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\*\*\* START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE CHILDREN OF THE CASTLE \*\*\*

Mrs Molesworth

"The Children of the Castle"

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### Chapter One.

#### Ruby and Mavis.

"Hast thou seen that lordly castle,  
That castle by the sea?  
Golden and red above it  
The clouds float gorgeously."

Trans. of Uhland: Longfellow.

Do you remember Gratian—Gratian Conyfer, the godson of the four winds, the boy who lived at the old farmhouse up among the moors, where these strange beautiful sisters used to meet? Do you remember how full of fancies and stories Gratian's little head was, and how sometimes he put them into words to please Fergus, the lame child he loved so much? The story I am now going to tell you is one of these. I think it was their favourite one. I can not say that it is in the very words in which Gratian used to tell it, for it was not till long, long after those boyish days that it came to be written down. But all the same it is his story.

How long ago it was I cannot say, nor can I tell you exactly where it was. This is not a story for which you will require an atlas, nor a history of England or of any other country, nor a dictionary of dates. All those wise and clever and useful things you may put out of your heads for a bit. I am just going to tell you a story. It was somewhere and somewhen, and I think that will do.

The "it" was a castle—and something else. But first about the castle. It was really worthy of the name, for it was very old and very strong, and in ancient days it had been used as a place of defence, and had a look about it of not having forgotten this. (I am afraid this sounds a *very* little historical. I must take care.) It was very big too, towering over the sea-washed cliffs on which it stood as if defying the winds and the waves to do their worst, frowning at them with the little round window-eyes of its turrets, like a cross old ogre. But it was a two-faced castle; it was only on one side—the rocky side, where the cliffs went down precipitously to the water—that it looked grim and forbidding. Inland, you could scarcely have believed it was the same castle at all. For here, towards the sunny south, it seemed to change into a gracious, comfortable, hospitably-inviting mansion; it did not look nearly so high on this side, for the ivy-covered turrets had more the effect of dimly dark trees in the background, and the bright wide-windowed rooms opened on to trim lawns and terraces gay with flowers. That was the case in summer-time at least. The whole look of things varied a good deal according to the seasons. In winter, grim as it was, I don't know but that the fortress-front, so to speak, of the great building had the best of it. For it was grand to watch the waves breaking down below when you knew you were safe and cosy behind the barred panes of the turret windows, those windows pierced in the walls through such a thickness of stone that each was like a little room within a room. And even in winter there were wonderful sunsets to be seen from the children's favourite turret-room—the one which had two windows to the west and only one to the cold north.

For the "something else" was the children. Much more interesting than the castle—indeed, what would any castle or any house be without them? Not that the castle was not a very interesting place to live in, as you will hear, but all *places*, I think, need people to bring out their interest. People who have been, sometimes, and sometimes, people that still are. There was a mixture of both in my castle. But first and foremost I will tell you of the children, whose home it was, and perhaps is yet.

There were only two of them, only two, that is to say, who lived there regularly; they were girls, twin-sisters, Ruby and Mavis were their names, and at this time they were nearly twelve years old. I will not say much in description of

them, it is best to let you find out about them for yourselves. They were almost exactly the same size; Ruby perhaps a very little the taller, and at first sight every one thought them exceedingly like each other. And so they were, so far as the colour of their hair, the shape of their features, their eyes and complexions went. They were pretty little girls, and they made a pretty pair. But the more you got to know them the less alike you got to think them, till at last you be an to wonder how you ever could have thought them like at all! And even almost at the first glance *some* differences were to be seen. Ruby was certainly the prettier. Her eyes were brighter, her colour more brilliant, her way of walking and holding herself more graceful, even her very manner of talking was more interesting and attractive.

"What a charming child she is," said strangers always. "Such pretty winning ways, so sweet and unselfish, so clever and intelligent! What a pity that dull little Mavis is not more like her—why, I thought them the image of each other at first, and now I can scarcely believe they are sisters. I am sure poor Ruby must find Mavis very trying, she is so stupid; but Ruby is so good and patient with her—it quite adds another charm to the dear child."

This opinion or one like it was always the first expressed—well, perhaps not *always*, but almost always. Now I will let you judge for yourselves.

