "I wish I could read it in books to myself."

And for the first time there came home to him a faint, shadowy feeling of what books are—of the treasures buried in the rows and rows of little black letters that he so often wished had never been invented.

"Yes," he said to himself, "I'll try to learn so that I can read it all to myself."

It was growing already a little dusk when he set off on his walk home. The evenings were beginning "to draw in" as the country folk say.

But little cared the merry throng who poured out of the schoolroom gate as five o'clock rang from the church clock, chattering, racing, tumbling over each other, pushing, pulling, shouting, but all in play. For they are a good-natured set, though rough and ready—these hardy moor children. And they grow into honest and sturdy men and women, hospitable and kindly, active and thrifty, though they care for little beyond their own corner of the world, and would scarcely find it out if all the books and "learning" in existence were suddenly made an end of.

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There are mischievous imps among them, nevertheless, and none was more so than Tony, the miller's son. He meant no harm, but he loved teasing, and Gratian, gentle and silent, was often a tempting victim. This evening, as sometimes happened, a dozen or so of the children whose homes lay at the end of the village, past which was the road to the Farm, went on together.

"We'll run a bit of the road home with thee, Gratian," said Tony.

And though the boy did not much care for their company, he thought it would be unfriendly to say so, nor did he like to refuse when Tony insisted on carrying his satchel for him. "There's no books in mine," he said; "I took them home at dinner-time, and I'm sure your shoulders will be aching before you get to the Farm with the weight of yours. My goodness, how many books have you got in it? I say," as he pretended to examine them, "here's Gratian Conyfer going to be head o' the school, and put us all to shame with his learning."

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But as Gratian said nothing he seemed satisfied, and after stopping a minute or two to arrange the satchel again, ran after the others.

"It's getting dark, Tony," said his sister Dolly, "we mustn't go farther. Good-night, Gratian, we've brought you a bit of your way—Tony, and Ralph, and I," for the other children had gradually fallen off.

"Yes—a good mile of it, thank you, Dolly. And thank you, Tony, for helping me with my satchel—that's right, thank you," as Tony was officiously fastening it on.

"Good-night," said Tony; "you're no coward any way, Gratian. I shouldn't like to have all that way to go in the dark, for it will be dark soon. There are queer things to be seen on the moor after sunset, folks say."

"Ay, so they say," said Ralph.

"I'll be home in no time," Gratian called back. For he did not know what fear was.

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But after he had ran awhile, he felt more tired than usual. Was it perhaps the fit of crying he had had at dinner-time that made him so weary? He plodded on, however, shifting his satchel from



time to time, it felt so strangely heavy, and queer tales he had heard of the little mountain man that would jump on your shoulders, and cling on till he had strangled you, unless you remembered the right spell to force him off with; or of the brownies who catch children with invisible ropes, and make them run round and round without their knowing they have left the straight road, till they drop with fatigue, came into his mind.

"There must be something wrong with my satchel," he said at last, and he pulled it round so that he could open it. He drew his hand out with a cry of vexation and distress. Tony, yes it must have been Tony—though at first he was half-inclined to think the mountain men or the brownies had been playing their tricks on him—Tony had filled the satchel with heavy stones, and had no doubt taken out the books at the time he was pretending to examine them. It was too bad. And what had he done with the books?

"He may have taken them home with him, he may have hidden them and get them as he passes by, or he may have left them on the moor, and if it rains they'll be spoilt, and the copy-books are sure to blow away."

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For in his new ardour, Gratian had brought home books of all kinds, meaning to work so well that his master should be quite astonished the next day, and the poor little fellow sat down on the heather, his arms and shoulders aching and sore, and let the tears roll down his face.

Suddenly a slight sound, something between a murmur and a rustle, some little way from him, made him look round. It was an unusually still evening; Gratian had scarcely ever known the moorland road so still—it could not be the wind then! He looked round him curiously, and for a moment or two forgot his troubles in his wonder as to what it could be. There it was, again, and the boy started to his feet.

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## CHAPTER III.

[Pg 29]

### FLYING VISITS

"I see thee not, I clasp thee not;  
Yet feel I thou art nigh."

*To the Summer Wind.*—SIR

NOEL PATON

Yes—he heard it again, and this time it sounded almost like voices speaking. He turned to the side whence it came, and to his surprise, in the all but darkness, there glimmered for an instant or two a sudden light. It was scarcely indeed to be called light; it was more like the reflection of faint colour on the dark background.

"It is like a black rainbow," said Gratian to himself. "I wonder if there are some sorts of rainbows that come in the night. I wonder—" but suddenly a waft of soft though fresh air on his cheek made him start. All around him, but an instant before, had been so still that he could not understand it, and his surprise was not lessened when a voice sounded close to his ear.

"What about your books, Gratian? How are you going to find them?"

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The boy turned to look who was speaking. His first thought was that one of his companions, knowing of the trick Tony had played him, had run after him with the books. But the figure beside him was not that of one of his companions—was it that of any one at all? Gratian rubbed his eyes; the faint light that remained,—the last rays of reflected sunset—were more bewildering than decided night; was it fancy that he had heard a voice speaking? was it fancy that he had seen a waving, fluttering form beside him?

No, there it was again; softly moving garments, with something of a green radiance on them, a sweet, fair face, like a face in a dream, seen but for an instant and then hidden again by a wave of mist that seemed to come between it and him, a gentle yet cheery voice repeating again—

"What of the books, Gratian? How are you going to find them?"

"I don't know," said the boy. "Who are you? How do you know about them, and can you help me to find them?"

But the sound of his own voice, rough and sharp, and yet thick it somehow seemed, in comparison with the soft clearness of the tones he had just heard, fell on his ears strangely. It seemed to awake him.

"Am I dreaming?" he said to himself. "There is no one there. How silly of me to speak to nobody! I might as well be speaking to the wind!"



**Was it fancy that he had  
seen a waving, fluttering  
form beside him?**

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"Exactly," said the voice, followed this time by a little burst of the sweetest laughter Gratian had ever heard. "Come, Gratian, don't be so dull; what's wrong with your eyes? Come, dear, if you do want to find your books, that's to say. You see me now, don't you?"

And again the fresh waft passed across his cheeks, and again the flutter of radiant green and the fair face caught his eyes.

"Yes," he said, "I see you now—or—or I did see you half a second ago," for even while he said it the vision had seemed to fade.

"That's right—then come."

He was opening his lips to ask how and where, but he had not time, nor did he need to do so. The breeze, slight as it was, seemed to draw him onwards, and the faint, quivering green light gleamed out from moment to moment before him. It was evident which way he was to go. Only for an instant a misgiving came over him and he hesitated.

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"I say," he called out, "you mustn't be offended, but you're not a will-o'-the-wisp, are you? I don't want to follow one of them. They're no good."

Again the soft laughter, but it sounded kind and pleasant, not the least mocking.

"That's right. Never have anything to say to will-o'-the-wisps, Gratian. But I'm not one—see—I keep on my way. I don't dance and jerk from side to side."

It was true; it was wonderful how fast she—if it were she, the voice sounded like a woman's—got over the ground and Gratian after her, without faltering or stumbling or even getting out of breath.

"Here we are," she said, "stoop down Gratian—there are your books hidden beside the furze bush at your feet. And it is going to rain; they would have been quite spoilt by morning even if I had done my best. It was an ugly trick of Master Tony's. There now, have you got them?"

"Yes, thank you," said Gratian, fumbling for his satchel, still hanging round his shoulders, though to his surprise empty, for he did not remember having thrown the stones out, "I have got them all now. Thank you *very* much whoever you are. I would like to kiss you if only I could see you long enough at a time."

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But a breath like a butterfly's kiss fluttered on to his cheek, and the gleam of two soft bluey-green eyes seemed for the hundredth part of a second to dance into his own.

"I have kissed you," said the voice, now sounding farther away, "and not for the first nor the thousandth time if you had known it! But you are waking up a little now; our baby boy is learning to see and to hear and to feel. Good-bye—good-night, Gratian. Work your best with your books to-night—get home as fast as you can. By the bye it is late; shall I speed you on your way? You will know how far that is to-morrow morning—look for the furze bush on the right of the path when it turns for the last time, and you will see if I don't know how to help you home in no time."

And almost before the last words had faded, Gratian felt himself gently lifted off his feet—a rush, a soft whiz, and he was standing by the Farm gate, while before him shone out the warm ruddy glow from the unshuttered windows of the big kitchen, and his mother's voice, as she heard the latch click, called out to him—

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"Is that you, Gratian? You are very late; if it had not been such a very still, beautiful evening I should really have begun to think you had been blown away coming over the moor."

And Gratian rubbed his eyes as he came blinking into the kitchen. His mother's words puzzled him, though he knew she was only joking. It *was* a very still night—that was the funny part of it.

"Why, you look for all the world as if you'd been having a nap, my boy," she went on, and Gratian stood rubbing his hands before the fire, wondering if perhaps he had. He was half-inclined to tell his mother of Tony's trick and what had come of it. But she might say he had dreamt it, and then it would seem ill-natured to Tony.

"And I don't want mother and father to think I'm always dreaming and fancying," he thought to himself, for just at that moment the farmer's footsteps were heard as he came in to supper. "Anyway I want them to see I mean to get on better at school than I have done."

He did not speak much at table, but he tried to help his mother by passing to her whatever she wanted, and jumping up to fetch anything missing. And it was a great pleasure when his father once or twice nodded and smiled at him approvingly.

"He's getting to be quite a handy lad—eh, mother?" he said.

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As soon as supper was over and cleared away, Gratian set to work at his lessons with a light heart. It was wonderful how much easier and more interesting they seemed now that he really gave his whole attention, and especially since he had tried to understand what the teacher had said about them.

"If only I had tried like this before, how much further on I should be now," he could not help saying to himself with a sigh. "And the queer thing is, that the more I try the more I want to try. My head begins to feel so much tidier."

But with all the goodwill in the world, at nine years old a head cannot do *very* much at a time. Gratian had finished all the lessons he *had* to do for the next day and was going back in his books with the wish to learn over again, and more thoroughly, much that he had not before really taken in or understood, when to his distress his poor little head bumped down on to the volume before

him, and he found by the start that he was going to sleep! Still it wasn't very late—mother had said nothing yet about bed-time.

"It is that I have got into such a stupid, lazy way of learning, I suppose," he said to himself, getting up from his seat. "Perhaps the air will wake me up a bit," and he went through the little entrance hall and stood in the porch, looking out.

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It was a very different night from the last. All was so still and calm that for once the name of the Farm did not seem to suit it.

Gratian leant against the door-post, looking up to the sky, and just then, like the evening before, old Jonas, followed by Watch, came round the corner.

"Good evening, Jonas," said the boy. "How quiet it is to-night! There wasn't much of a storm after all."

"No, Master Gratian," replied the shepherd; "I told you they were only a-knocking about a bit to keep their hands in;" and he too stood still and looked up at the sky.

"I don't like it so still as this," said the boy. "It doesn't seem right. I came out here for a breath of air to wake me up. I've been working hard at my lessons, Jonas; I'm going always to work hard now. But I wish I wasn't sleepy."

"Sign that you've worked enough for to-night, maybe," said Jonas. But as he spoke, Gratian started.

"Jonas," he said, "did you see a sort of light down there—across the grass there in front, a sort of golden-looking flash? ah, there it is again," and just at the same moment a soft, almost warm waft of air seemed to float across his face, and Gratian fancied he heard the words, "good boy, good boy."

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"'Tis a breath of south wind getting up," said old Jonas quietly. "I've often thought to myself that there's colours in the winds, Master Gratian, though folk would laugh at me for an old silly if I said so."

"*Colours*," repeated Gratian, "do you mean many colours? I wasn't saying anything about the wind though, Jonas—did you feel it too? It was over there—look, Jonas—it seemed to come from behind the big bush."

"Due south, due south," said Jonas. "And golden yellow is my fancy for the south."

"And what for the north, and for the——" began Gratian eagerly, but his mother's voice interrupted him.

"Bedtime, Gratian," she called, "come and put away your books. You've done enough lessons for to-night."

Gratian gave himself a little shake of impatience.

"How tiresome," he said. "I am quite awake now. I want you to go on telling me about the winds, Jonas, and I want to do a lot more lessons. I can't go to bed yet," but even while the words were on his lips, he started and shivered. "Jonas, it can't be south wind. It's as cold as anything."

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For a sharp keen gust had suddenly come round the corner, rasping the child's unprotected face almost "like a knife" as people sometimes say, and Watch, who had been rubbing his nose against Gratian, gave a snort of disgust.

"You see Watch feels it too," said the boy. But Jonas only turned a little and looked about him calmly.

"I can't say as I felt it, Master Gratian," he said. "But there's no answering for the winds and their freaks here at the Four Winds Farm, and it's but natural you should know more about 'em than most. All the same, I take it as you're feeling cold and chilly-like means as bed is the best place. You're getting sleepy—to say nothing of the Missus calling to ye to go."

And again the mother's voice was heard.

"Gratian, Gratian, my boy. Don't you hear me?"

He moved, but slowly. A little imp of opposition had taken up its abode in the boy. Perhaps he had been feeling too pleased with his own good resolutions and beginnings!

"Too bad," he muttered to himself, "just when I was getting to understand my lessons better. Old Jonas is very stupid."

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Again the short, sharp cutting slap of cold air on his face, and in spite of himself the boy moved more quickly.

"Good-night, Jonas," he said rather grumpily, though he would not let himself shiver for fear he should again be told it showed he was sleepy, "I'm going. I'm not at all tired, but I'm going all the same. Only how you can say it's south wind—!"

"I don't say so now. I said it *was* south—that soft feeling as if one could see the glow of the south in it. Like enough it's east by now; isn't this where all the winds meet? Well, I'm off too. Good-night, master."

"And you'll tell me about all the colours another time, won't you, Jonas?" said Gratian in a mollified tone.

"Or you'll tell me, maybe," said the old man. "Never fear—we'll have some good talks over it. Out

on the moor some holiday, with nobody but the sheep and Watch to hear our fancies—that's the best time—isn't it?"

And the old shepherd whistled to the dog and disappeared round the corner of the house.

His mother met Gratian at the kitchen door.

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"I was coming out to look for you," she said. "Put away your books now. You'd do no more good at them to-night."

"I wasn't sleepy, mother. I went to the door to wake myself up," he replied. But his tone was no longer fretful or cross.

"Feeling you needed waking up was something very like being sleepy," she answered smiling. "And all the lessons you have to learn are not to be found in your books, Gratian."

He did not at once understand, but he kept the words in his mind to think over.

"Good-night, mother," and he lifted his soft round face for her kiss.

"Good-night, my boy. Father has gone out to the stable to speak to one of the men. I'll say good-night to him for you. Pleasant dreams, and get up as early as you like if you want to work more."

"Mother," said Gratian hesitatingly.

"Well?"

"Is it a good thing to be born where the four winds meet?"

She laughed.

"I can't say," she replied. "It's not done you any harm so far. But don't begin getting your head full of fancies, my boy. Off with you to bed, and get to sleep as fast as you can. Pleasant dreams."

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"But, mother," said the child as he went upstairs, "dreams are fancies."

"Yes, but they don't waste our time. There's no harm in dreaming when we're asleep—we can't be doing aught else then."

"Oh," said Gratian, "it's dreaming in the day that wastes time then."

He was turning the corner of the stair as he said so, speaking more to himself than to his mother. Just then a little waft of air came right in his face. It was not the sharp touch that had made him start at the door, nor was it the soft warm breath which old Jonas said was the south wind. Rather did it remind Gratian of the kindly breeze and the sea-green glimmerings on the moor. He stood still for an instant. Again it fluttered by him, and he heard the words, "Not always, Gratian; not always."

"What was I saying?" he asked himself. "Ah yes—that it is dreaming in the day that is a waste of time! And now she says 'Not always.' You are very puzzling people whoever you are," he went on; "you whose voices I hear in the chimney, and who seem to know all I am thinking whether I say it or not."

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And as he lifted his little face towards the corner whence the sudden draught had come, there fell on his ears the sound of rippling laughter—the merriest and yet softest laughter he had ever heard, and in which several voices seemed to mingle. So near it seemed at first that he could have fancied it came from the old granary on the other side of the wooden partition shutting off the staircase, but again, in an instant, it seemed to dance and flicker itself away, till nothing remained but a faint ringing echo, which might well be no more than the slight rattle of the glass in the old casement window.

Then all was silent, and the boy went on to his own room, and was soon covered up and fast asleep in his little white bed.

There were no voices in the chimney that night, or if there were Gratian did not hear them. But he had a curious dream.

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## CHAPTER IV.

[Pg 43]

### A RAINBOW DANCE

"Purple and azure, white and green and golden,

---

and they whirl  
Over each other with a thousand motions."

*Prometheus*                      *Unbound.*

—SHELLEY

He dreamt that he awoke, and found himself not in his comfortable bed in his own room, but in an equally comfortable but much more uncommon bed in a very different place. Out on the moor!

He opened his eyes and stared about him in surprise; there were the stars, up overhead, all blinking and winking at him as if asking what business a little boy had out there among them all in the middle of the night. And when he did find out where he was, he felt still more surprised at being so warm and cozy. For he felt perfectly so, even though he had neither blankets nor sheets nor pillow, but instead of all these a complete nest of the softest moss all about him. He was lying on it, and it covered him over as perfectly as a bird is covered by its feathers.

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"Dear me," he said to himself, "this is very funny. How have I got here, and who has covered me up like this?"