It was late autumn. So late, that one felt inclined to wish it were already winter, without any thought or talk of a milder season. For it was very cold, and thick-walled though the castle was, it needed any amount of huge fires and curtains in front of the doorways and double windows, and, in the modern rooms, hot air or water-pipes to make it comfortable in severe weather. And all these things in winter it had. But the housekeeper had rather old-fashioned and stiff ideas. She did everything by rule. On a certain day in the autumn the winter arrangements were begun, on a certain day in the spring they came to an end. And this, whatever the weather was,—not a very good plan, for as everybody knows, the weather itself is not so formal and particular. There are quite warm, mild days sometimes in late November, and really bitterly cold ones in April and May. But there would have been no manner of use in trying to make old Bertha see this. Winter *should* stop on a certain day, and summer should come, and *vice versâ*. It had always been so in her time, and Bertha did not like new-fangled ways.

So everybody shivered, and the more daring ones, of whom Ruby was the foremost, scolded and grumbled. But it was no use.

"You may as well try to bear it patiently, my dear," said cousin Hortensia, "the mild weather must come soon. I will lend you one of my little shawls if you like. You will feel warmer when you have been out for a run."

Cousin Hortensia was the lady who lived at the castle to teach and take care of the two little girls. For their mother was dead and their father was often away. He had some appointment at the court. I am not sure what it was, but he was considered a very important person. He was kind and good, as you will see, and it was always a great delight to the children when he came home, and a great sorrow when he had to leave.

Cousin Hortensia was only a very far-off cousin, but the children always called her so. For though she was really with them as a governess as well as a friend, it would not have seemed so nice to call her by any other name. She was very gentle, and took the best care she could of them. And she was clever and taught them well. But she was rather a dreamy sort of person. She had lived for many years a very quiet life, and knew little of the outside world. She had known and loved the twins' mother, and their father too, when they were but boy and girl, for she was no longer young. And she loved Ruby and Mavis, Ruby especially, so dearly, that she could see no fault in them. It was to Ruby she was speaking and offering a shawl. They were sitting in one of the rooms on the south side of the castle, sheltered from the stormy winds which often came whirling down from the north. But even here it was cold, or at least chilly.

Ruby shrugged her shoulders.

"You always offer me a shawl as if I were seventy, cousin Hortensia," she said rather pertly. "It would be much better if you would speak to Bertha, and *insist* on her having the fires lighted now it is so cold. When I'm grown up I can tell you I won't stand the old thing's tyranny."

Cousin Hortensia looked rather distressed. There was some sense in what Ruby said, but there were a great many other things to be considered, all of which she could not explain to the children. Bertha was an exceedingly valuable servant, and if she were interfered with and went away it would be almost impossible to get any one like her. For it was necessary that the castle should be managed with economy as well as care.

"I would speak to Bertha if there was anything really important to complain of," she said. "But this weather cannot last, and you are not cold at night, are you?"

"No," said Mavis, "not at all."

"Bertha would never get all the work done unless she took her own way," Miss Hortensia went on. "But I'll tell you what I'll do, Ruby. I will have the fire lighted in my own little room. I don't need to trouble Bertha about that, thanks to your kind father's thoughtfulness. My little wood-cupboard is always kept filled by Tim. And when you come in from your walk we will have tea there instead of here, and spend a cosy evening."

Ruby darted at Miss Hortensia and kissed her.

"That will be lovely," she said. "And as it's to be a sort of a treat evening, do tell us a story after tea, dear cousin."

"If you're not tired," put in Mavis. "Cousin Hortensia had a headache this morning," she said to Ruby, turning to her.

"Rubbish!" cried Ruby, but she checked herself quickly. "I don't mean that," she went on, "but Mavis is such a kill-

joy. You won't be tired will you, dear cousin? Mavis doesn't care for stories as much as I do. I've read nearly all the books in the library, and she never reads if she can help it."

"I've enough to do with my lesson-books," said Mavis with a sigh. "And I can scarcely ever find stories to read that I understand. But I like *hearing* stories, for then I can ask what it means if there comes a puzzling part."

"Poor Mavis!" said Ruby contemptuously, "she's always getting puzzled."

"We must try to make your wits work a little quicker, my dear," said Miss Hortensia. "You will get to like reading when you are older, I daresay. I must look out for some easier story-books for you."

"But I love *hearing* stories, cousin," said Mavis. "Please don't think that I don't like your stories. I do so like that one about when you came to the castle once when you were a little girl and about the dream you had."

"I don't care for stories about dreams," said Ruby. "I like to hear about when cousin Hortensia was a young lady and went to balls at the court. I would love to have beautiful dresses and go to the court. Do you think father will take me when I'm grown up, cousin Hortensia?"

"I daresay he will. You will both go, probably," Miss Hortensia replied. "But you must not think too much of it or you may be disappointed. Your mother was very beautiful and everybody admired her when she went out in the world, but she always loved best to be here at the castle."

Ruby made a face.

"Then I don't think I'm like her," she said. "I'm very tired of this stupid old place already. And if you tell your dream-story to Mavis, you must tell me the one about how mother looked when she went to her first ball. She was dressed all in white, wasn't she?"

"No," Mavis answered. "In blue—wavy, changing blue, like the colour the sea is sometimes."

"*Blue*," Ruby repeated, "what nonsense! Isn't it nonsense, cousin Hortensia? Didn't our mother wear all white at her first ball—everybody does."

Miss Hortensia looked up in surprise.

"Yes, of course," she said. "Who ever told you she wore blue, Mavis?"

Mavis grew very red.

"I wasn't speaking of our mother," she said. "It was the lady you saw in your dream I meant, cousin Hortensia."

"You silly girl!" said Ruby. "Isn't she stupid?" Mavis looked ready to cry.

"You must get out of that habit of not listening to what people say, my dear," said Miss Hortensia. "Now you had better both go out—wrap up warmly, and don't stay very long, and when you come in you will find me in my own room."

"And you'll tell us stories, won't you, dear good cousin?" said Ruby coaxingly, as she put up her pretty face for a kiss. "If you'll tell me *my* story, you may tell Mavis hers afterwards."

"Well, well, we'll see," said Miss Hortensia, smiling.

"I do so like the story of the blue lady," said Mavis, very softly, as they left the room.

Five minutes later the twins were standing under the great archway which led to the principal entrance to the castle. At one end this archway opened on to a winding road cut in the rock, at the foot of which was a little sandy cove—a sort of refuge among the cliffs. On each side of it the waves broke noisily, but they never entirely covered the cove, even at very high tides, and except in exceedingly rough and stormy weather the water rippled in gently, as if almost asking pardon for intruding at all. When the sea was out there was a scrambling path among the rocks to the left, by which one could make one's way to a little fishing-hamlet about a quarter of a mile off on the west. For, as I should have explained before, the castle stood almost at a corner, the coast-line turning sharply southwards, after running for many miles almost due east and west.

The proper way to this hamlet was by the same inland road which led to the castle, and which, so the legend ran, was much more modern than the building itself, much more modern at least than the north side of it. That grim fortress-like front was very ancient. It had been built doubtless for a safe retreat, and originally had only been accessible from the sea, being in those days girt round on the land side by enormous walls, in which was no entrance of any kind. A part of these walls, ivy-clad and crumbling, still remained, but sufficient had been pulled down to give space for the pleasant sunny rooms and the sheltered garden with its terraces.

Ruby shivered as she and Mavis stood a moment hesitating in the archway.

"It is cold here," she said; "the wind seems to come from everywhere at once. Which way shall we go, Mavis?"

"It would be a little warmer at the back, perhaps," said Mavis. "But I don't care much for the gardens on a dull day like this."

"Nor do I," said Ruby, "there's nothing to see. Now at the front it's almost nicer on a dull day than when it's sunny—except of course for the cold. Let's go down to the cove, Mavis, and see how it feels there." It was curious that they

always spoke of the fortress side as the front, even though the southern part of the building was what would have naturally seemed so.

"I'd like to stay out till sunset and see the colours up in the turret windows," said Mavis, as they clambered down the rocky path. "I wish I knew which of these rooms is the one where the blue fairy lady used to come. I do think cousin Hortensia might have found out."