But still he did not feel so excessively surprised as if he had been awake; for in dreams, as everybody knows, any surprise one feels quickly disappears, and one is generally very ready to take things as they come. So he lay still, just quietly gazing about him. And gradually a murmur of approaching sound caught his ears. It was like soft voices and fluttering garments and breezes among trees, all mixed together, till as it came nearer the voices detached themselves from the other sounds, and he heard what they were saying.

"Yes, he deserves a treat, poor child," said one in very gentle caressing tones; "you have teased him enough, sisters."

"Teased him!" exclaimed another voice, and this time it seemed a familiar one to him; "*I* tease him! Why, as you well know, it is my mission in life to comfort and console. I don't believe in petting and praising to the same extent as you do, perhaps—still you cannot say *I* ever tease. Laugh at him a little now and then, *I* may. But that does no harm."

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"*I* never pet and praise except when it is deserved," murmured the first voice—and as he heard its soft tones a sort of delicious languor seemed to creep over Gratian—"never. But *I* beg your pardon, sister, if *I* misjudged you. You can be rigorous sometimes, you know, and—"

"So much the better—so much the better," broke in with clear cutting distinctness another voice; "how would the world go round—that is to say, how would the ships sail and the windmills turn—if we were all four as sweet and silky as you, my golden-winged sister? But it was *I* who teased the child as you call it—I slapped him on the face; yes, and *I* am ready to do it again—to sting him sharply, when *I* think he needs it."

"Right, right—quite right," said another voice, not exactly sharp and clear like the last, yet with a resemblance to it, though deeper and sterner and with a strange cold strength in its accents. "You are his true friend in doing so. *I* for my part shall always be ready to invigorate and support him—to brace him for the battles he must fight. But you, sister, have a rare gift of correction and of discerning the weak points which may lead to defeat and failure. Yours is an ungrateful task truly, but you are a valuable monitor."

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"*I* must find my satisfaction in such considerations; it is plain *I* shall never get any elsewhere," replied the former speaker, rather bitterly. "What horrid things are said of me, to be sure! Every ache and pain is laid at my door—I am 'neither good for man nor beast,' *I* am told! and yet—I am not all grim and gray, am *I*, sisters? There is a rosy glow in the trail of my garments if people were not so short-sighted and colour-blind."

"True, indeed, as who knows better than *I*," said the sweet mellow tones of the first speaker. "When you come my way and we dance together, sister, who could be less grim than you?"

"Ah, indeed," said the cold, stern voice, but it sounded less stern now, "then her sharp and biting words came from neighbourhood with *me*. Ah well—I can bear the reproach."

"*I* should think so," said the voice which Gratian had recognised, "for you know in your heart, you great icy creature, that you love fun as well as any one. How you do whirl and leap and rush and tear about, once your spirits really get the better of you! And you have such pretty playthings—your snow-flakes and filigree and icicles—none of us can boast such treasures, not to speak of your icebergs and crystal palaces, where you hide heaven knows what. My poor waves and foam, though *I* allow they are pretty in their way, are nothing to your possessions."

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"Never mind all that. *I* don't grumble, though *I* might. What can one do with millions of tons of sand for a toy, *I* should like to know? And little else comes in my way that *I* can play catch-and-toss with! *I* can waft my scents about, to be sure—there is some pleasure in that. But now for our dance—our rainbow dance, sisters—no need to wake him roughly. We need only kiss his eyelids."

And Gratian, who had not all this time, strange to say, known that his eyes were closed again, felt across his lids a breeze so fresh and sudden that he naturally unclosed them to see whence it came. And once open he did not feel inclined to shut them again, *I* can assure you.

The sight before him was so pretty—and not the sight only. For the voices had melted into music—far off at first, then by slow degrees coming nearer; rising, falling, swelling, sinking, bright with rejoicing like the song of the lark, then soft and low as the tones of a mother hushing her baby to sleep, again wildly triumphant like a battle strain of victory, and even while you listened changing into the mournful, solemn cadence of a dirge, till at last all mingled into a slow, even measure of stately harmony, and the colours which had been weaving themselves in the distance, like a plaited rainbow before the boy's eyes, took definite form as they drew near him.

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He saw them then—the four invisible sisters; he saw them, and yet it is hard to tell what he saw! They were distinct and yet vague, separate and yet together. But by degrees he distinguished them better. There was his old friend with the floating sea-green-and-blue mantle, and the streaming fair hair and loving sad eyes, and next her the sister with the golden wings and glowing locks and laughing rosy face, and then a gray shrouded



**"Now for our dance—our rainbow dance, sisters—no need to wake him roughly. We need only kiss his eyelids."**

nimble figure, which seemed everywhere at once, whose features Gratian could scarcely see, though a pair of bright sparkling eyes flashed out now and then, while sometimes a gleam of radiant red lighted up the grim robe. And in and out in the meshes of the dance glided the white form of the genius of the north—cold and stately, sparkling as she moved, though shaded now and then by the steel-blue veil which covered the dusky head. But as the dance went on, the music gradually grew faster and the soft regular movements changed into a quicker measure. In and out the four figures wove and unwove themselves together, and the more quickly they moved the more varied and brilliant grew the colours which seemed a part of them, so that each seemed to have all those of the others as well as her own, and Gratian understood why they had spoken of the rainbow dance. Golden-wings glowed with every other shade reflected on her own rich background, the sister from the sea grew warmer with the red and yellow that shone out among the lapping folds of her mantle, with its feather-like trimming of foam, the gray of the East-wind's garments grew ruddier, like the sky before sunrise, and the cold white of the icy North glimmered and gleamed like an opal. And faster and faster they danced and glided and whirled about, till Gratian felt as if his breath were going, and that in another moment he would be carried away himself by the rush.

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"Stop, stop," he cried at last. "It is beautiful, it is lovely, but my breath is going. Stop."

Instantly the four heads turned towards him, the four pairs of wings sheathed themselves, the eyes, laughing and gentle, piercing and grave, seemed all to be gazing at him at once, and eight outstretched arms seemed as if about to lift him upwards.

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"No—no—" he said, "I don't want—I don't—."

But with the struggle to speak he awoke. He was in his own bed of course, and by the light he saw that it must be nearly time to get up.

He stretched himself sleepily, smiling as he did so.

"What nice dreams I have had," he said to himself. "I wonder if they come of working well at my lessons? *They* said it was to be a treat for me. I wish I could go to sleep and dream it all over again."

But just then he heard his mother's voice calling up the stair to him.

"Are you up, Gratian? You will be late if you are not quick."

Gratian gave himself a little shake of impatience under the bedclothes; he glanced at the window—the sky was gray and overcast, with every sign of a rainy day about it. He tucked himself up again, even though he knew it was very foolish thus to delay the evil moment.

"It's too bad," he thought. "I can *never* do what I want. Last night I had to go to bed when I wanted to sit up, and now I have to get up when I do so want to stay in bed."

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But just at that moment a strange thing happened. The little casement window burst open with a bang, and a blast of cold sharp wind dashed into the room, upsetting a chair, scattering Gratian's clothes, neatly laid together in a little heap, and flinging itself on the bed with a whirl, so that the coverlet took to playing antics in its turn, and the blankets no doubt would have followed its example had Gratian not clutched at them. But all his comfort was destroyed—no possibility of feeling warm and snug with the window open and all this uproar going on. Gratian sprang up in a rage, and ran to the window. He shut it again easily enough.

"I can't think what made it fly open," he said to himself; "there was no wind in the night, and it never burst open before."

He stood shivering and undecided. Now that the window was shut, bed looked very comfortable again.

"I'll just get in for five minutes," he said to himself; "I'm so shivering cold with that wind, I shan't get warm all day."

He turned to the bed, but just as one little foot was raised to get in, lo and behold, a rattle and bang, and again the window burst open! Gratian flew back, it shut obediently as before. But he was now thoroughly awakened and alert. There was no good going back to bed if he was to be blown out of it in this fashion, and Gratian set to to dress himself, though in a rather surly mood, and keeping an eye on the rebellious window the while. But the window behaved quite well—it showed no signs of bursting open, it did not even rattle! and Gratian was ready in good time after all.

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"You look cold, my boy," said his mother, when he was seated at table and eating his breakfast.

"The wind blew my window open twice, and it made my room very cold," he replied rather dolefully.

"Blew your window open? That's strange," said his father. "The wind's not in the east this

morning, and it's only an east wind that could burst in your window. You can't have shut it properly."

"Yes, father, I did—the first time I shut it just as well as the second, and it didn't blow open after the second time. But I *know* I shut it well both times. I think it must be in the east, for it felt so sharp when it blew in."

"It must have changed quickly then," said the farmer, eyeing the sky through the large old-fashioned kitchen window in front of him. "That's the queer thing hereabouts; many a day if I was put to it to answer, I couldn't say which way the wind was blowing."

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"Or which way it *wasn't* blowing, would be more like it," said Mrs. Conyfer with a smile. "It's to be hoped it'll blow you the right way to school anyway, Gratian. You don't look sure of it this morning!"

"I'm cold, mother, and I've always got to do what I don't want. Last night I didn't want to go to bed, and this morning I didn't want to get up, and now I don't want to go to school, and I must."

He got up slowly and unwillingly and began putting his books together. His mother looked at him with a slight smile on her face.

"Must's a grand word, Gratian," she said. "I don't know what we'd be without it. You'll feel all right once you're scampering across the moor."

"Maybe," he replied. But his tone was rather plaintive still. He was feeling "sorry for himself" this morning.

Things in general, however, did seem brighter, as his mother had prophesied they would, when he found himself outside. It was really not cold after all; it was one of those breezy yet not chilly mornings when, though there is nothing depressing in the air, there is a curious feeling of mystery—as if nature were holding secret discussions, which the winds and the waves, the hills and the clouds, the trees and the birds even, know all about, but which we—clumsy creatures that we are—are as yet shut out from.

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"What is it all about, I wonder?" said Gratian to himself, as he became conscious of this feeling—an *autumn* feeling it always is, I think. "Everything seems so grave. Are they planning about the winter coming, and how the flowers and all the tender little plants are to be taken care of till it is over? Or is there going to be a great storm up in the sky? perhaps they are trying to settle it without a battle, but it does look very gloomy up there."

For the grayness had the threatening steel-blue shade over it which betokens disturbance of some kind. Still the child's spirits rose as he ran; there was something reviving in the little gusts of moorland breeze that met him every now and then, and he forgot everything else in the pleasure of the quick movement and the glow that soon replaced the chilly feelings with which he had set out.

He had run a good way, when something white, or light-coloured, fluttering on the ground some little way before him, caught his eye. And as he drew nearer he saw that it was a book, or papers of some kind, hooked on to a low-growing furze bush. Suddenly the words of the mysterious figure of the night before returned to his mind—"Look for the furze bush on the right of the path where it turns for the last time," she had said.

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Gratian stopped short. Yes—there in front of him was the landmark—the path turned here for the last time, as she had said. He looked about him in astonishment.

"This was where my books were last night, then," he said to himself. "I had no idea I had come so far! Why, I was home in half a second—it is very strange—I could fancy it was a dream, or else that last night and the rainbow dance *wasn't* a dream."

He ran on to where the white thing was still fluttering appealingly, as if begging him to detach it. Poor white thing! It was or had been an exercise-book. At first Gratian fancied it must be one of his copy-books, left behind by mistake after his fairy friend had given him back the rest of his books. But as soon as he took it in his hands and saw the neat, clear characters, he knew it was not his, and he did not need to look at the signature, "Anthony Ferris," to guess that it belonged to the miller's son—for Tony was a clever boy, almost at the head of the school, and famed for his very good writing.

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"Ah ha," thought Gratian triumphantly, "I have you now, Master Tony."

He had recognised the book as containing Tony's dictation lessons, for here and there were the wrongly spelt words—not many of them, for Tony was a good speller too—marked by the schoolmaster.

"Tony must have meant to take the book home to copy it out clear, and correct the wrong spelling," thought Gratian. And he remembered hearing the teacher telling Tony's class that on the neatness with which this was done would depend several important good marks. "He'll not be head of his class, now he's lost this book. Serve him right for the trick he played me," said Gratian to himself, as he rolled up the tattered book and slipped it into his satchel. "It's not so badly torn but what he could have copied it out all right, but it would have been torn to pieces by this evening, now that the wind's getting up. So it isn't my fault but his own—nasty spiteful fellow. Where would all *my* poor books have been by now, thanks to him?"

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The wind was getting up indeed—and a cold biting wind too. For just as Gratian was thus thinking, there came down such a gust as he had but seldom felt the force of. For an instant he staggered and all but fell, so unprepared had he been for the sudden buffet. It took all his

strength and agility to keep his feet during the short remainder of the moorland path, so sharp and violent were the blasts. And it was with face and hands tingling and smarting painfully that he entered the schoolroom.

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## CHAPTER V.

[Pg 58]

### GOOD FOR EVIL

"For 'tis sweet to stammer one letter  
Of the Eternal's language;—on earth it is called  
forgiveness!"

*The Children of the Lord's*

*Supper.*—LONGFELLOW

Tony's face was almost the first thing he caught sight of. It was not late, but several children were already there, and Tony, contrary to his custom, instead of playing outside till the very last moment, was in the schoolroom eagerly searching for something among the slates and books belonging to his class. Gratian understood the reason, and smiled to himself inwardly—but had he smiled visibly I don't think his face would have been improved by it. Nor was there real pleasure or rejoicing in the feeling of triumph which for a moment made him forget his smarting face and hands.

"How red you look, Gratian," said Dolly, Tony's sister, "have you been crying?"

"Crying—no, nonsense, Dolly," he replied in a tone such as gentle Gratian seldom used. "Whose face wouldn't be red with such a horrible wind cutting one to pieces." [Pg 59]

"Wind!" repeated Dolly, "I didn't feel any wind. It must have got up all of a sudden. Did you get home quickly last night?"

Gratian looked at her. For half an instant he wondered if there was any meaning in her question—had Dolly anything to do with the trick that had been played him? But his glance at her kindly, honest face reassured him. He was going to answer when Tony interrupted him.

"Got home quick," he said, looking up with a grin; "of course he did. He was in such a hurry to get to work. Didn't you see what a lot of books he took home with him? My! your shoulders must have ached before you got to the Farm, Gratian. Mine did, I know, though 'twas only a short bit I carried your satchel."

"It was pretty heavy," said Gratian, unfastening it as he spoke, and coolly taking out the books one after another, watching Tony the while, "but nothing to hurt. And I got all my lessons done nicely. It was kind of you, Tony, to help me to carry my satchel."

Tony stared—with eyes and mouth wide open.

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"What's the matter?" said his sister. "You look as if you'd seen a ghost, Tony."

The boy turned away, muttering to himself.

"Tony's put out this morning," said Dolly in a low voice to Gratian, "and I can't help being sorry too. He's lost his exercise-book that he was to copy out clear—and the master said it'd have to do with getting the prize. Tony's in a great taking."

"How did he lose it?" asked Gratian with a rather queer feeling, as he wondered what Dolly would say if she knew that at that very moment the lost book was safely hidden away at the bottom of his satchel, which he took care not to leave within Tony's reach.

"He doesn't know," said Dolly dolefully. "He's sure he had it when we left school last night. We were looking for it all evening, and then he thought maybe it'd be here after all. But it isn't."

Then the bell rang for lessons to begin, and Gratian saw no more of Tony, who was at the other side of the schoolroom in a higher class, and though Dolly was in the same as himself, she was some places off, so that there was no chance of any talking or whispering.

Gratian's lessons were well learnt and understood. It was not long before he found himself higher in his class than he had almost ever done before, and he caught the master's eye looking at him with approval, and a smile of encouragement on his face. Why was it he could not meet it with a brightly answering smile as he would have done the day before? Why did he turn away, his cheeks tingling again as if the wind had been slapping them, here inside the sheltered schoolroom? [Pg 61]

The master felt a little disappointed.

"He will never do really well if he is so foolishly shy and bashful," he said to himself, when Gratian turned away as if ashamed to be grateful for the few kind words the teacher said to him at the end of the morning's lessons; and the boy, in a corner of the playground by himself when the other children had run home for their dinner, felt nearly, if not quite, as unhappy as the day before.

"I don't see why I should mind about Tony," he was thinking as he sat there. "He's a naughty, unkind boy, and he deserves to be punished. If it hadn't been for *her* helping me, I wouldn't have



known my lessons a bit this morning, and the master would have thought I was never going to try. I just hope Tony will lose his place and the prize and everything. Oh, how cold it is!" for round the wall, *through* it indeed, it almost seemed, came sneaking a sharp little gust of air, so cold, so cutting, that Gratian actually shivered and shook, and the smarting in his face began again. "I feel cold even in my bones," he said to himself.

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Just then voices reached his ear. The door of the schoolhouse opened and the master appeared, showing out a lady, who had evidently come to speak to him about something. She was a very pleasant-looking lady, and Gratian's eyes rested with satisfaction on her pretty dress and graceful figure.

"Then you will not forget about it? You will let me know in a few days what you think?" Gratian heard her say.

"Certainly, madam," replied the schoolmaster. "I have already one or two in my mind who, I think, may be suitable. But I should like to think it over and to ask the parents' consent."

"Of course—of course. Good-bye then for the present, and thank you," said the lady, and then she went out at the little garden-gate and the schoolmaster returned into his house.

"I wonder what they were talking about," thought Gratian. But he soon forgot about it again—his mind was too full of its own affairs.