"Rubbish!" said Ruby. It was rather a favourite expression of hers, I am afraid. "I don't believe cousin Hortensia ever saw her. It was all a fancy because she had heard about it. If ever she did come, it was ages and ages ago, and I don't believe she did even then. I don't believe one bit about spirits and fairies and dreams and things like that." Mavis said nothing, but a puzzled, disappointed look crept into her eyes.

"Perhaps it's because I'm stupid," she said, "but I shouldn't like to think like you, Ruby. And you know the story wouldn't have come all of itself, and cousin Hortensia, though she calls it a dream, can't really explain it that way."

"If you know so much about it, why do you keep teasing to have it told again?" said Ruby impatiently. "Well, here we are at the cove; what are we to do now?"

Mavis looked about her. It was chilly, and the sky was grey, but over towards the west there was a lightening. The wind came in little puffs down here, now and again only, for they were well under the shelter of the cliffs. And up above, the old castle frowning down upon them—his own children, whose ancestors he had housed and sheltered and protected for years that counted by centuries—suddenly seemed to give a half unwilling smile. It was a ray of thin afternoon sunshine striking across the turret windows.

"See, see," said Mavis. "The sun's coming out. I'm sure the sky must be pretty and bright round where the cottages are. The sea's quite far enough back, and it's going out. Do let us go and ask how the baby—Joan's baby, I mean—is to-day."

"Very well," said Ruby. "Not that I care much how the baby is, but there's rather a nice scrambly way home up behind Joan's house. I found it one day when you had a cold and weren't with me. It brings you out down by the stile into the little fir-wood—just where you'd never expect to find yourself. And oh, Mavis, there's such a queer little cottage farther along the shore, at least just above the shore that way. I saw it from the back, along the scrambly path."

"I wonder whose it is," said Mavis. "I don't remember any cottage that way. Oh yes, I think I remember passing it one day long ago when Joan was our nurse, and she made me run on quick, but she didn't say why."

"Perhaps it's haunted, or some nonsense like that," said Ruby with her contemptuous air. "I'll ask Joan to-day. And if we pass it I'll walk just as slow as ever I can on purpose. You'll see, Mavis."

"We'd better run now," said Mavis. "The sands are pretty firm just here, and cousin Hortensia said we were to make ourselves warm. Let's have a race."

They had left the cove and were making their way to the hamlet by the foot of the rocks, where at low tide there was a narrow strip of pebbly sand, only here and there broken by out-jutting crags which the children found it very amusing to clamber over. Their voices sounded clear and high in the air. For the wind seemed to have fallen with the receding tide. By the time they reached the cottages they were both in a glow, and Ruby had quite forgotten her indignation at old Bertha's fireless rooms.

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## Chapter Two.

### Winfried.

"And somewhat southward toward the noon,  
Whence lies a way up to the moon;  
And thence the fairy can as soon  
Pass to the earth below it."

Drayton.

Joan, a pleasant-faced young woman who had once been the children's nurse, and was now married to a fisherman who owned several boats, and was a person of some consequence among the villagers, was standing at the door of her cottage with a baby in her arms as the children came up. Her face beamed with smiles, but before she had time to speak Ruby called out to her.

"How are you, Joan? We've come round to ask how baby is, but it's very easy to see he is better, otherwise you wouldn't be so smiling."

"And here he is to speak for himself, Miss Ruby," said Joan. "How very kind of you to think of him! And you too, Miss Mavis, my dear. Are you both quite well?"

"Yes, thank you, Joan," said Mavis quietly. But Ruby was fussing about the baby, admiring him and petting him in a way that could scarcely fail to gain his mother's heart. Joan, however, though fond of both the children, had plenty of discernment. She smiled at Ruby—"Miss Ruby has pretty ways with her, there's no denying," she told her husband afterwards,—but there was a very gentle tone in her voice as she turned to Mavis.

"You've had no more headaches, I hope, Miss Mavis? Have you been working hard at your lessons?"

"I have to work hard if I work at all, Joan," said the little girl rather sadly.