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Tony looked vexed and unhappy that afternoon, and Dolly's rosy face bore traces of tears. She overtook Gratian on his way home in the evening, and began again talking about the lost book.

"It's so vexing for Tony, isn't it?" she said, "and do you know, Gratian, it's even more vexing than we thought. Did you see a lady at the school to-day? Do you know who she was?"

Gratian shook his head.

"She's the lady from the Big House down the road, that's been shut up so long. It isn't her house, but she's the sister or the cousin of the gentleman it belongs to, and he's lent it to her because the doctors said the air hereabouts would be good for her little boy. He's ill someway, he can scarcely walk. And she came to the school to-day to ask master if one of the boys—his best boy, she said—might go sometimes to play with her little boy and read to him a little. And Tony was sure of being the top of the class if only he had finished copying out those exercises—he'd put right all the faults the master had marked, and it only wanted copying. But now he's no chance; the other boys have theirs nearly done."

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"How do you know about what the lady said?" Gratian asked.

"The master told mother. He met her in the village just before afternoon lessons, and asked her if she'd let Tony go, if so be as he was head of his class."

"And would he like to go, d'ye think, Dolly?" asked Gratian.

"He'd like to be head of his class, anyway," the sister replied. "I don't know as father can let him go, for we're very busy at the mill, and Tony's big enough to help when he's not at school. But he'd not like to see Ben or that conceited Robert put before him. If it were you now, Gratian, I don't think he'd mind so much."

Gratian's heart beat fast at her words. Visions of the pleasure of going to see the pretty lady and her boy, of hearing her soft voice speaking to him, and of seeing the inside of the Big House, which had always been a subject of curiosity to the children of the village, rose temptingly before him. But they soon faded.

"Me!" he exclaimed, "I'd have no chance—even failing Tony."

"I don't know," said Dolly. "You're never a naughty boy, and you can read very nice when you like. Master always seems to think you read next best to Tony. I shouldn't wonder if he sent you, if he's vexed with Tony. And he will be that, for he told him to do out that writing so very neatly. I think it was to be shown to the gentlemen that come to see the school sometimes. But I musn't go any farther with you, Gratian. It'll be dark before I get home. I'm afraid Tony must have dropped the book out here, and that it blew away. Good-night, Gratian."

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"Good-night, Dolly," he replied. And then after a little hesitation he added, "I wish—I wish Tony hadn't lost his book."

"Thank you, Gratian," said the little girl as she ran off.

Gratian stood and looked after her with a queer mixture of feelings. It was true, as he had said to Dolly, he did wish Tony had not lost his book, but almost more he wished *he* had not found it. But just now, standing there in the softly fading light, with the evening breeze—no longer the sharp blast of the morning—gently fanning his cheeks, looking after little Dolly as she ran home, and thinking of Tony's sunburnt troubled face, the angry feelings seemed to grow fainter, till the wish to see his schoolfellow punished for his mischievous trick died away altogether. And once he had got to this, it was a quick step to still better things.

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"I *will*, I *will*," he shouted out aloud, though there was no one—*was* there no one?—to hear. And as he sprang forward to rush after Dolly and overtake her, it seemed to him that he was half-lifted from his feet, and at the same moment another waft of the breeze he had been feeling, though still softer and with a scent as of spring flowers about it, blew into his face.

"Are you kissing me, kind wind?" he said laughing, and in answer, as it were, he felt himself blown along almost as swiftly as the night before. At this rate it did not take him long to gain ground on the miller's daughter.

"Dolly, Dolly," he called out when he saw himself within a few paces of her. "Stop, do stop. I have something for you—something to say to you."

Dolly turned round in astonishment.

"Gratian!" she exclaimed, "have you been running after me all this time? I would have waited for you if I'd known."

"Never mind. I ran very fast," said Gratian. "Look here, Dolly," and he held out to her the poor copy-book which he had already taken out of his satchel. "This is what I ran after you for; give it to Tony, and—"

"Tony's lost exercise-book!" cried Dolly. "Oh Gratian, how glad he will be. Where did you find it? *How* good of you! Did you find it just now, since you said good-night to me?"

Gratian's face grew red, but it was too dark for Dolly to see.

"No," he said, "I found it before. But—but—Tony had done me a bad turn, Dolly, and it wasn't easy—not all at once—to do him a good one instead. But I've done it now, and you may tell him what I say. I'm quite in earnest, and I'm glad I've done it. Tell him I hope he'll be the head of his class now, anyway, and—"

"Gratian," said Dolly, catching hold of his arm as she spoke, "I don't know what the trick was that Tony played you, or tried to play you. But I know he's terrible fond of tricks, though I don't think he's got a bad heart. And it was too bad of him to play it on you, it was—you that never does ill turns to none of us."

"I've been near it this time, though," said Gratian, feeling, now that the temptation was over, the comfort of confessing the worst. "I was very mad with Tony, and I didn't like bringing myself to give back his book. I don't want you to think me better than I am, Dolly."

"But I do think you very good all the same, I do," said the little girl earnestly, "and I'll tell Tony so. And you shan't have any more tricks played you by him—he's not so bad as that. Thank you very much, Gratian. If he gets the prize, it'll be all through you."

"And about going to the Big House," added Gratian, rather sadly. "He'll be the one for that now. I think that's far before getting a prize. It was thinking of that made me feel I *must* give him his book. I'd give a good deal, I know, to be the one to go the Big House."

"Would you?" said Dolly, a little surprised, for it was not very often Gratian spoke so eagerly about anything. "I don't know that I'd care so much about it. And to be sure you might have been the one if you hadn't helped Tony now! But I don't know that it would be much fun after all—just amusing a little boy that's ill."

"You didn't see the lady, Dolly, but *I* did," said Gratian. "She's not like any one I ever saw before—she's so beautiful. Her hair's a little the colour of yours, I think, but her skin's like—like cream, and her eyes are as kind as forget-me-nots."

"Was she finely dressed?" asked Dolly, becoming interested.

"Yes—at least I think so. Her dress was very soft, and a nice sort of shiny way when she moved, and she spoke so prettily. And oh, Dolly, it'd be terribly nice to see the Big House. Fancy, I've heard tell there are beautiful pictures there."

"Pictures—big ones in gold frames, do you mean?" Dolly inquired.

"I don't know about gold frames. I've never seen any. But pictures of all sorts of things—of places far away, I daresay, where the sky is so blue and the big sea—like what the master tells us sometimes in our geography. Oh, I'd like more than anything to see pictures, Dolly."

"I never thought about such things. What a funny boy you are, Gratian," said Dolly, as she ran off joyfully, with Tony's tattered book in her hand.

It did not take Gratian long to make his way home—the feeling of having done right "adds feather to the heel." But as he sped along the moorland path he could not help wondering to himself if his soft-voiced friend of the night before were anywhere near.

"I think she must be pleased with me," he thought. "It feels like her kissing me," as just then the evening breeze again met him as he ran. "Is it you Golden-wings, or you, Spirit of the Waves?" he said, for he had learnt in his dream to think of them thus. And a little soft laughter in the air about him told him he was not far wrong. "Perhaps it is both together," he thought. "I think they are pleased. It is nicer than when that sharp East-wind comes snapping at one—though after all, East-wind, I think perhaps I should thank you for having stung me as you did this morning—I rather think I deserved it."

Whiz, rush, dash—came a sharp blast as he spoke. Gratian started, and for half a moment felt almost angry.

"I didn't deserve it just now, though," he said. But a ripple of laughter above him made his vexation fade away.



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**"Look here, Dolly," and he held out to her the poor copy-book which he had already taken out of his satchel.**

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"You silly boy," came a whisper close to his ear. "Can't you take a joke?"

"Yes, that I can, as well as any one;" and no sooner were the words out of his mouth than again, with the whir and the swoop now becoming familiar to him, he was once more raised from the ground, and really, before he knew where he was, he found himself at the gate of the farm-house.

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His mother was just coming out to the door.

"Dear me, child," she said, "how suddenly you have come! I have been out several times to the gate to look for you, but though it is not yet dark I didn't see you."

"I did come very quickly, mother dear," said Gratian, and for a moment he thought of telling her about his strange new friends. But somehow, when he was on the point of doing so, the words would not come, and his feelings grew misty and confused as when one tries to recollect a dream that one knows was in one's memory but a moment before. And he felt that the voices of the winds were as little to be told as are the songs of the birds to those who have not heard them for themselves. So he just looked up in his mother's face with a smile, and she stooped and kissed him—which she did not very often do. For the moorland people are not soft and caressing in their ways, but rather sharp and rugged, though their hearts are true.

"I wonder where you come from, sometimes, Gratian," said his mother half-laughing. "You don't seem like the other children about."

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"But mother, I'm getting over dreaming at my lessons. I am indeed," said the child brightly. "I think when you ask the master about me the next time, he'll tell you he's pleased with me."

"That's my good boy," said she well pleased.

So the day ended well for the child of the Four Winds.

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## CHAPTER VI.

[Pg 73]

### ORGAN TONES

"Music, when soft voices die,  
Vibrates in the memory."

SHELLEY

As Gratian was running into school the next morning he felt some one tugging at his coat, and looking round, there was Tony, his round face redder than usual, his eyes bright and yet shy.

"She give it me, Gratian—Doll did—and—and—I've to thank you. I was awful glad—I was that."

"Have you got it done? Will it be all right for the prize and all that?" asked Gratian.

Tony nodded.

"I think so. I sat up late last night writing, and I think I'll get it done to-night. It was awful good of you, Gratian," Tony went on, growing more at his ease, "for I won't go for to say that it wasn't a mean trick about the stones. But I meant to go back and get the books and keep them safe for you till the next morning. You did look so funny tramping along with the bag of stones," and Tony's face screwed itself up as if he wanted to laugh but dared not.

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"It didn't *feel* funny," said Gratian. "It felt very horrid. Indeed it makes me get cross to think of it even now—don't say any more about it, Tony."

For it did seem to him as if, after all, the miller's boy was getting off rather easily! And it felt a little hard that all the good things should be falling to Tony's share, when he had been so unkind to another.

"I want to forget it," he went on; "if the master knew about it, he'd not let you off without a good scolding. But I'm not going to stand here shivering—I tell you I don't want to say any more about it, Tony."

"Shivering," repeated Tony, "why it's a wonderful mild morning for November. Father was just saying so"—and to tell the truth Gratian himself had thought it so as he ran across the moor. "But, Gratian, you needn't be so mad with me now—I know it was a mean trick, and just to show you that I know it, I promise you the master *shall* know all about it," and Tony held his head higher as he said the words. "There's only one thing, Gratian. I do wish you'd tell me where you found my book, and how you knew where I'd hidden yours? I've been thinking and thinking about it, and I can't make it out. Folks do say as there's still queer customers to be met on the moor after nightfall. I wonder if you got the fairies to help you, Gratian?" added Tony laughing.

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Gratian laughed too.

"No, Tony, it wasn't the fairies," he said, his good-humour returning. And it was quite restored by a sweet soft whisper at that moment breathed into his ear—"no, not the fairies—but who it was is our secret—eh, Gratian?" And Gratian laughed again softly in return.

"Who was it then?" persisted Tony. But just then the school-bell rang, and there was no time for more talking.

Tony was kept very busy for the next day or two with his writing-out, which took him longer than he expected. Gratian too was working hard to make up for lost time, but he felt happy. He saw that the master was pleased, and that his companions were beginning to look up to him as they had never done before. But he missed his new friends. The weather was very still—for some days he had heard scarcely a rustle among the trees and bushes, and though he had lain awake at night, no murmuring voices in the chimney had reached his ears.

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"Have they gone away already? Was it all a dream?" the child asked himself sadly.

Sunday came round again, and Gratian set off to church with his father and mother. Going to church was one of his pleasures—of late especially, for the owner of the Big House, though seldom there himself, was generous and rich, and he had spent money in restoring the church and giving a beautiful organ. And on Sunday mornings an organist came from a distance to play on it, but in the afternoon its great voice was silent, for no one in the village—not even the schoolmaster, who was supposed to know most things—knew how to play on it. For this reason Gratian never cared to go to church the second time—he would much rather have stayed out on the moor with Jonas and Watch, and sometimes, in the fine summer weather, when the walk was hot and tiring even for big people, his mother had allowed him to do so. But now, with winter at hand, it was not fit for sauntering about or lying on the heather, especially with Sunday clothes on, so the child knew it was no use asking to stay at home.

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This Sunday afternoon brought a very welcome surprise. Scarcely was the boy settled in his corner beside his mother, before the rich deep tones fell on his ear. He started and looked about him, not sure if his fancy were not playing him false. But no—clearer and stronger grew the music—there was no mistake, and Gratian gave himself up to the pleasure of listening. And never had it been to him more beautiful. New fancies mingled with his enjoyment of it, for it seemed to him that he could distinguish in it the voices of his friends—the loving, plaintive breath of the west, telling of the lapping of the waves on some lonely shore; the sterner, deeper tones of the strong spirit of the north; even the sharply thrilling blast of the ever-restless east wind seemed to flash here and there like lightning darts, cutting through and yet melting again into the harmony. And then from time to time the sweet, rich glowing song of praise from the lips of Golden-wings, the joyful.

"Yes, they are all there," said Gratian to himself in an ecstasy of completest pleasure. "I hear them all. That is perhaps why they have not come to me lately—it was to be a surprise! But I have found you out, you see. Ah, if I could play on the organ you could never hide yourselves from me for long, my friends. Perhaps the organ is one of their real homes. I wonder if it can be."

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And his face looked so bright and yet absorbed that his mother could not help smiling at him, as they sat waiting for a moment after the last notes had died away.

"Are you so pleased to have music in the afternoon too?" she said. "It is thanks to the stranger lady—the squire's cousin, who has come to the Big House. There—you can see her. She is just closing the organ."

Gratian stood up on his tiptoes and bent forward as far as he could. He caught but one glimpse of the fair face, but it was enough. It was the same—the lady with the forget-me-not eyes; and his own eyes beamed with fresh delight.

"They must be friends of hers too," was the first thought that darted through his brain; "she must know them, else she couldn't make their voices come like that. Oh dear, if I could but go to the Big House, perhaps she would tell me about how she knows them."

But even to think of the possibility was very nice. Gratian mused on it, turning it over and over in his mind, as was his wont, all the way home. And that evening, while he sat in his corner reading over the verses which the master always liked his scholars to say on the Monday morning—his father and mother with their big Sunday books open on the table before them as usual—a strange feeling came over him that he was again in the church, again listening to the organ; and so absorbing grew the feeling that, fearful of its vanishing, he closed his eyes and leaned his curly head on the wooden rail of the old chair and listened. Yes, clearer and fuller grew the tones—he was curled up in a corner of the chancel by this time, in his dream—and gradually in front, as it were, of the background of sound, grew out the voices he had learnt to know so well. They all seemed to be singing together at first, but by degrees the singing turned into soft speaking, the sound of the organ had faded into silence, and opening his eyes, by a faint ray of moonlight creeping in through the window, he saw he was in his own bed in his own room.

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How had he come there? Had his mother carried him up and undressed him without awaking him as she had sometimes done when he was a very tiny boy?

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"No—she couldn't. I'm too big and heavy," he thought sleepily. "But hush! the voices again."

"Yes, I carried him up. He was so sleepy—he never knew—nobody knew. The mother looked round and thought he had gone off himself. And Golden-wings undressed him. He will notice the scent on his little shirt when he puts it on in the morning."

"Humph!" replied a second voice, in a rather surly tone, "you are spoiling the child, you and our sister of the south. Snow-wings and I must take him in hand a while—a whi—ile."

For the East-wind was evidently in a hurry. Her voice grew fainter as if she were flying away.

"Stop a moment," said the softest voice of all. "It's not fair of you to say we are spoiling the child—Sea-breezes and I—we're doing nothing of the kind. We never pet or comfort him save when he deserves it—we keep strictly to our compact. You and our icy sister have been free to interfere

when you thought right. Do you hear, Gray-wings! do you he—ar?"

And far off, from the very top of the chimney, came Gray-wings's reply.

"All right—all right, but I haven't time to wait. Good-night—go—od—ni—ght," and for once East-wind's voice sounded soft and musical. [Pg 81]

Then the two gentle sisters went on murmuring together, and what they said was very pleasant to Gratian to hear.

"I say," said Golden-wings—"I say he has been a very good boy. He is doing credit to his training, little though he suspects how long he has been under our charge."

"He is awaking to that and to other things now," replied she whom the others called the Spirit of the Sea. "It is sad to think that some day our guardianship must come to an end."

"Well, don't think of it, then. I never think of disagreeable things," replied the bright voice.

"But how can one help it? Think how tiny he was—the queer little red-faced solemn-eyed baby, when we first sang our lullabies to him, and how we looked forward to the time when he should hear more in our voices than any one but a godchild of ours *can* hear. And now——"

"Now that time has come, and we must take care what we say—he may be awake at this very moment. But listen, sister—I think we must do something—you and I. Our sterner sisters are all very well in their places, but all work and no play is not *my* idea of education. Now listen to my plan;" but here the murmuring grew so soft and vague that Gratian could no longer distinguish the syllables. He tried to strain his ears, but it was useless, and he grew sleepy through the trying to keep awake. The last sound he was conscious of was a flapping of wings and a murmured "Good-night, Gratian. Good-night, little godson—good—ni—ight," and then he fell asleep and slept till morning. [Pg 82]

He would have forgotten it all perhaps, or remembered it only with the indistinctness of a dream that is past, had it not been for something unusual in the look of the little heap of clothes which lay on the chair beside his bed. They were so *very* neatly folded—though Gratian prided himself rather on his own neat folding—and the shirt was so snow-white and smooth that the boy thought at first his mother had laid out a fresh one while he was asleep. But no—yesterday was Sunday. Mrs. Conyfer would have thought another clean one on Monday very extravagant—besides, not even from her linen drawers, scented with lavender, could have come that delicious fragrance! Gratian snuffed and sniffed with ever-increasing satisfaction, as the words he had overheard in the night returned to his memory. And his stockings—they too were scented! What it was like I could not tell you, unless it be true, as old travellers say, that miles and miles away from the far-famed Spice Islands their fragrance may be perceived, wafted out to sea by the breeze. That, I think, may give you a faint idea of the perfume left by the South-wind on her godson's garments. [Pg 83]

"So it's true—I wasn't dreaming," thought the boy. "I wonder what the plot was that I couldn't hear about. I shall know before long, I daresay."

At breakfast he noticed his mother looking at him curiously.

"What is it, mother?" he said; "is my hair not neat?"

"No, child. On the contrary, I was thinking how very tidy you look this morning. Your collar is so smooth and clean. Can it be the one you wore yesterday?"

"Yes, mother," he replied, "just look how nice it is. And hasn't it a nice scent?"

He got up as he spoke and stood beside her. She smoothed his collar with satisfaction.

"It is certainly very well starched and ironed," she said. "Madge is improving; I must tell her so. That new soap too has quite a pleasant smell about it—like new-mown hay. It's partly the lavender in the drawers, I daresay." [Pg 84]

But Gratian smiled to himself—thinking he knew better!

"Gratian," said his mother, two mornings later, as he was starting for school, "I had a message from the master yesterday. He wants to see me about you, but he is very busy, and he says if father or I should be in the village to-day or to-morrow, he would take it kindly if we would look in. I must call at the mill for father to-day—he's too busy to go himself—so I think I'll go on to school, and then we can walk back together. So don't start home this afternoon till I come."

"No, mother, I won't," said Gratian. But he still hung about as if he had more to say.

"What is it?" asked his mother. "You're not afraid the master's going to give a bad account of you?"

"No, mother—not since I've cured myself of dreaming," he answered. "I was only wondering if I knew what it was he was going to ask you."

"Better wait and know for sure," said his mother. So Gratian set off.

But he found it impossible not to keep thinking and wondering about it to himself. Could it be anything about the Big House? Had Tony kept his promise, and told the master of the trick he had played, so that Gratian, and not he, should be chosen? [Pg 85]

"He didn't seem to care about it much," thought Gratian, "not near so much as I should—oh, dear no! Still it wouldn't be very nice for him to have to tell against himself, whether he cared about it or not."

But as his mother had said, it was best to wait a while and know, instead of wasting time in

fruitless guessing.

Tony seemed quite cheerful and merry, and little Dolly was as friendly as possible. After the morning lessons were over and the other children dispersed, the schoolmaster called Gratian in again.

"It is too cold now for you to eat your dinner in the playground, my boy," he said. "After you have run about a little, come in and find a warmer dining-room inside. But I have something else to say to you. I had a talk with Anthony Ferris yesterday."

Gratian felt himself growing red, but he did not speak.

"He told me of the trick he'd played you. A very unkind and silly trick it was, and so I said to him; but as he told it himself I won't punish him. He told me more, Gratian—of your finding his book and giving it back to him, when you might have done him an ill turn by keeping it." [Pg 86]

"I did keep it all one day, sir," said Gratian humbly.

"Ah well, you did give it him in the end," said the master smiling. "I am pleased to see that you did the right thing in face of temptation. And Tony feels it himself. He's an honest-hearted lad and a clever one. He has done that piece of work I gave him well, and no doubt he stands as the head boy"—here the master stopped and seemed to be thinking over something. Then he went on again rather abruptly.

"That was all I wanted to say to you just now, I think. Tony is really grateful to you, and if he can show it, he will. Did your father or mother say anything about coming to see me?"

"Please, sir, mother's coming this afternoon. I'm to wait and go home with her."

"Ah well, that's all right."

But Gratian had plenty to think of while he ate his dinner. He was very much impressed by Tony's having really told.

"I wonder," he kept saying to himself, "I do wonder if perhaps——"

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## CHAPTER VII.

[Pg 87]

### THE BIG HOUSE AND THE LADY

"The light of love, the purity of grace;  
The mind, the music breathing from her face;  
The heart, whose softness harmonised the whole."

Mrs. Conyfer was waiting for Gratian at the gate of the schoolhouse when he came out.

"We must make haste," she said; "I think it's going to rain."

Gratian looked up at the sky, and sniffed the cold evening air.

"Yes," he said, "I think it is."

"It's not so cold quite as it was when I came down," Mrs. Conyfer went on—the dwellers at Four Winds often spoke of "coming down," when they meant going to the village—"that's perhaps because the rain is coming. I don't want to get my bonnet spoilt—I might have known it was going to rain when father said the wind was in the west."

"Why does the west wind bring rain?" asked Gratian; "is it because it comes from the sea?" [Pg 88]

"Nay," said his mother, "I don't know. You should know better about such things than I—you that's always listening to the winds and hearing what they've got to say."

Gratian looked up, a little surprised.

"What makes you say that, mother?" he asked.

Mrs. Conyfer laughed a little.

"I scarcely know," she said. "We always said of you when you were a baby that you seemed to hear words in the wind—you were always content to lie still, no matter how long you were left, if only the wind were blowing. And it seems to me even now that you're always happiest and best when there's wind about, though it's maybe only a fancy of mine."

But Gratian looked pleased.

"No, mother," he said, "I don't think it's a fancy. I think myself it's quite true."

And he pulled off his cap as he spoke and let the wind blow his hair about, and lifted up his face as if inviting its caresses.

"It's getting up," he said. "But I think we'll get home before the rain comes."

His mother had not heard the whisper that had reached his ear through the gust of wind. [Pg 89]

"I will help you home, Gratian, both you and your mother, though she won't know it."

He laughed to himself when he felt the gentle, steady way in which they were blown along—never had the long walk to the Farm seemed so short to Mrs. Conyfer.

"Dear me," she said, when they were within a few yards of the gate, "I couldn't have believed we were home! It makes a difference when the wind is with us, I suppose."

Gratian pulled her back a moment, as she was going in.

"Mother," he said, "what was it the master wanted to say to you? Won't you tell me?"

"I must speak first to father," she replied; "it's something which we must have his leave for first."

Gratian could not ask any more, and nothing more was said to him till the next morning when he was starting for school. Then his mother came to the door with him.

"I've a message for the master," she said. "Listen, Gratian. You must tell him from me that father and I have no objection to his doing as he likes about what he spoke to me of yesterday. He said he'd like to tell you about it himself—so I won't tell you any more. Maybe you'll not care about it when you hear it."

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"Ah—I don't think that," said the boy, as he ran off.

He needed no blowing to school that morning. The way seemed short, even though it was still drizzling—a cold, disagreeable, small rain, which had succeeded the downpour of the night before. But Gratian cared little for rain—what true child of the moors could?—he rather liked it than otherwise, especially when it came drifting over in great sheets, almost blinding for the moment, and then again dispersed as suddenly, so that standing on the high ground one could see on the slopes beneath when it was raining and when it stopped. It gave one a feeling of being "above the clouds" that Gratian liked. But this morning there was nothing of a weather panorama of that kind—just sheer, steady, sapping rain, with no wind to interfere.

"They are tired, I daresay," thought Gratian; "for they must have been hard at work last night, getting the clouds together for all this rain. I expect Golden-wings goes off altogether when it's so cold and dreary. I wonder where she is. I would like to see her home—it must be full of such beautiful colours and scents."

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"And mine—wouldn't you like to see mine?" whistled a sudden cold breath in his ear. "Yes, I have made you jump. But I'm not going to bring the snow just yet—I've just come down for a moment, to see how much rain Green-wings has got together. She mustn't waste it, you see. I can't have her interfering with my reservoirs for the winter. I hold with a good old-fashioned winter—a snowy Christmas and plenty of picture exhibitions for my pet artist, Jack Frost. A good winter's the healthiest in the end for all concerned."

"Yes, I think so too," said Gratian. He wished to be civil to White-wings. It was interesting to have some one to talk to as he went along, and the North-wind in a mild mood seemed an agreeable companion, less snappish and jerky than her sister of the east.

"That's a sensible boy," said the snow-bringer condescendingly; "you've something of the old northern spirit about you here on the moorlands still, I fancy. Ah! if you could see the north—the real north—I don't fancy you would care much about the sleepy golden lands you were dreaming of just now."

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"I'd like to *see* them," replied the child; "I don't say I'd like to live in them always. But the scents and the colours—they must be very beautiful. I seem to know all about them when Golden-wings kisses me."

"Humph," said the Spirit of the North. Both she and Gray-wings had a peculiar way of saying "humph" when Gratian praised either of the gentler sisters—"as for scents I don't say—scent is a stupid sort of thing. I don't understand anything about it. But *colours*—you're mistaken, I assure you, if you think the south can beat me in that. You've got your head full of the idea of snow—interminable ice-fields and all the rest of it. Why, my good boy, did you never hear of Arctic sunsets—not to speak of the Northern Lights? I could show you sunsets and sunrises such as you have never dreamt of—like rainbows painted on gold. Ah, it is a pity you cannot come with me!"

"And why can't I?" asked Gratian. "I'm not afraid of the cold."

The North-wind gave a whistle of good-natured contempt.

"My dear, you'd have no time to be afraid or not afraid—you'd be dead before you'd even looked about you. Ah—it's a terrible inconvenience, those bodies of yours—if you were like us, now! But I mustn't waste my time talking, only as I was passing I thought I'd say a word or two. When my sisters are all together there's never any getting in a syllable edgeways. Good-bye, my child. We'll meet again oftener during the next few months."

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"Good-bye, Godmother White-wings," said Gratian, and a gust of wind rushing past him with a whistle seemed to answer, "Good-bye."

"I'm very glad to have had a little talk with her," he said to himself; "she's much nicer than I thought she was, and she makes one feel so strong and brisk. Dear me—what wonderful places there must be up in the north where she lives!"

The master called him aside after morning lessons.

"Did your mother send any message to me, Gratian?" he asked.

"Yes, sir," and he repeated what Mrs. Conyfer had said.

The schoolmaster looked pleased.

"I'm glad she and your father have no objection," he said. "I think it may be a good thing for you in several ways. But I must explain it to you. You know the Big House as they call it, here? A lady

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and her son have come to stay there for a time—relations of the squire's—"

"Yes, sir, I know," interrupted Gratian; "she plays the organ on Sunday afternoons, and her little boy is ill."

"Not exactly ill, but he had a fall, and he mustn't walk about or stand much. It's dull for him, as at home he was used to companions. His mother asked me to send him one of my best boys—a boy who could read well for one thing—as a playmate. At first I thought of Tony Ferris, and I spoke of him. But Tony has begged me to choose you instead of him."

Gratian raised his brown eyes and fixed them on the master's face.

"Does Tony not want to go?" he asked. "I shouldn't like to take it from him if he wants to go."

"I think he would be happier for you to go," said the master, "and perhaps you may be more suitable. Besides Tony thinks that he owes you something. He has told me of the trick he played you, as you know—and certainly you deserve to be chosen more than he. I am not sure that he would care much about it; but still it will give him pleasure to think he has got it for you, and we may let him have this pleasure."

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"Yes, sir," said Gratian thoughtfully. And then he added, "it was good of Tony to ask for it for me."

"Yes, it was," agreed the master.

"Then when am I to go?" asked Gratian.

"This afternoon. I will let you off an hour or so earlier, and you can stay at the Big House till it is dark. It is no farther home from there than from here, if you go by the road at the back of it. We shall see how you get on, and then the lady will tell you about going again."

Gratian still lingered.

"What is it?" said the master. "Do you not think you shall like it?"

"Oh no, sir, oh no," exclaimed the child. "I was only wondering. Are there pictures at the Big House, do you think, sir?"

"Yes, I think there are some. Are you fond of pictures?"

"I don't know, sir. I've never seen any real ones. But I've often thought about them, and fancied them in my mind. There are such lots of things I'd like to see pictures of that I can't see any other way."

"Well, perhaps you will see some at the Big House," said the master with a smile.

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Out in the playground Gratian ran against Tony.

"Has he told you?" he asked eagerly.

"Yes," said Gratian. "I'm to go this afternoon. It was very good of you, Tony, to want me to go instead of you."

Tony got rather red.

"I don't know that I'd a-cared about it much, Gratian," he said. "It wasn't that as cost me much. But to tell you the truth, I did want to get out of telling the master about the trick I'd played you. And I don't know as I'd have told it, but a mighty queer thing happened—it's thanks to that I told."

"What was it?" asked Gratian.

"It was at night after I was in bed. I'd put off telling, and I thought maybe it'd all be forgotten. And that night all of a sudden there came such a storm of wind that it woke me up—the window had burst open, and I swear to you, Gratian—I've not told any one else—I saw a figure all in white, and with white wings, leaning over my bed, as if it had brought the storm with it. I was so frightened I began to think of all the bad things I had done, and I hollered out, 'I'll tell master first thing to-morrow morning, I will.' And with that the wind seemed to go down as sudden as it came, and I heard a sort of singing, something like when the organ plays very low in church, and there was a beautiful sweet scent of flowers through the room; and I suppose I fell asleep again, for when I woke it was morning, and I could have fancied it was all a dream, for nobody else had heard the wind in the night."

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"We hear it most nights up at our place," said Gratian, "but I'm never frightened of it."

"You would have been that night—leastways I was. I durstn't go back from my word, dream or no dream—so now you know, Gratian, how I came to tell. And I hope you'll enjoy yourself at the Big House."

"I shall thank you for it if I do, all the same, Tony," Gratian replied.

"It's more in your way than mine. I'd feel myself such a great silly going among gentry folk like that," said Tony, as he scampered off to his dinner.

About three o'clock that afternoon Gratian found himself at the gates of the Big House. He had often passed by that way and stood looking in, but he had never been within the gates, for they were always kept locked; and there had been a strange, almost sad look of loneliness and desertedness about the place, even though the gardens had not been allowed to be untidy or overrun. Now it looked already different; the padlock and chain were removed, and there were the marks of wheels upon the gravel. It seemed to Gratian that even if he had not known there were visitors in the old house he would have guessed it.

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He walked slowly up the avenue which led from the gates to the house. He was not the least afraid or shy, but he was full of interest and expectation. He wanted to see everything—to miss nothing, and even the walk up the avenue seemed to him full of wonder and charm. It *had* a charm of its own no doubt, for at each side stood pine-trees like rows of sentinels keeping guard on all comers, tall, stately, and solemn, only now and then moving their heads with silent dignity, as if in reply to observations passing among them up there, too high to be heard. The pines round Gratian's home were not so tall or straight—naturally, for they had a great deal of buffeting to do in order to live at all, and this of course did not help them to grow tall or erect. Gratian looked up in wonder at the great height.

"How I wish I knew what they say to each other up there," he said.

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But just then a drop of something cold falling on his face made him start. It was beginning to rain.

"I wouldn't like to be wet when I first see the lady and the young gentleman," he thought. "I must be quick."

So off he set at a run, which perhaps did not much hasten matters, for when he got to the hall door he was so out of breath that he had to stand still for several minutes before venturing to ring.

The bell, when he did ring it, sounded sharp and hollow, almost like a bell ringing in an empty house. And when the door was opened, he saw that the large hall did look bare and empty, and he felt a little disappointed. But this feeling did not last long. Before he had time to say anything to the servant, a sweet, bright voice came sounding clearly.

"Oh, here he is, Fergus," were the words she said, and in another instant the owner of the voice appeared. It was the lady of the organ. She came forward smiling, and holding out her hand, but Gratian gazed at her for a moment without speaking, nor seeming to understand that she was speaking to him. He had never seen any one like her before. She was tall and fair, and her face was truly lovely. But what made it so, more than the delicate features or the pretty soft colours, was its sunny brightness, which yet from time to time was veiled by a look of pitying sadness, almost sweeter. And at these times the intense blueness of her eyes grew paler and fainter, so that they looked almost gray, like the sea when a cloud comes over the sunny sky above; only as Gratian had never seen the sea, he could not think this to himself.

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What he did say to himself told it quite as well.

"She is like Golden-wings and Green-wings mixed together," was his thought.

And then having decided this, his mind seemed to grow clearer, the sort of confused bewilderment he had felt for a moment wafted itself away, and he distinguished the words she had repeated to him more than once.

"You are the little boy Mr. Cornelius has kindly sent to see my poor little boy. It is kind too of you to come. I hope you and Fergus will be great friends."

She thought he was shy when at first he did not answer. But looking at him again she saw that it was not shyness which was speaking out of his big brown eyes.

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"You are not afraid of me, are you?" she said smiling again.

"Oh no," he replied. "I didn't mean to be rude. I couldn't be frightened of you. I was only thinking—I never saw anybody so beautiful as you before," he went on simply, "and it made me think."

The lady flushed a little—a very little.

"I am pleased that you like my face," she said. "I like yours too, and I am sure Fergus will. Will you come and see him now? He is waiting eagerly for you."

She held out her hand again, and Gratian this time put his little brown one into it confidingly. And thus she led him out of the large, cold hall, down a short passage, rendered light and cheerful by a large window—here a door stood open, and a glow of warmth seemed to meet them as they drew near it.