"She's so stupid," said Ruby; "and she gets her head full of fancies. I daresay that prevents her having room for sensible things. Oh, by-the-bye, Joan, tell us who lives in that queer cottage all by itself some way farther along the coast. I never saw it till the other day—it's almost hidden among the rocks. But Mavis says she once passed it with you, and you made her run by quickly. Why did you, Joan? I do so want to know."

Joan looked rather at a loss.

"You mean old Adam's cottage," she said. "I really don't know why people speak against him. He's never done any harm, indeed, he's a kind old man. But he's come from a long way off, and he's not like the other folk, and they got up a tale that there were queer sounds and sights in his cottage sometimes—singing and lights late at night, that couldn't be canny. Some spoke of mermaids swimming down below in front of his hut and him standing talking to them quite friendly-like. But that's a good while ago now, and I think it's forgotten. And he goes to church regularly. You'll always be sure of seeing him there."

"Then why don't people like him?" said Mavis.

"Perhaps it's just because he is good and goes to church," said Ruby. "I'm not at all sure that I like extra good people myself. They're so tiresome."

"He's not one to meddle with others," said Joan. "He keeps very much to himself, and his talking doesn't sound like ours. So they call him a foreigner. Indeed, he's often not heard of or seen for weeks and even months at a time, unless any one's ill or in trouble, and then he seems to know it all of himself, and comes to see if he can help. That's one reason why they think him uncanny."

"Did he come when baby was ill?" asked Ruby. Joan shook her head.

"No, for a wonder he didn't."

"Perhaps he's dead," said Ruby indifferently.

"We're going past that way, Mavis. Let's peep in and see."

Mavis grew rather pale.

"Ruby," she said, "I wish you wouldn't—you frighten me."

"Miss Ruby would be frightened herself. She's only joking," said Joan. "I don't suppose there's aught the matter, still I don't think you'd better stop at old Adam's. It isn't like as if he was one of our own folk."

"Rubbish!" said Ruby again. "I'm off. You can send your husband to see if the old wizard has turned us into frogs or sea-gulls, in case we are not heard of any more. Good-night;" and off she ran.

Mavis had to follow her. There was not much fear of Ruby's really doing anything rash, for she was by no means a very brave child, still Mavis always felt uncomfortable when her sister got into one of these wild moods.

"Good-bye, Joan," she said gently. "I'm so glad baby's better. I daresay Ruby's only joking;" and then she ran along the path, which just here in the hamlet was pretty level and smooth, after Ruby.

They had quite half a mile to go before they got to the lonely cottage. It stood some way back from the shore, and great craggy rocks near at hand almost hid it from sight. One might have passed by that way often without noticing that there was any human dwelling-place there. But the children were on the look-out.

"There," said Ruby, "the old ogre can't be dead: there's smoke coming out of the chimney. And—oh, just look, Mavis, what a big fire he must have; do you see the red of it in the window?"

"No," said Mavis, "it's the sun setting. Look out to sea—isn't it splendid?"

But Ruby had set her heart upon exploring the fisherman's hut. She began scrambling up the stones, for there was really nothing worthy of the name of a pathway, quite regardless of the beautiful sight behind her. And as usual. Mavis had to follow, though reluctantly. Still she was not quite without curiosity about the lonely cottage herself. Suddenly, when within a short distance of the hut, Ruby stopped short, and glancing back towards her sister, lifted her hand as if to tell her to be silent and listen. Then Mavis became conscious of the sound of voices speaking—not old Adam's voice certainly, for these sounded soft and clear, and now and then came a ripple of silvery laughter, very sweet and very delicate. The little girls, who had drawn near together, looked at each other.

"Who can it be?" said Mavis in a whisper.

"The mermaids," replied Ruby mockingly. "Perhaps old Adam has invited them to tea."

But as she spoke there came distinctly the sound of the words "Good-bye, good-bye," and then there was silence.

Somehow both children felt rather frightened. "Suppose old Adam's really dead," said Ruby, looking rather pale, "and that these are—fairies, or I don't know what, come to fetch him."