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## CHAPTER VIII.

[Pg 102]

### LITTLE FERGUS

"Old portraits round in order set,  
Carved heavy tables, chairs, buffet  
Of dark mahogany."

MRS. SOUTHEY

For there was a bright fire burning in the room, which sent red rays flickering and dancing in all directions, lighting up the faded tints of the ancient curtains and covers, and bringing rich crimson shades out of the shining, old dark mahogany furniture. There were flowers too; a bouquet of autumn leaves—bronze and copper and olive—with two or three fragile "last roses" in the middle, on which Gratian's eyes rested with pleasure for a moment, on their way to the small

figure—the most interesting object of all.

He was lying on a little sofa, placed so as to be within reach of the fire's warmth, and yet near enough to the window for him to see out into the garden, to watch the life of the birds and the plants, the clouds and the breezes. The autumn afternoon looked later and darker now to Gratian as he glanced at it from within than when he was himself a part of it out-of-doors, and his eyes returned with pleasure to the nearer warmth and colour, though after the first momentary glimpse of the boy on the sofa a sort of shyness had made him look away.

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For the child was extremely pale and thin—he looked much more ill than Gratian had been prepared for, and this gave him a feeling of timidity that nothing else could have caused. But the lady soon put him at his ease.

"Fergus, dear," she said, "here is the little friend you have been hoping for. Come over here near us, my dear boy"—for she had sat down on a low chair beside the couch, evidently her usual place—"and I will help you to get over the first few steps of making friends. To begin with," she said smiling, "do you know we don't know your name? That seems absurd, doesn't it? And you don't know ours."

"Yes—I know *his*," said Gratian, smiling too, and with a little gesture towards the invalid, so gentle and half-timid that no one could have called it rude; "you have just said it—Fergus. I never heard that name before."

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"It is a Scotch name," said the lady. "One can almost fancy oneself in Scotland here. And tell us your name."

"Gratian," he replied, "Gratian Conyfer."

"What a nice name," said Fergus, speaking for the first time, "and what a queer one! I can say the same to you as you said to me, Gratian—I never heard that name before."

"How did you come by it?" asked Fergus's mother.

"I think it was because mother is called Grace, and there were several baby brothers that died, that were called for father," he replied.

"And how old are you?" asked Fergus, raising himself a little on his elbow. "I'm eight and a half. I'm not so very small for my age when I stand up—am I, mother?"

"No, dear," she answered with a little shadow over her bright face. "And you, Gratian?"

"I am nine," he said; "but they say at school I don't look so much. Tony is twelve, but he is much, much bigger."

"Tony—who is Tony?" asked Fergus; "is he your brother?"

"Oh no, I have no brothers. He's the head boy at the school."

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"Yes," said Fergus's mother, "I remember about him. He was the boy Mr. Cornelius first thought of sending."

"And why didn't he come?" asked Fergus.

Gratian looked up at the lady.

"Did the master tell you?" he asked. The lady smiled, and nodded her head.

"Yes," she said, "I know the story. You may tell it to Fergus, Gratian; he would like to hear it. Now I am going away, for I have letters to write. In half an hour or so you shall have your tea. Would you like it here or in the library, Fergus?"

"Oh, in the library," he said eagerly. "I haven't been there for two days, mother. And then Gratian can see the pictures—you told me he liked pictures?—and best of all, you can play the organ to us, little mother."

"Then you feel better to-day, my boy?" she said, stooping to kiss the white forehead as she was leaving the room. "Some days I can't get him to like to move about at all," she added to Gratian.

"Yes, I do feel better," he said. "I don't mind it hurting me when I don't feel that horrible way as if I didn't care for *anything*. Have you ever been ill, Gratian? Do you know how it feels?"

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Gratian considered.

"I once had a sore throat," he said, "but I didn't mind very much. It was winter, and I had a fire in my room, and I liked to see the flames going dancing up the chimney."

"Yes," said Fergus, "I know how you mean. I'm sure we must have the same thinkings about things, Gratian. Do you like music too, as much as pictures? Mother says people who like pictures very much, often like music too, and—and—there's something else that those kind of people like too, but I forget what."

"Flowers," suggested Gratian; "flowers and trees, perhaps."

"No," said Fergus, looking a little puzzled, "these would count in with pictures, don't you think? I'll ask mother—she said it so nicely. Don't you like when anybody says a thing so that it seems to fit in with other things?"

"Yes," said Gratian, "I think I do. But I think things to myself, mostly—I've not got anybody much to talk to, except sometimes Jonas. He's got very nice thoughts, only he'd never say them except to Watch and me."

"Who's Watch?" asked Fergus eagerly. "Is he a dog?"

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"He's our sheep-dog, and Jonas is the shepherd," replied Gratian. "They're sometimes alone with the sheep for days and days—out on the moors. It's so strange—I've been with them sometimes—it's like another world—to see the moors all round, ever so far, like the sea, I suppose—only I've never seen the sea—and not a creature anywhere, except some wild birds sometimes."

"Stop," said Fergus, closing his eyes; "yes, I can see it now. Go on, Gratian—is the sky gray, or blue with little white clouds?"

"Gray just now," said the boy, "and there's no wind that you can feel blowing. But it's coming—you know it's coming—now and then Watch pricks up his ears, for he can tell it much farther off than we can, and old Jonas pats him a little. Jonas has an old blue round cap—a shepherd's cap—and his face is brownish-red, but his hair is nearly white, and his eyes are very blue. Can you see him, Fergus? And the sheep keep on browsing—they make a little scrumping noise when you are quite, quite close to them. And just before the wind really comes a great bird gives a cry—up, very high up—and it swoops down for a moment and then goes up again, till it looks just a little black speck against the sky. And all the time you know the wind is coming. Can you see it all, Fergus?"

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"All," said the boy; "it's beautiful. You must tell me pictures often, Gratian, till I can go out again. I never had any one who could make them come so, except mother's music—they come with that. Haven't you noticed that they come with music?"

"I don't know," said Gratian. "I've never seen any real pictures—painted ones in big gold frames."

"There are some here," said Fergus; "not very many, but some. I like a few of them—perhaps you will too. But I like the pictures that come and go in one's fancy best. That's the kind that mother's music brings me."

"Yes," said Gratian, his eyes sparkling, "I understand."

"I was sure you would," said Fergus, with a tiny touch of patronising in his tone, which Gratian was too entirely single-minded to see, or rather perhaps to object to if he did see it. "I knew the minute I saw you, you'd suit me. I'm very glad that other fellow didn't come instead of you. But, by the bye, you haven't told me about that—mother said you'd tell me."

Gratian related the story of his satchel of stones. Fergus was boy enough to laugh a little, though he called it a mean trick; but when Gratian told of having found his books again, he looked puzzled.

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"How could you find them?" he asked. "It was nearly dark, didn't you say?"

"I don't quite know," replied Gratian, and he spoke the truth. It was always difficult for him to distinguish between real and fancy, dreaming and waking, in all concerning his four friends, and in some curious way this difficulty increased so much if he ever thought of talking about them, that he felt he was not meant to do so. "I have fancies sometimes—like dreams, perhaps—that I can't explain. And they help me often—when I am in any trouble they help me."

"I don't see how fancies can help you to find things that are lost," said Fergus, who, except in his own particular way, was more practical than Gratian, "unless you mean that you dream things, and your dreams come true."

"It's a little like that," Gratian replied. "I think I had a sort of dream about coming here. I did so want to come—most of all since I heard the lady play in church."

"Yes," said Fergus, "isn't mother's playing beautiful? I've not heard her play in church for ever so long, but I'm so glad there's an organ here. She plays to me every day. I like music best of everything in the world—don't you?"

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To which Gratian gave his old answer—"I don't know yet."

Then they began talking of more commonplace things. Each told the other of his daily life and all his childish interests. Fergus was greatly struck by the account of Gratian's home—the old house with the queer name.

"How I should like to see it," he said, "and to feel the wind blow."

"The winds," corrected Gratian, "the four winds."

"The *four* winds," repeated Fergus. "North, south, east, and west. They don't blow all together, do they?"

"I think they do sometimes. Yes, I know they do—at night I'm sure I've heard them all four together, like tones in music."

Fergus looked delighted.

"Ah, you have to come back to music, you see," he said. "There's nothing tells everything and explains everything as well as music."

"You must have thought about it a great deal," said Gratian admiringly. "I've only just begun to think about things, and I think it's very puzzling, though I'm older than you. I don't know if music would explain things to me."

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"Perhaps not as much as to me," said Fergus. "You see it's been my best thing—ever since I was five years old I've been lying like this. At home the others are very kind, but they can't quite understand," he added, shaking his head a little sadly; "they can all run about and jump and play."

And when children can do all that, they don't need to think much. Still it is very dull without them—that is why I begged mother to try to get me somebody to play with. But I think you're better than that, Gratian. I think you understand more—how is it? You've never been ill or had to lie still."

"No," said the boy, "but I've had no brothers and sisters to play with me. And perhaps it's with being born at Four Winds—mother says so herself."

"I daresay it is," said Fergus gravely.

"Won't you get better soon?" asked Gratian, looking at Fergus with profound sympathy. For, gentle as he was, the idea of having to lie still, not being able to run about on the moors and feel his dear winds on his face, having even to call to others to help him before he could get to the window and look out on the sunshine—it seemed perhaps more dreadful to Gratian than it would have done to an ordinary, healthy child like Tony Ferris. "Won't you too be able to walk and run about—even if it's only a little?"

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"I hope so," Fergus replied. "Mother says I mustn't expect ever to be quite strong. But they say I'm getting better. That's why mother brought me here. Do you know I can eat ever so much more than when I came? If I can get well enough to play—even on a piano—I wouldn't mind so much. I could make up all sorts of things for myself then—I could make pictures even of the moorland and Four Winds Farm, I think, Gratian."

"I'll try to tell you them—I'll try to make some of my fancies into stories and pictures," said Gratian; "then afterwards, when you get well and can play, you can make them into music."

Just then the door opened, and Fergus's mother came in.

"Tea is ready," she said, "and Andrew is going to carry you into the library, Fergus."

She looked at the boy a little anxiously as she spoke, and Gratian saw that a slight shadow of pain or fear crept over Fergus's face.

"Mother," he said, "would it perhaps be better to stay here after all? You could show Gratian the pictures."

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The lady looked very disappointed.

"The tea is so nicely set out," she said, "and you know you can't hear the organ well from here. And Andrew doesn't hurt you—he is very careful."

Gratian looked on, anxious too. He understood that it must be good for Fergus to go into another room, otherwise his mother would not wish it. Fergus caught sight of the eagerness on Gratian's face, and it carried the day.

"I will go," he said; "here, Andrew."

A man-servant, with a good-humoured face and a strong pair of arms, came forward and lifted the child carefully.

"You walk beside me, Gratian, and hold my hand. If it hurts much I will pinch you a little, but don't let mother know," he said in a whisper; and thus the little procession moved out of the room right across the hall and down another corridor.

"There must be a window open," said Fergus; "don't you feel the air blowing in? Oh don't shut it, mother," as the lady started forward, "it's such nice soft air—scented as if they were making hay. Oh, it's delicious."

His mother seemed a little surprised.

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"There is no window open, dear," she said. "It must be that you feel the change from the warm room to the hall. Perhaps I should have covered you up."

"Oh no, no," repeated Fergus. "I'm not the least cold. It's not a cold wind at all. Gratian, don't *you* feel it?"

"Yes," said Gratian, holding Fergus's hand firmly. But his eyes had a curious look in them, as if he were smiling inwardly to himself.

"Golden-wings, you darling," he murmured, "I know you're there—thank you so much for blowing away his pain."

In another moment Fergus was settled on a couch in the library—a lofty room with rows and rows of books on every side, nearly up to the ceiling. It would have looked gloomy and dull but for the cheerful fire in one corner and the neat tea-table drawn up before it; as it was, the sort of solemn mystery about it was very pleasing to Gratian.

"Isn't it nice here?" said Fergus. "I'm so glad I came. And do you know it didn't hurt me a bit. The fresh air that came in seemed to blow the pain away."

"I think you really must be getting stronger," said his mother, with a smile of hopefulness on her face, as she busied herself with the tea-table; "you have brought us good luck, Gratian."

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"I believe he has," said Fergus. "Mother, do you know what he has been telling me? He was born where the four winds meet—he *must* be a lucky child, mustn't he, mother?"

"I should say so, certainly," said the lady with a smile. "I wonder if it is as good as being born on a Sunday."

"Oh far better, mother," said Fergus; "there are lots of children born on Sundays, but I never

heard of one before that was born at the winds' meeting-place."

"Gratian will be able to tell you stories, I daresay," said his mother—"stories which the winds tell him, perhaps—eh, Gratian?"

Gratian smiled.

"He has been telling me some pictures already," said Fergus; "oh, mother I'm so happy."

"My darling," said his mother. "Now let me see what a good appetite you have. You must be hungry too, Gratian, my boy. You have a long walk home before you."

Gratian was hungry, but he hardly felt as if he could eat—there was so much to look at and to think about. Everything was so dainty and pretty; though he was well accustomed at the Farm to the most perfect cleanliness and neatness, it was new to him to see the sparkling silver, the tea-kettle boiling on the spirit-lamp with a cheerful sound, the pretty china and glass, and the variety of bread and cakes to tempt poor Fergus's appetite. And the lady herself—with her forget-me-not eyes and sweet voice. Gratian felt as if he were in fairyland.

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## CHAPTER IX.

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### MUSIC AND COUNSEL

"What is this strange new life, this finer sense,  
Which lifts me out of self, and bids me  
... rise to glorious thought  
High hopes, and inarticulate fantasies?"

"Voices."—*Songs of Two*

*Worlds*

After tea Fergus's mother turned to the two boys.

"Shall I play to you now?" she said, "or shall we first show Gratian the pictures?"

"Play the last thing, please," said Fergus. "I like to keep it in my mind when I go to bed—it makes me sleep better. We can go into the gallery now and show Gratian the pictures; it would be too dark if we waited."

"It is rather dark already," said the lady, "still Gratian can see some, and the next time he comes he can look at them again."

She rang the bell, and when Andrew came, she told him to wheel Fergus's couch into the picture-gallery, which opened into the library where they were.

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Andrew opened a double door at the other end of the room from that by which they had come in, and then he gently wheeled forward the couch on which Fergus was lying, and pushed it through the doorway. The gallery was scarcely large enough to deserve the name, but to Gratian's eyes it looked a very wonderful place. It was long and rather narrow, and the light came from the top, and along the sides and ends were hung a good many pictures. All down one side were portraits—gentlemen with wigs, and ladies with powder, and some in queer, fancy dresses, mostly looking stiff and unnatural, though among them were some beautiful faces, and two or three portraits of children, which caught Gratian's eye.

"What do you think of them?" asked Fergus.

Gratian hesitated.

"I don't think people long ago could have been as pretty as they are now," he said at last, "except that lady in the long black dress—oh, she is very pretty, and so is the red little boy with the dog, and the two girls blowing soap-bubbles. The big one has got eyes like—like the lady's," he added half-timidly.

The lady looked pleased.

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"You have a quick eye, Gratian," she said. "The pictures you admire are the best here, and that little girl is my great-grandmother. Now, look at the other side. These are pictures of all kinds—not family ones."

Gratian followed her in silence. The pictures were mostly landscapes—some so very old and dark that one could scarcely distinguish what they were. And some of which the colours were brighter, the boy did not care for any better—they were not like any skies or trees he had ever seen or even imagined, and he felt disappointed.

Suddenly he gave a little cry.

"Oh, I like that—I do like that," he said, and he glanced up at the lady for approval.

She smiled again.

"Yes," she said, "it is a wonderful picture. Quite as much a picture of the wind as of the sea."

Gratian gazed at it with delight. The scene was on the coast, on what one might call a playfully stormy day. The waves came dancing in, their crests flashing in the sunshine, pursued and tossed

by the wind; and up above, the little clouds were scudding along quite as busy and eager about *their* business, whatever it was, as the white-sailed fishing-boats below.

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"Do you like it so very much?" she asked.

"Yes," the boy replied, "that's like what I fancied pictures were. I've never seen the sea, but I can feel it must be like that."

And after this he did not seem to care to see any others.



**And when she sat down to play the light sparkled and glowed on her fair hair, making it look like gold.**

Fergus too was getting a little tired of lying alone while his mother and Gratian made the tour of the gallery. So Andrew was called to wheel him back again to the other door of the library, from whence he could best hear the organ. It stood at one side of the large hall, in a recess which had probably been made on purpose. It was dark in the recess even at mid-day, and now the dusk was fast increasing, so the lady lit the candles fixed at each side of the music-desk, and when she sat down to play the light sparkled and glowed on her fair hair, making it look like gold.

Gratian touched Fergus.

"Doesn't it look pretty?" he said, pointing to the little island of light in the gloomy hall.

Fergus nodded.

"I always think mother turns into an angel when she plays," he said. "Now, let's listen, Gratian, and afterwards you can tell me what pictures the music makes to you, and I'll tell you what it makes to me."

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The organ was old and rather out of repair, and Andrew was not very well used to blowing. That made it, I think, all the more wonderful that the lady could bring such music out of it. It was not so fine and perfect, doubtless, as what Gratian had heard from her in church on the Sunday afternoon, but still it was beautiful enough for him to think of nothing but his delight in listening. She played several pieces—some sad and plaintive, some joyful and triumphant, and then Gratian begged her to play the last he had heard at church.

"That is a good choice for our good-night one," she said. "It is a favourite of Fergus's too. He calls it his good-night hymn."

Fergus did not speak—he was lying with his eyes shut, in quiet happiness, and as the last notes died away, "Don't speak yet, Gratian," he said, "you don't know what I am seeing—flocks of birds are slowly flying out of sight, the sun has set, and one hears a bell in the distance ringing very faintly; one by one the lights are going out in the cottages that I see at the foot of the hill, and the night is creeping up. That is what *I* see when mother plays the good-night. What do you see, Gratian?"

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"The moor, I think," said the boy, "our own moor, up, far up, behind our house. It must be looking just as I see it now, at this very minute; only the music is coming from some place—a church, I think, *very* far away. The wind is bringing it—the south wind, not the one from the sea. And you know that when the music is being played in the church there are lots of people all kneeling so that you can't see their faces, and I think some are crying softly."

"Yes," said Fergus, "that isn't so bad. I can see it too. You'll soon get into the way, Gratian," he went on, with his funny little patronising tone, "of making music-pictures if we practice it together. That's the best of music, you see. It makes itself and pictures too. Now pictures never make you music."

"But they give you feelings—like telling you stories—at least that one I like so much does. And I suppose there are many pictures like that—as beautiful as that?" he went on, as if asking the question from the lady, who had left the organ now and was standing by Fergus, listening to what they were saying.

"Yes," she said, "there are many pictures I should like you to see, and many places too. Places which make one wish one could paint them the moment one sees them. Perhaps it is pictures you are going to care most for, little Gratian? If so, they will be music and poetry and everything to you—they will be your voice."

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"*Poetry*," repeated Fergus, "that's the other thing—the thing I couldn't remember the name of, Gratian."

Gratian looked rather puzzled.

"I don't know much about poetry," he said. "But I don't know about anything. I never saw pictures before. There are so many things to know about," he added with a little sigh.

"Don't be discouraged," said the lady smiling. "Everybody has to find out and to learn and to work hard."

"Has everybody a voice?" asked Gratian.

"No, a great many haven't, and some who have don't use it well, which is worse than having

none. But don't look so grave; we shall have plenty of time for talking about all these things. I think you must be going home now, otherwise your mother will be wondering what has become of you. And thank her for letting us have you, and say I hope you may come again on Saturday. You don't mind the long walk home—for it is almost dark, you see?"

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"Oh no, I don't mind the dark or anything like that," said Gratian with a little smile, which the lady, even though her forget-me-not eyes were so very clear, could not quite understand.

For he was thinking to himself, "How could I be afraid, with my four godmothers to take care of me, wherever I were?"

Then he turned to say good-bye to Fergus, and the little fellow stretched up his two thin arms and clasped them round the moorland child's neck.

"I love you," he said; "kiss me and come again soon, and let us make stories to tell each other."

The lady kissed him too.

"Thank you for being so good to Fergus," she said.

And Gratian, looking up in her face, wished he could tell her how much he had liked all he had seen and heard, but somehow the words would not come. All he could say was, "Thank you, and good-night."

Out-of-doors again, especially when he got as far as the well-known road he passed along every day, it seemed all like a dream. All the way down the avenue of pines he kept glancing back to see the lights in the windows of the Big House—he liked to think of Fergus and his mother in there by the fire, talking of the afternoon and making, perhaps, plans for another.

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"I hope his back won't hurt him to-night when they carry him up to bed," he said to himself. "It was very good of Golden-wings to come. But I'm afraid she can't be here much more, now that the winter is so near. Green-wings might perhaps come sometimes, but——"

A sudden puff of wind in his face, and a voice in his ear, interrupted him. The wind felt sharp and cold, and he did not need the tingling of his cheeks to tell him who was at hand.

"But what?" said the cutting tones of Gray-wings. "Ah, I know what you were going to say, Master Gratian. White-wings and I are too sharp and outspoken for your new friends! Much you know about it. On the contrary, nothing would do the lame boy more good than a nice blast from the north, once he is able to be up and about again. It was for the moorland air the doctors, with some sense for once, sent him up here. And I am sure you must know it isn't Golden-wings and Green-wings only who are to be met with on the moors."

"I'm very sorry if I've offended you," said Gratian, "but you needn't be quite so cross about it. I don't mind you being sharp when I deserve it, but I've been quite good to-day, *quite* good. I'm sure the lady wouldn't like me if I wasn't good."

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"Humph!" said Gray-wings. At least she meant it to be "humph," and Gratian understood it so, but to any one else it would have sounded more like "whri—i—zz," and you would have put up your hand to your head at once to be sure that your cap or hat wasn't going to fly off. "Humph! I don't set up to be perfect, though I might boast a little more experience, a few billions of years more, of this queer world of yours than you. And I've been pretty well snubbed in my time and kept in my proper place—to such an extent, indeed, that I don't now even quarrel with having a *very* much worse name than I deserve. It's good for one's pride, so I make a wry face and swallow it, though of course, all the same, it must be a very pleasant feeling to know that one has been quite, *quite* good. I wish you'd tell me what it's like."

"You're very horrid and unkind, Gray-wings," said Gratian, feeling almost ready to cry. "Just when I was so happy, to try and spoil it all. Tell me what you think I've not been good about and I'll listen, but you needn't go mocking at me for nothing."

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There was no answer, and Gratian thought perhaps Gray-wings was feeling ashamed of herself. But he was much mistaken. She was only reserving her breath for a burst of laughter. Gratian of course knew it was laughter, though I don't suppose either you or I would have known it for that.

"What is it that amuses you so?" asked the boy.

"It's Green-wings—you can't see her unfortunately—she's posting down in such a hurry. She thinks I tease you, and she knows I'm in rather a mischievous mood to-night. But they've caught her—she can't get past the corner over there, where the Wildridge hills are—and she is in such a fuss. The hills never like her to run past without paying them a visit if they can help it, and she's too soft-hearted to go on her way will-ye, nill-ye, as I do. So you'll have to trust to me to take you home after all, my dear godchild."

"Dear Green-wings," said Gratian, "I don't like her to be anxious about me."

"Bless you, she's always in a pathetic humour about some one or something," said Gray-wings.

"I don't mind you taking me home if you won't mock at me," said Gratian. "Are you really displeased with me? Have I done anything naughty without knowing it?"

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Gray-wings's tone suddenly changed. Never had her voice sounded so gentle and yet earnest.

"No, my child. I only meant to warn you. It is my part both to correct and to warn—of the two I would rather, by far, warn. Don't get your little head turned—don't think there is nothing worth, nothing beautiful, except in the new things you may see and hear and learn. And never think yourself *quite* anything. That is always a mistake. What will seem new to you is only another way

of putting the old—and the path to any real good is always the same—never think to get on faster from leaving it. You can't understand all this yet, but you will in time. Now put your arms out, darling—I am here beside you. Clasp them round my neck; never mind if it feels cold—there. I have you safe, and here goes——"

A whirl, a rapid upbearing, a rush of cold, fresh air, and a pleasant, dreamy feeling, as when one is rocked in a little boat at sea. Gratian closed his eyes—he *was* tired, poor little chap, for nothing is more tiring than new sights and feelings—and knew no more till he found himself lying on the heather, a few yards from the Farm gates.

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He looked about him—it was quite night by now—he felt drowsy still, but no longer tired, and not cold—just pleasantly warm and comfortable.

"Gray-wings must have wrapped me up somehow," he said to himself. "She's very kind, really. But I must run in—what would mother think if she saw me lying here?"

And he jumped up and ran home.

The gate was open, the door of the house was open too, and just within the porch stood his mother.

"Is that you, Gratian?" she said, as she heard his step.

"Yes, mother," he replied; and as he came into the light he looked up at her. She was much, much older-looking than Fergus's mother, for she had not married young, and Gratian was the youngest of several, the others of whom had died. But as he glanced at her sunburnt face, and saw the love shining out of her eyes, tired and rather worn by daily work as she was, she somehow reminded him of the graceful lady with the sweet blue eyes.

"I understand some of what Gray-wings said," he thought. "It's the same in mother's face and in hers when she looks at Fergus."

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And he held up his mouth for a kiss.

"Have you been happy at the Big House?" Mrs. Conyfer asked. "Were they kind to you? She seems a kind lady, if one can trust to pretty looks."

"Oh! she's very kind," answered Gratian eagerly; "and so's Fergus. He's her boy, mother—he can't walk, nor scarcely stand. But he's getting better—the air here will make him better."

"It's to be hoped so, I'm sure," said the farmer's wife, with great sympathy in her tone. "It must be a terrible grief—the poor child—I couldn't find it in my heart to refuse to let you go when Mr. Cornelius told me of his affliction. But you were happy, and they were good to you?"

"Oh, mother! yes—happier than ever I was in my life."

Mrs. Conyfer smiled and yet sighed a little. She knew her child was not altogether like his compeers of the moor country—she was proud of it, and yet sometimes afraid with a vague misgiving.

"Come in and warm yourself—it's a cold evening. There's some hot girdle cakes and a cup of Fernflower's milk for your supper—though maybe you had so many fine things to eat at the Big House that you won't be hungry."

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"Ah, but I am, though," he said brightly; and the big kitchen looked so cheery, and the little supper so tempting, that Gratian smiled with satisfaction.

"How good of you to make it so nice for me, mother!" he said. "I could never like *anywhere* better than my own home, however beautiful it was."

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## CHAPTER X.

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### THE STORY OF THE SEA-GULL

Now my brothers call from the bay,  
Now the great winds shoreward blow,  
Now the salt tides seaward flow,  
Now the wild white horses play,  
Champ and chafe and toss in the spray,  
Children dear, let us away!  
This way, this way!"

#### *The Forsaken Merman*

The winter—the real winter, such as it is known up in that country—came on slowly that year. There was no snow and but little frost before Christmas. Fergus gained ground steadily, and his mother, who at first had dreaded the experiment of the bleak but bracing air, was so encouraged that she stayed on from week to week. And through these weeks there was never a half-holiday which the two boys did not spend together.

Gratian was learning much—more than even those who knew him best had full understanding of; much, much more than he himself knew.

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"He is like a different child," said the schoolmaster one day to the lady, when she had looked in as she was passing through the village; "if you had seen him a year ago; he seemed always dreaming or in the clouds. I really thought I should never succeed in teaching him anything. You have opened his mind."

"His mind had begun to open before he ever saw me, Mr. Cornelius," said Fergus's mother with a smile. "It is like a flower—it asks nothing but to be allowed to grow. He is a very uncommon child—one could imagine that some specially happy influences surrounded him. He seems to take in and to feel interest in so many different things. I wonder what he will grow up."

"Ah yes, ma'am," said the schoolmaster with a sigh. "It is a pity to think of his being no more than his father before him. But yet, what can one do?"

"One would like at least to find out what he *might* be," she said thoughtfully. "He will be a *good* man, whether he ever leaves the moors or not—of that I feel sure. And if it is his duty to stay in this quiet corner of the world, I suppose we must not regret it."

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"I suppose not. I *try* to think so," said the schoolmaster. But from something in his tone the lady suspected that he was looking back rather sadly on dreams, long ago past, of his own future—dreams which had never come to pass, and left him but the village schoolmaster.

And her sympathy with this half-understood disappointment made her think still more of Gratian.

"Cornelius would live again in this child if he should turn out one of the great few," she thought to herself.

It was one of the afternoons Gratian now always spent with Fergus. She could leave her lame boy with perfect comfort in his friend's care, sure that he would be both safe and happy. As she made her way up the pine avenue and drew near to the house, she heard bright voices welcoming her.

"Mother dear," Fergus called out, "I have walked twelve times along the south terrace—six times up and six times down—with Gratian's arm. It is so sheltered there—just a nice little soft breeze. Do you know, Gratian, I so often notice that breeze when you are here? It is as if it came with you."

"But it is getting colder now, my boy," she answered. "You must come in. I have been to see Mr. Cornelius, Gratian. I am so glad to hear that he is pleased with your lessons. I would not like him to think that being with us distracted your attention."

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"I'm sure it doesn't, ma'am," said Gratian simply. "So often the things you tell me about or read to us, or that I hear about somehow when I am here, seem to come in just at the right minute, and to make my lessons easier. I have never found lessons so nice as this winter."

"I don't like lessons," said Fergus. "I never shall like them."

"You will have to look upon them as necessary evils then," said his mother.

"I usedn't to like them," said Gratian. "Now I often think I'd like to go on till I'm quite big."

"Well, so you can, can't you?" said Fergus.

"No," Gratian replied; "boys like me have to stop when they're big enough to help their fathers at home, and I've no big brother like Tony. I'll have to stop going to school before very long. I used to think I'd be very glad. Now I'd be sorry even if I was to be a shepherd."

"How do you mean?" asked the lady.

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Gratian looked up at her with his soft brown eyes.

"I used to think being a shepherd and lying out on the heather all day—alone with the sheep and Watch, like old Jonas—would be the best life of any. But now I want to know things. I think one can fancy better when one knows more. And I'd like to do more than fancy."

"What would you like to do?" asked Fergus's mother. "Would you like to learn to *make* music as well as to play it? That is what Fergus wants to do."

Gratian shook his head.

"I don't know," he replied. "I don't know *yet*. And isn't it best not to plan about it, because I know father will need me on the farm?"

"Perhaps it is best," she said. But she answered as if thinking of something else at the same time.

And then Andrew came out to help Fergus up the steps into the house, where tea was waiting for them in the library.

Fergus's mother was rather tired. She had walked some distance to see a poor woman who was ill that afternoon.

"Don't ask me to play much to-day, my dear boys," she said. "I never like to play much when I am tired; it doesn't seem fair to the music."

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"Then you sha'n't play at all, mother darling," said Fergus. "Gratian, I'll tell you what; you shall tell mother and me a story. That will rest her nicely."

Gratian looked up hesitatingly.

"He tells such nice stories," Fergus went on.

"Does he often tell them?" asked the lady.

"Yes, when we are alone," said Fergus.

"The music makes me think of them very often," said Gratian. "It makes Fergus see pictures, and it makes me think stories. Sometimes I can see pictures too, but I think I like stories best."

"He made a beauty the other day, about a Princess whose eyes were forget-me-nots, so that whoever had once seen her could never forget her again; and if they were good people it made them very happy, but if they were naughty people it made them very unhappy—only it did them all good somehow in the end. Gratian made it come right."

"That sounds very pretty," said the lady. "Did that come out of my music?"

"No," said the boy, "that story came mostly out of your eyes. I called you the lady with the forget-me-not eyes the first Sunday in church."

He spoke so simply that the lady could not help smiling.

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"My eyes thank you for your pretty thoughts of them," she said. "Will you tell that story again?"

"No," Fergus interrupted. "I want a new one. You were to have one ready for to-day, Gratian."

"I have only a very little one, but I will tell it, if you like," said Gratian. "It isn't exactly like a story. There isn't anything wonderful in it like in the one about the Princess, or the one about the underground fairies."

"No, that *was* a beauty," said Fergus. "But never mind if this one isn't quite so nice," he added, condescendingly.

So Gratian began.

"It is about a sea-gull," he said. "You know about them, of course, for you have been at the sea. This was a little, young sea-gull. It had not long learnt to fly, and sea-gulls need to fly very well, for often they have to go many miles without a rest when they are out at sea, unless there happens to be a ship passing or a rock standing up above the water, or even a bunch of seaweed floating—that might do for a young bird that is not very heavy. There was very stormy weather the year this sea-gull and his brothers and sisters were hatched, and sometimes the father and mother sea-gulls were quite frightened to let them try to fly, for fear they should be beaten down by the storm winds and not have strength to rise again. It is quite different, you see, from little land-birds learning to fly. They can just flutter a little way from one twig to another near the ground, so that if they do fall they can't be much hurt. Sea-gulls need to have brave hearts even when they are quite little. This sea-gull was very brave, almost too brave. He loved the sea so dearly that while he was still a nestling, peeping out from his home, high up on a ledge of rock, at the dancing, flashing waves down below, he longed to be among them. He felt as if he almost would go mad with joy if only his mother would let him dash off with her, whirling and curving about in the air, with nothing below but the great ocean. And he would scarcely believe her and his father when they told him that it wasn't so easy to fly as it looked—not at the beginning, and that birds had to learn by degrees. At last one day the father, who had been out sniffing about, came in and told the mother it would be a good day for a beginning. So all the four young ones got ready, and stood at the edge of the nest in great excitement. I think it must have been very funny to see them at first—they were so awkward and clumsy. But they didn't hurt themselves—for the old birds kept them at first among the rocks where they couldn't fall far. And our sea-gull wasn't quite so sure of himself the next day, nor quite so impatient to go on flying, and I daresay he got on better when he had become less conceited. When they could fly a little better the father and mother took them to a little bay, where there was nice soft sand, and where the wind blew gently, and there they got on very well. And there they should have been content to stay till the spring storms were over and their wings had grown stronger. They all were quite content except the one I am telling you of."

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"What was his name?" asked Fergus.

"He hasn't got one," Gratian replied, "but we can make him one. I daresay it would be better."

"Call him White-wings," said Fergus.