"Angels," said Mavis. "Joan says he's good. But—Ruby—I shouldn't think angels would laugh." She had scarcely said

the words when they saw running down the rough slope from the hut the figure of a boy. He ran fast and lightly, his feet scarcely seeming to touch the stones; he was slight and very active-looking; it was pretty to watch him running, even though as he came close it was plain that he was only a simple fisher-boy, in rough clothes, barefoot and sunburnt. He slackened his pace a little as he came near the children, then glancing at them with a smile he lifted his dark blue cap and stopped short.



"Can I?" he began, then hesitated. He had a pleasant face and clear grey eyes, which looked one straight in the face with interest and inquiry.

"What do you say?" asked Ruby rather haughtily.

"I thought perhaps you had lost your way," he answered quietly. "There's not many gentry comes round here;" and then he smiled, for no very particular reason apparently, though his smile nevertheless gave one the feeling that he had a reason if he chose to give it.

"No, we haven't lost our way," said Ruby; "we came here on purpose. Do you know the old man who lives up there?" and she pointed to the hut.

"Is it true that there's something queer about him?"

The boy looked at her, still smiling.

"Queer?" he repeated.

Ruby began to feel annoyed. She tapped her foot impatiently.

"Yes," she said, "*queer*. Why do you repeat my words, and why don't you say 'Miss,' or 'My Lady?' Lots of the people here call me 'My Lady.' Do you know who I am?"

The boy's face had grown graver.

"Yes," he said. "You are the little ladies from the castle. I have seen you sometimes. I have seen you in church. We always call you the little ladies—grandfather and I—when we are talking. He has told me about you—and—I've heard about the castle, though I've never been in it. It's very fine. I like to look up at it from the sea."

Ruby felt a little smoothed down. Her tone became more gracious. Mavis, who had drawn near, stood listening with great interest, and as the boy turned towards her the smile came over his face again.

"Who do you mean by 'grandfather'?" asked Ruby eagerly. "Is it old Adam? I didn't know he had any children or

grandchildren.”

“Yes,” the boy replied, “I’m his grandson. Was it grandfather you meant when you said he was queer?”

“Oh,” said Mavis, “Ruby didn’t mean to be rude. It was only nonsense. People say—”

“They say he’s very queer indeed,” said Ruby, who had no intention of deserting her colours. “They say he’s a kind of a wizard or an ogre, and that you hear all sorts of sounds—music and talking and I don’t know all what—if you’re near his cottage in the evening, and that there are lights to be seen in it too, not common lights like candles, but much more. Some say he’s friends with the mermaids, and that they come to see him—is that true?” and notwithstanding her boasted boldness Ruby dropped her voice a little, and glanced over her shoulder half nervously seawards, as if not quite sure but that some of the tailed ladies in question might be listening to her.

The boy did more than smile now. He laughed outright; but his laugh, though bright and ringing, was not the laugh the sisters had heard from the cottage.

“The mermaids,” he said. “No, indeed, poor little things, they never visit grandfather.”

“Well, why do you laugh?” said Ruby angrily again. “You speak as if there *were* mermaids.”

“I was thinking of stories I have heard about them,” said the boy simply. “But I couldn’t help laughing to think of them coming to see grandfather. How could they ever get up these stones?”

“Oh, I don’t know, I’m sure,” Ruby answered impatiently. “If he’s a wizard he could do anything like that. I wish you’d tell us all about him. You must know, as you live with him.”

“I’ve not been long with him,” said the boy. “He *may* be friends with the mermaids for all I know. He’s friends with everybody.”

“You’re mocking at me,” said Ruby, “and I won’t have it. I’m sure you could tell me things if you chose.”

“We did hear talking and laughing,” said Mavis gently, speaking almost for the first time, “and it seemed as if there was some one else there.”

The boy looked at her again, and a very pleasant light came into his eyes—more than that, indeed, as Mavis watched him it seemed to her that they changed in colour. Was it the reflection from the sky? No, there was a mingling of every hue to be seen over by the western horizon certainly, but scarcely the deep clear midsummer sky-blue they suddenly became.

“What funny eyes you’ve got,” exclaimed the child impulsively. “They’re quite blue now, and they weren’t a minute ago.”