"No," said Gratian, "that won't do," though he didn't say why. "Besides his wings weren't all white. We'll call him 'Quiver,' because he was always quivering with impatience. Well, they were all quite content except Quiver, and he was very discontented. He looked longingly over the sea, wishing so to be in the midst of the flocks of birds he saw sparkling in the sunshine; and at last one morning when his father and mother had gone off for a good fly by themselves, which they well deserved, poor things, after all their trouble with the little ones, he stood up in the nest, flapping his impatient wings, and said to the three others that he too was going off on his own account. The brothers and sisters begged him not, but it was no use—off he would go, he was in such a hurry to see the world and to feel independent. Well, he got on pretty well at first; the sea was far out, and there were several rocks sticking up which he could rest on, and he found it so easy that he was tempted to fly out farther than he had intended, going from one rock to the other. And he didn't notice how far he had gone till he had been resting a while on a rock a good way out, and then looking round he couldn't tell a bit where he was, for there was nothing but sea all round him. He couldn't think what had become of all the other points of rocks—they seemed to have disappeared. But just as he was beginning to feel rather frightened a number of gulls flew up and lighted on the rock. They were all chattering and very excited."

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"'We must make haste,' they said, 'and get to the shore as fast as we can before the storm is on us. And we must shelter there till we can get back to our own rocks.'"

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"They only rested a moment or two, and then got ready to start again. Quiver stood up and flapped his wings to attract attention."

"May I fly with you?' he said. 'I'm afraid I don't quite know the way.'

"They looked at him in surprise.

"What are you doing away from your home—a young fledgling like you?' they said. 'Come with us if you like, it's your only chance, but you'll probably never get to shore.'

"Oh how frightened he was, and how he wished he'd stayed at home! But he flew away with them, for it was, as they said, his only chance, and what he suffered was something dreadful. And when at last he reached the shore, it was only to drop down and lie on the sands gasping and bruised, and, as he thought, dying. A man that was passing, in a hurry himself to get home before the storm, picked up poor Quiver, half out of pity, half because he thought his little master might like to have his feathers if he died, or to make a pet of him if he lived. And Quiver, who was quite fainting by this time, woke up to find himself lying in a little sort of tool-house in a garden, with a boy about as big as you, Fergus, stooping over him.

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"I don't think he's going to die,' the boy said. 'I've made him a bed of some hay here in the corner—to-morrow we'll see how he is.'

"Poor Quiver felt very strange and queer and sad. It took him several days to get better, and he didn't like the food they gave him, though of course they meant to be kind. At last, one day he was able to hop about and even to flap his wings a little.

"Now I shall soon be able to fly home again,' he thought joyfully. 'If once I can get to the sea I'll be sure to meet some gulls who can show me the way.'

"And when the boy came to look at him, he was pleased to hear himself said to be quite well again.

"We can let him out into the garden now, can't we?' he said to the gardener, 'and we'll see if he's such a good slug catcher as you say.'

"No fear but he's that, sir,' said the gardener. 'But first we must clip his wings, else he'd be flying away.'

"And he took Quiver up in his arms, and stretching out his wings, though not so as to hurt them, snipped at them with a big sharp pair of scissors. Quiver didn't feel it, any more than we feel having our nails cut, but he was dreadfully frightened. And he was still all shaking and confused when the gardener set him down on the garden path—though he got better in a minute and looked about him. It was a pretty garden, and he was pleased to be out in the air again, though he felt something strange in it, for he had never before been away from the sea. And he ran a few steps just to try his legs, and then turned round meaning to say good-bye to the boy and thank him in his sea-gull way for his hospitality before starting off. Having done this he stretched his wings to fly—but—oh dear, what was the matter? He could not raise himself more than a few inches from the ground—wings!—he had none left, and with a pitiful cry he rolled over on the ground in misery and despair.

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"Poor bird!' said the boy; 'you shouldn't have clipped his wings, Barnes. It would have been better to let him fly away.'

"He'd never have got to his home; he's too young a bird to fly so far. And he'll be uncommon good for the slugs, you'll see, sir.'

"So all the summer poor Quiver spent in the garden. He got more used to it after a while, but still he had always a pain at his heart. He used to rush along the paths as if he was in a desperate hurry and eager to get to the end, and then he would just rush back again. It was the only way he could keep down his impatience and his longing for the sea. He used to pretend to himself that when he got to the end of the path he would feel the salt air and see the waves dancing; but the children of the house, who of course didn't understand his thoughts, used to laugh at him and call him 'that absurd creature.' But his heart was too sore for him to mind, and even catching slugs was very little consolation to him.

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"And so Quiver lived all through the summer and the autumn till the winter came round again, and all this time whenever his wings began to grow longer, Barnes snipped them short again. I don't think there ever was a bird so severely punished for discontent and impatience.

"The winter was a dreadfully cold one; there was frost for such a long time that nothing seemed alive at all—there was not a worm or a slug or an insect of any kind in the garden. The little boy and his brothers and sisters all went away when it began to get so cold, but before they went, they told Barnes that he must not leave Quiver out in the garden; he must be shut up for the winter in the large poultry house with the cocks and hens.

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"For there's nothing for him to eat outside, and you might forget to feed him, you know,' the children said.

"So Quiver passed the winter safely, though sadly enough. He had plenty to eat, and no one teased or ill-used him, but he used sometimes almost to *choke* with his longing for freedom and for the fresh air—above all, the air of the sea. He did not know how long winter lasted; he was still a young bird, but he often felt as if he would die if he were kept a prisoner much longer. But he had to bear it, and he didn't die, and he grew at last so patient that no one would have thought he was the same discontented bird. There was a little yard covered over with netting outside the hen-house, and Quiver could see the sky from there; and the clouds scudding along when it was a windy day reminded him a little of the waves he feared he would never see again; and the stupid, peaceful cocks and hens used to wonder what he found to stare up at for hours together. *They*

thought by far the most interesting thing in life was to poke about on the ground for the corn that was thrown out to them. [Pg 147]

"At last—at last—came the spring. It came by little bits at a time of course, and Quiver couldn't understand what made everything feel so different, and why the sky looked blue again, till one day the gardener's wife, who managed the poultry, opened the door of the covered yard and let them all out, and Quiver, being thinner and quicker than the hens, slipped past her and got out into the garden. She saw him when he had got there, but she thought it was all right—he might begin his slug-catching again. And he hurried along the path in his old way, feeling thankful to be free, but with the longing at his heart, stronger than ever. It was so long since he had tried to fly in the least that he had forgotten almost that he had wings, and he just went hurrying along on his legs. All of a sudden something startled him—a noise in the trees or something like that—and without thinking what he was doing, he stretched his wings in the old way. But fancy his surprise; instead of flopping and lopping about as they had done for so long, ever since Barnes had cut them, they stood out firm and steady, quite able to support his weight; he tried them again, and then again, and—it was no mistake—up he soared, up, up, up, into the clear spring sky, strong and free and fearless, for his wings had grown again! That was what they had been doing all the long dull winter; so happiness came to poor Quiver at last, when he had learnt to wait." [Pg 148]

"And did he fly home?" asked Fergus breathlessly; "did he find his father and mother and the others in the old nest among the rocks?"

"Yes," replied Gratian, after a moment's consideration, "he met some gulls on his way to the sea, who told him exactly how to go. And he did find them all at home. You know, generally, bird families don't stay so long together, but these gulls had been so unhappy about Quiver that they had fixed to stay close to the old ones till he came back. They always kept on hoping he would come back."

"I am so glad," said Fergus with a sigh of relief. "How beautiful it must have been to feel the sea-wind again, and see the waves dancing in the sunshine! Do you know, Gratian, I was just a little afraid at the end that you were going to say that Quiver had grown so good that he went 'up, up, up,' straight into heaven. I shouldn't have liked that—at least not till he had lived happily by the sea first. And then," Fergus began to get a little confused, "I don't know about that. *Do* gulls go to heaven, mother? You don't mind my thinking dogs do." [Pg 149]

The lady smiled. She had not said anything yet; she seemed to be thinking seriously. But now she drew Gratian to her and kissed his forehead.

"Thank you, dear boy," she said. "I am so glad to have heard one of your stories."

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## CHAPTER XI.

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### DRAWN TWO WAYS

"When Love wants this, and Pain wants that,  
And all our hearts want Tit for Tat."

MATTHEW BROWNE

Gratian almost danced along the moor path on his way home that evening; he felt so happy. Never had he loved Fergus and his mother so much—he could not now understand how he had ever lived without them, and like a child he did not think of how he ever *could* do so. He let the future take care of itself.

It was cold of course. He rather fancied that White-wings was not far off, and once or twice he stood still to listen. It was some little time now since he had heard anything of his friends. But at first nothing met his ear, and he ran on.

Suddenly a breath—a waft rather of soft air blew over his face. It was not White-wings, and most certainly not Gray-wings. Gratian looked up in surprise—he could hardly expect the soft western sister on such a cold night. [Pg 151]

"Yes, it is I," she said; "you can hardly believe it, can you? I am only passing by—no one else will know I have been here. I don't generally come when you are in such merry spirits—I don't feel that you need me then. But as I was not so very far off, I thought I'd give you a kiss on my way. So you told them the sea-gull's story—I am glad they liked it."

"Yes," said Gratian, "they did, indeed. But, Green-wings, I'm glad you've come, for I wanted to ask you, if they ask me if I made it all up myself, what can I say? I'm so afraid of telling what isn't true; but you know I couldn't explain about you and the others. I couldn't if I tried."

"You are not meant to do so," replied she quickly. "What have you said when Fergus has asked you about other stories?"

"I have said I couldn't explain how I knew them—that sometimes they were a sort of dream. I didn't want to say I had made them all myself, though I have *partly* made them—you know I have, Green-wings."

"Certainly—it was not I for instance, who told you the very remarkable fact of natural history that [Pg 152]

you related at the end of the story?" said Green-wings with her soft laugh. "You may quite take the credit of that. But I won't laugh at you, dear. It is true that they are your stories, and yet a sort of dream. No one but you could hear them—no one would say that the whispers of the wind talking language to you, are anything but the reflection of your own pretty fancies. It will be all right—you will see. But I must go," and she gave a little sigh.

"Green-wings, darling, you seem a little sad to-night," said Gratian. "Why is it? Is it that the winter has come?"

"I am never very merry, as you know. But I am a little sadder than usual to-night. I foresee—I foresee sorrows"—and her voice breathed out the words with such an exquisite plaintiveness that they sounded like the dying away notes of a dirge. "But keep up your heart, my darling, and trust us all—all four. We only wish your good, though we may show it in different ways. And wherever I am I can always be with you to comfort you, if it be but for a moment. No distance can separate us from our child."

"And I am most *your* child, am I not, dear Green-wings?" asked Gratian. "I knew you the first, and I think I love you the most."

"My darling, good-night," whispered Green-wings, and with a soft flutter she was gone.

There was no mother waiting at the open door for Gratian's return that evening.

"It is too cold for standing outside now," he said to himself as he went in, adding aloud, "Here I am, mother. Did you think I was late?"

Mrs. Conyfer was sitting by the fire. Her knitting lay on her knee, but her hands were idle. She looked up as Gratian came in.

"I am glad you have come, dear," she said; but her voice sounded tired, and when he was close to her he saw that her face seemed tired also.

"Are you not well, mother?" he said gently.

Mrs. Conyfer looked a little surprised but pleased too. It was new to her either to think of how she was or to be asked about it. For though her husband was kind and good, he was plain and even a little rough, as are the moorland people in general. Gratian had never been rough, but he had not had the habit of much noticing those about him. Since he had been so often with Fergus and the lady he had learnt to be more observant of others, especially of his mother, and more tender in his manner.

"Are you not well, mother dear?" he repeated.

"I'm only a bit tired, my boy," she said. "I'm getting old, I suppose, and I've worked pretty hard in my way—not to say as if I'd been a poor man's wife of course, but a farmer's wife has a deal on her mind."

"And you do everything so well, mother," said Gratian admiringly. "I'm getting old enough now to see how different things are here from what they are in many houses. Fergus does so like to hear about the dairy and the cocks and hens, and about the girdle cakes and all the nice things you make."

"He's really a nice little gentleman!" said Mrs. Conyfer, well pleased, "I *am* glad to hear he's getting so much better. I'm sure his mother deserves he should—such a sweet lady as she is."

For now and then on a Sunday the two boys' mothers had spoken to each other.

"Yes, he's *much* better," said Gratian. "To-day he walked six times up and down the terrace with only my arm."

"They weren't afraid to let him out, and it so cold to-day?" said Mrs. Conyfer.

"It wasn't so very cold—you usedn't to mind the cold, mother," said the boy.

"Maybe not so much as now," she replied. "I think I'm getting rheumatic like my father and mother before me, for I can't move about so quick, and then one feels the cold more."

"What makes people have rheumatics?" asked Gratian.

"Folk don't have it so much hereabout," his mother answered; "but I don't belong to the moor country, you know. My home was some way from this, down in the valley, where it's milder but much damper—and damp is worst of anything for rheumatism. Dear me, I remember my old grandmother a perfect sight with it—all doubled up—you wondered how she got about. But she was a marvel of patience, and so cheery too. I only hope I shall be like her in that, if I live so long, for it's a sore trial to an active nature to become so nearly helpless."

"Had she nobody to be kind to her when she got so ill?" asked Gratian.

"Oh yes; her children were all good to her, so far as they could be. But they were all married and about in the world, and busy with their own families. She was a good deal alone, poor old grandmother."



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**"Are you not well, mother?"  
he said gently.**

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"Mother," said Gratian quickly. "If you ever got to be like that, I would never marry or go about in the world. I'd stay at home to be a comfort to you. I'd run all your messages and do everything I could for you. Mother, I wish you'd let me be more use to you now already, even though you're not so ill."

Mrs. Conyfer smiled, but there was more pleasure than amusement in her smile.

"I do think being at the Big House has done you good, Gratian. You never used to notice or think of things so much before you went there," she said. "And you're getting very handy, there's no doubt. I hope I shall never be so laid aside, but I'm sure you'd do your best, my dear. Now I think I shall go to bed, and you must be off too. Father's out still—he and Jonas have so much to see to these cold nights, seeing that all the creatures are warm and sheltered. There's snow not far off, they were saying. The wind's in the north."

Gratian's dreams were very grotesque that night. He dreamt that his mother was turned into a sea-gull, all except her face, which remained the same. And she could neither walk nor fly, she was so lame and stiff, or else it was that her wings were cut—he was not sure which. Then he heard Green-wings's voice saying, "She only wants a sight of the sea to make her well. Gratian, you should take her to the sea; call the cocks and hens to help you;" and with that he thought he opened his eyes and found himself on the terrace where he had been walking with Fergus, and there was a beautiful little carriage drawn by about a dozen cocks and hens; but when he would have got in, Fergus seemed to push him back, saying, "Not yet, not yet, your mother first," and Fergus kept looking for Mrs. Conyfer as if he did not know that she was the poor sea-gull, standing there looking very funny with the little red knitted shawl on that Gratian's mother wore when it was a chilly morning. And just then there came flying down from above, Gratian's four friends. Nobody seemed to see them but himself, and the cocks and hens began making such a noise that he felt quite confused.

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"Oh, do take poor mother," he called out—for there was no use trying to make any one else understand—"Green-wings and all of you, do take poor mother."

"Not without you, Gratian," replied Gray-wings's sharp voice. "It's your place to look after your mother," and as she spoke she stooped towards him and he felt her cold breath, and with the start it gave him he awoke.

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The door of his room had blown open, and the window was rattling, and the clothes had slipped off on one side. No wonder he had dreamt he was cold. He covered himself up again and went to sleep.

Mrs. Conyfer was up as usual the next morning. She said she was better, but she limped a little as she walked, and Gratian did not like to see it, though she assured him it did not hurt her.

"I shall take a rest on Sunday," she said, "and then you may tend me a bit, Gratian. He's as handy as a girl," she added, turning to the farmer with a smile. And Mr. Conyfer patted his son's head.

"That's right," he said; "always be good to your mother."

"Winter is really coming," thought Gratian, as he ran to school, and he glanced up at the sky wondering if snow were at last on the way.

It held off however for some little time yet.

It was on the third day after this that Gratian on his way home was rather surprised to meet Mr. Cornelius returning as if from the Farm. The school-children knew that the master had been somewhere, for he had left the school in charge of one or two of the head boys and his sister, who lived with him and taught the girls sewing.

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He smiled and nodded at Gratian, but did not speak, and the boy could not help wondering if he had been at Four Winds, and why. And as soon as he got home he ran eagerly in to ask.

"Has the master been here, mother? What did he come for?" he called out.

His father and mother were both together in the kitchen, talking rather earnestly.

His father looked at him as he answered—

"Yes, Gratian," he said, "Mr. Cornelius has been here. He had something important to talk to us about. After you have had your tea and done your lessons we will tell you."

"I haven't any lessons, father," he replied. "We had time to do them this afternoon when the master was out."

So as soon as tea was over he was told what it was.

"Your friends at the Big House," began the farmer, "are leaving soon. They daren't stay once it gets really cold. You'll be sorry to lose them, my boy?"

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Gratian felt a lump rise in his throat, but he tried to answer cheerfully.

"Yes, father. They've been so good to me. I knew they'd have to go some time, but I tried not to think of it. The lady has taught me so many things I never knew before. I'll try not to forget them."

"She has been very good to you, and she wants to be still more. That's what Cornelius came about. I don't want to make you vain, Gratian, but she thinks, and Cornelius thinks—and they should know—that there's the making of something out of the common in you—that, if you are taught and trained the right way, you may come to be something a good bit higher than a plain moorland farmer."

Gratian listened with wide-opened eyes.

"I know," he said breathlessly, "I've felt it sometimes. I don't rightly know what. I'd like to learn—I'd like to—oh, father, I can't say what I mean. It's as if there were so many thoughts in me that I can't say," and the child leaned his head on his mother's shoulder and burst into tears.

The farmer and his wife looked at each other. They were simple unlettered folk, but for all that there was something in them that "understood." [Pg 161]

"My boy, my little Gratian," said the mother, in tones that she but seldom used; "don't cry, my dear. Listen to father."

And in a moment or two the child raised his still tearful eyes, and the farmer went on.

"It's just that," he said. "It's just because you can't rightly say, that we want you to learn. No one can tell as yet what your talent may be, or if perhaps it is not, so to speak, but an everyday one after all. If so, no harm will be done; for you will be in wise hands, and you will come home again to Four Winds and follow in your father's and grandfather's steps. But your friends think you should have a better chance of learning and seeing for yourself than I can give you here. And the lady has written to her husband, and he's quite willing, and so it's, so to speak, all settled. You are to go with them when they leave here, Gratian, and for a year or so you are to have lessons at home with the little boy, who isn't yet strong enough to go to school. And by the end of that time it'll be easier to see what you are best fitted for. You'll have teaching of all kinds—music and drawing, and all sorts of book-learning. It's a handsome offer, there's no denying." [Pg 162]

And the tears quite disappeared from Gratian's bright eyes, and his whole face glowed with hope and satisfaction.

"I'll do my best, father. I can promise you that. You shall have no call to be ashamed of me. It's very good of you and mother to let me go. But I shall come home again before very long—I shan't be long without seeing you?"

"Oh yes—you shall come home after a while of course. Anyway for a visit, and to see how it will be best to do. We're not going to give you away altogether, you may be sure," said the farmer with a little attempt at a joke.

But the mother did not speak. She kissed the boy as she rarely kissed him, and whispered "God bless you, my dear," when she bade him good-night.

"I wonder if it's all come of our giving him such an outlandish name!" said Mrs. Conyfer with a rather melancholy smile.

And Gratian fell asleep with his mind in a whirl.

"I should like to talk about it to my godmothers," was almost his last thought. "I wonder if I shall still see them sometimes when I am far from Four Winds." [Pg 163]

And the next morning when he woke, he lay looking round his little room and thinking how much he liked it, and how happy he had been in it. He was beginning to realise that no good is all good, no light without shadow.

But there seemed no shadow or drawback of any kind the next day when he went to the Big House to talk it all over with the lady and Fergus. Fergus was too delighted for words.

"It is like a story in a book, isn't it, Gratian?" he said. "And if you turn out a great man, then the world will thank mother and me for having found you."

Gratian blushed a little.

"I don't know about being a *great* man," he said, "but I want to find out really what it is I can do best, and then it will be my own fault if I don't do *something* good."

"Yes, my boy—that is exactly what I want you to feel," said Fergus's mother.

But Gratian was anxious to know what his four friends had to say about it.

"I don't think it's very kind of none of you to come to speak to me," he said aloud on his way home. "I know you're not far off—all of you. I'm sure I heard Gray-wings scolding outside last night." [Pg 164]

A sound of faint laughter up above him seemed to answer.

"Oh there you are, Gray-wings, I thought as much," he said, buttoning up his jacket, for it was very cold. But he had hardly spoken before he heard, nearer than the laughter had been, a soft sigh.

"I never forget you—remember, Gratian, whenever you want me—whenever in sor—row."

"That's Green-wings," he said to himself. "But why should she talk of sorrow when I'm so happy—happier than ever in my life, I think. She *is* of rather too melancholy a nature."

He ran on—the door was latched—he hurried into the kitchen. There was no one there.

"Where can mother be?" he thought. He heard steps moving upstairs and turned to go there. Halfway up he met Madge, the servant, coming down. Her face looked anxious and distressed through all its rosiness.

"Oh the poor missis," she said. "She's had to go to bed. The pains in her ankles and knees got so bad—I'm afeared she's going to be really very ill."

Gratian ran past her into his mother's room.

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"Don't be frightened," Mrs. Conyfer said at once. "It's only that my rheumatism is very bad to-day. I'll be better in the morning, dear. I must be well with you going away so soon."

And when the farmer came in she met him with the same cheerful tone, though it was evident she was suffering severely.

But Gratian sat by her bedside all the evening, doing all he could. He was grave and silent, for the thought was deep in his heart—

"I can't go away—I can't and I mustn't if mother is going to be really ill. Poor mother! I'm sure my godmothers wouldn't think I should."

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## CHAPTER XII.

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### LEARNING TO WAIT

"If all the beauty in the earth  
And skies and hearts of men  
Were gently gathered at its birth,  
And loved and born again."

MATTHEW BROWNE

But the godmothers seemed to have forgotten him. He went sadly to bed—and the tears came to his eyes when he remembered how that very evening he had thought of himself as "happier than he had ever been in his life." He fell asleep however as one does at nine years old, whatever troubles one has, and slept soundly for some hours. Then he was awakened by his door opening and some one coming in. It was his father.

"Gratian, wake up. Your mother is very ill I'm afraid. Some one must go for the doctor—old Jonas is the nearest. I can't leave her—she seems nearly unconscious. Dress yourself as quick as you can, and tell Jonas to bring Dr. Spense as soon as possible."

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Gratian was up and dressed almost at once. He felt giddy and miserable, and yet with a strange feeling over him that he had known it all before. He dared not try to think clearly—he dared not face the terrible fear at the bottom of his heart. It was his first experience of real trouble.

As he hurried off he met Madge at the door; she too had been wakened up. A sudden thought struck him.

"Madge," he said, "if I'm not back quickly, tell father not to be frightened. I think I'll go all the way for the doctor myself. It'll save time not to go waking old Jonas, and I know he couldn't go as fast as I can."

Madge looked admiringly and yet half-anxiously at the boy. He seemed such a little fellow to go all that way alone in the dark winter night.

"I daresay you're right," she said, "and yet I'm half-afraid. Hadn't you better ask master first?"

Gratian shook his head.

"No, no. It will be all right. Don't trouble him about me unless he asks," and off he ran.

He went as quickly as he could find his way—it was not a *very* dark night—till he was fairly out on the moorland path. Then he stood still.

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"White-wings, Green-wings—whichever of you hears me, come and help me. Dear Green-wings, you said you always would comfort me."

"So she would, surely," said a voice, firmer and colder than hers, but kindly too, "but at this moment it's more strength than comfort that you want. Hold out your arms, my boy, there—clasp me tight, don't start at my cold breath. That's right. Why, I can fly with you as if you were a snow-flake!"

And again Gratian felt the strange, whirling, rushing sensation, again he closed his eyes as if he were falling asleep, and knew no more till he found himself standing in the village street, a few doors from the doctor's house, and felt, rather than heard, a clear cold whisper of "Farewell, Gratian, for the present."

And the next morning the neighbours spoke of the sudden northern blast that had come rushing down from the moors in the night, and wondered it had not brought the snow with it, little thinking it had brought a little boy instead!

Dr. Spense was soon awakened, and long as the time always seems to an anxious watcher by a sick-bed, Farmer Conyfer could scarcely believe his ears when he heard the rattle of the dogcart wheels up the steep road, or his eyes when the doctor, followed by Gratian, came up the staircase.

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"My boy, but you have done bravely!" said the father in amazement. "Doctor, I can't understand how he can have been so quick!"

The doctor turned kindly to Gratian.



"Go down, my good child, and warm yourself. I saw the sparkle of a nice fire in the kitchen—it is a bitter night. I will keep my promise to you; as I go away I'll look in."

For Gratian, though not able to tell much of his mother's illness, had begged the doctor to promise to tell him the truth as to what he thought of her.

"I'd rather know, sir, I would indeed, even if it's very bad," he had said tremblingly.

And as he sat by the kitchen fire waiting, it seemed to him that never till now had he in the least understood how he loved his mother.

It was a queer, boisterous night surely. For down the chimney, well-built and well-seasoned as it was, there came a sudden swirl of wind. But strangely enough it did not make the fire smoke. And Gratian, anxious though he was, smiled as a pretty green light seemed suddenly to dance among the flames. And he was neither surprised nor startled when a soft voice whispered in his ear:

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"I am here, my darling. I *would* come for one moment, though White-wings has been trying to blow me away. Keep up your heart—and don't lose hope."

And just then the doctor came in.

"My boy," he said, as he stood warming his hands at the blaze, "I will tell you the truth. I am afraid your poor mother is going to be ill for a good while. She has not taken care of herself. But I have good hopes that she will recover. And you may do a good deal. I see you are sensible, and handy, I am sure. You must be instead of a daughter to her for a while—it will be hard on your father, and you may be of great help."

Gratian thanked him, with the tears, which would not now be kept back, in his eyes. And promising to come again that same day, for it was now past midnight, the doctor went away.

Some days passed—the fever was high at first, and poor Mrs. Conyfer suffered much. But almost sooner than the doctor had ventured to hope, she began to get a little better. Within a week she was out of danger. And then came Fergus's mother again. She had already come to ask for news of her little friend's mother, and in the first great anxiety she said nothing of the plans that had been made. But now she asked to see the farmer, and talked with him some time downstairs while Gratian watched by his mother.

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"I am so thankful to be better—so very thankful to be better before you go, Gratian," said the poor woman.

"Oh yes, dear mother, we cannot be thankful enough," the boy replied. "I will never forget that night—the night you were so very ill," he said with a shiver at the thought of it.

"I shall not be able to write much to you, my child," she said. "The doctor says my hands and joints will be stiff for a good while, but that I must try not to fret, and to keep an easy mind. I will try—but it won't be easy for me that's always been so stirring. And I shall miss you at first, of course. But if you're well and happy—and it would have been sad and dull for you here with me so different."

Just then the farmer's voice came sounding up the stairs.

"Gratian," it said, "come down here."

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The boy obeyed. But first he stooped and kissed the pale face on the pillow.

"Dear mother," he said.

His father was standing by the kitchen fire when he went in, and the lady was seated in one of the big old arm-chairs. She looked at him with fresh love and interest in her sweet blue eyes.

"Dear Gratian," she said, "Fergus is fretting for you sadly. Your father has been telling me what a clever sick-nurse you are. And indeed I was sure of it from your way with Fergus. I am so very, very glad your dear mother is better."

"She will miss him a good deal at first, I'm afraid," said the farmer, "but I must do my best. It's about your going, my boy—the lady has already put it off some days for your sake. It's very good of you, ma'am—*very* good. I'll get him ready as well as I can. You'll excuse it if his things are not just in such shipshape order as his mother would have had them."

"Of course, of course," she replied. "Then the day after to-morrow. I *daren't* wait longer—the doctor says Fergus must not risk more cold as yet."

Gratian had listened in silence. But now he turned, first to his father and then to the lady, and spoke.

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"Father, dear lady," he began, "don't be vexed with me—oh don't. But I can't go now. I've thought about it all these days—I'm—I'm *dreadfully* sorry," and here his voice faltered. "I wanted to learn and to understand. But it wouldn't be right. I know it wouldn't. Mother would not get well so quick without me, perhaps she'd never get well at all. And no learning or seeing things would do me really good if I knew I wasn't doing right. Father—tell me that you think I'm right."

The lady and the farmer looked at each other; there were tears in the lady's eyes.

"Is he right?" asked Gratian's father.

She bent her head.

"I'm afraid he is," she said, "but it is only fair to let him quite understand. It isn't merely putting it

off for a while, Gratian," she went on; "I am afraid it may be for altogether. We are not likely to come back to this part of the country again, and my husband, though kind, is a little peculiar. He has a nephew whom he will send for as a companion to Fergus if you don't come. We should like you better, but it is our duty to do something for Jack, and Fergus needs a companion, so it seems only natural to take him instead of sending him away to school."

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"Of course," said the farmer, looking at his son.

"Yes, I understand," said Gratian. "But it doesn't make any difference. If I never learnt anything more—of learning, I mean—if I never left Four Winds or saw any of the beautiful places and things in the world, it *shouldn't* make any difference. I couldn't ever be happy or—or—do anything really good or great," he went on, blushing a little, "if I began by doing wrong—could I?"

"He is right," said his father and Fergus's mother together.

And so it was settled.

The person the most difficult to satisfy that he *was* right was—no, not Fergus—sorry as he was he loved his own mother too much not to agree—poor Mrs. Conyfer herself, for whom the sacrifice was to be made. Gratian had to talk to her for ever so long, to assure her that it was for his own sake as well—that he would have been too miserable about her to have got any good from his new opportunities. And in the end she gave in, and allowed herself to enjoy the comfort of her little boy's care and companionship during her long weary time of slow recovery.

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Fergus and his mother did not leave a day too soon. With early January the winter spirits, chained hitherto, broke forth in fury. Never had such falls of snow been known even in that wild region, and many a night Gratian, lying awake, unable to sleep through the rattle and racket, felt a strange excitement at the thought that all this was the work of his mysterious protectors.

"White-wings and Gray-wings seem really going mad," he thought once or twice. But the sound of laughter, mingling with the whistling and roaring and shrieking in the chimney, reassured him.

"No fear, no fear," he seemed to hear; "we must let our spirits out sometimes. But you'd better not go to school for a day or two, small Gratian, all the same."

And several "days or two" that winter it was impossible for him to go to school, or for any one to come to the Farm, so heavy and dark even at mid-day were the storm-clouds, so deep lay the treacherous snow-drifts. Not even the doctor could reach them. But fortunately Mrs. Conyfer was by this time much better. All she now required was care and rest.

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"Oh, mother dear, how glad I am that I did not leave you!" Gratian would often say. "How dull and dreary and long the days would have seemed! You couldn't even have got letters from me."

And the lessons he learnt in that winter of patient waiting, of quiet watching and self-forgetfulness, bore their fruit.

And his four friends did not forget him. There came now and then a soft breath from the two gentle sisters whose voices were hushed to all others for a time, and more than once in some mysterious way Gratian felt himself summoned out to the lonely moorland by the two whose carnival time it was.

And standing out there with the great sweep of open country all around him, with his hair tossed by White-wings's giant touch, or his cheeks tingling with a sharp blast from mischievous Gray-wings, Gratian laughed with pleasure and daring enjoyment.

"I am your child too—Spirits of the North and East. You can't frighten me. I defy you."

And the two laughed and shouted with wild glee at their foster-child's great spirit.

"He does us credit," they cried, though old Jonas passing by heard nothing but a shriek of fresh fury up above, and shouted to Gratian to hasten within shelter.

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But winter never lasts for ever. Spring came again—slow and reluctant—and it was long before Gray-wings consented to take her yearly nap and let her sister of the west soothe and comfort the storm-tossed country. And then, as day by day Gratian made his way to school, he watched with awakened and ever-awaking eyes the exquisite eternal beauty of the summer's gradual approach, till at last Golden-wings clasped him in her arms one morning and told him her joy at being able to return.

"For I love this country, though no one will believe it," she said. "The scent of the gorse and the heather is delicious and refreshing after the strong spice perfumes of my own home;" and many a story she told the child, and many a song she sang to him through the long summer days—which he loved to spend in his old way, out among the heather with Jonas and Watch and the browsing sheep.

For the holidays had begun. His mother was well, quite well, by now, and Gratian was free to do as he chose.

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He was out on the moors one day—a lovely cloudless day, that would have been sultry anywhere else—when old Jonas startled him by saying suddenly:

"Did you know, Master Gratian, that the gentry's come back to the Big House?"

Gratian sat straight up in his astonishment.

"No, Jonas. How did you hear it?"

"Down in the village, quite sudden-like. It was all got ready for



**It was Fergus, little lame Fergus, mounted on a tiny rough-coated pony, coming towards him!**

them last week, but there's been none of us down there much lately."

Gratian felt too excited to lie still and dream any more.

"I'll ask mother if I may go and see," he said jumping up. And off he ran. But an unexpected sight met him at a stone's throw from the Farm. It was Fergus, little lame Fergus, mounted on a tiny rough-coated pony, coming towards him! And the joy of the meeting who could describe?

"We tried to keep it a secret till it was quite sure," said the boy. "There was some difficulty about it, but it is all settled now. Father has taken the Big House from our cousin, and we are to live at it half the year. We are all there—my sisters—and my big brother comes sometimes—and mother of course. All except Jack. Jack has gone to sea. He was very nice, but he hated lessons—he only wanted to go to sea. So we want you now, Gratian—my own Gratian. I have a tutor, and you are to learn with me all the summer and to go away with us in the winter now your mother is well, so that you will find out what you want to be. It is for me we have come here. I must always be lame, Gratian. The doctors can't cure me," and the bright voice faltered. "But I shall get strong all the same if I live here in this beautiful air. And I shall be very happy, for I can learn to play on the organ—and that makes up for all."

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And all came about as Fergus said.

The summer and the autumn that followed, Gratian studied with his friend's tutor. And the winter after, greatly to his mother's joy, he went away as had been planned before. But not for ever of course. No great length of time passed without his returning to his birthplace.

"I should die," he said sometimes, "if I could not from time to time stand at the old porch and feel the breath of the four winds about me."

This is only the story of the very opening of the life of a boy who lived to make his mark among men. How he did so, how he found his voice, it is not for me to tell. But he had early learnt to choose the right, and so we know he prospered.

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Besides—was he not the godchild of the Four Winds of Heaven?

## THE END.

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Mr. A. C. SWINBURNE, in *The Nineteenth Century*, writes:—

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