Ruby stared at him and then at Mavis. “Nonsense,” she said, “they’re not. They’re just common coloured eyes. You shouldn’t say such things, Mavis; people will think you’re out of your mind.” Mavis looked very ashamed, but the boy’s face flushed up. He looked both glad and excited.

“If you please, miss,” he said, “some people see things that others don’t. I don’t even mind that nonsense about gran and the mermaids; those that say it don’t know any better.”

Ruby looked at him sharply.

“Then there is something to know,” she said. “Now you might as well tell us all about it. Is old Adam a wizard?”

“That he’s not,” answered the boy stoutly, “if so be, as I take it, that a wizard means one that has to do with bad spirits—unkind and mischief-making and unloving, call them what you will. None of such like would come near gran, or, if they did, he’d soon send them to the right-about. I’d like you to see him for yourself some day, but not to-day, if you’ll excuse it. He’s very tired. I was running down to the shore to fetch a pailful of sea water to bathe his lame arm.”

“Then we mustn’t keep you,” said Mavis. “But might we really come to see your grandfather some day, do you think?”

“I’ll ask him,” said the boy; “and I think he’d be pleased to see you.”

“You might come up to the castle if there’s anything he would like—a little soup or anything,” said Ruby in her patronising way. “I’ll speak to the housekeeper.”

“Thank you, miss,” said the boy, but more hesitatingly than he had spoken before.

“What’s your name?” asked Ruby. “We’d better know it, so that you can say who you are when you come.”

“Winfried,” he answered simply.

“Then good-bye, Winfried,” said Ruby. “Come on, Mavis;” and she turned to pursue her way home past the cottage.

Winfried hesitated. Then he ran a step or two after them.

“I can show you a nearer way home to the castle,” he said, “and if you don’t mind, it would be very kind of you not to go near by our cottage. Grandfather is feeble still—did you know he had been very ill?—and seeing or hearing

strangers might startle him.”

“Then you come with us,” said Ruby. “You can tell him who we are.”

“I’m in a hurry to get the salt water,” said the boy. “I have put off time already, and if you won’t think me rude I’d much rather you came to the cottage some day when we could invite you to step in.”

His manner was so simple and hearty that Ruby could not take offence, though she had been quite ready to do so.

“Very well,” she said, “then show us your nearer way.”

He led them without speaking some little distance towards the shore again. After all there was a path—not a bad one of its kind, for here and there it ran on quite smoothly for a few yards and then descended by stones arranged so as to make a few rough steps.

“Dear me,” said Ruby, “how stupid we were not to find this path before.”

Winfried smiled. “I scarce think you could have found it without me to show you,” he said, “nor the short way home either for that matter. See here;” and having come to the end of the path he went on a few steps along the pebbly shore, for here there was no smooth sand, and stopped before a great boulder stone, as large as a hay-cart, which stood out suddenly among the broken rocks. Winfried stepped up close to it and touched it apparently quite gently. To the children’s amazement it swung round lightly as if it had been the most perfectly hung door. And there before them was revealed a little roadway, wide enough for two to walk abreast, which seemed to wind in and out among the rocks as far as they could see. It was like a carefully rolled gravel path in a garden, except that it seemed to be of a peculiar kind of sand, white and glistening.

Ruby darted forward.

“What a lovely path!” she exclaimed; “will it take us straight home? Are you sure it will?”

“Quite sure,” said Winfried. “You will see your way in no time if you run hand-in-hand.”

“What a funny idea,” laughed the child; and Mavis too looked pleased.

“I’m quite sure it’s a fairy road,” she was beginning to say, but, looking round, their little guide had disappeared. Then came his voice:

“Good-night,” he said cheerfully. “I’ve shut-to the stone door, and I’m up on the top of it. Good-night, little ladies. Run home hand-in-hand.”

The girls looked at each other.

“Upon my word,” exclaimed Ruby, not quite knowing what to say, “if old Adam isn’t a wizard his grandson is. I think we’d better get out of this as quick as we can, Mavis.”

She seemed half frightened and half provoked. Mavis, on the contrary, was quite simply delighted.

“I shouldn’t wonder if this was the mermaid’s own way to the cottage,” she said. “I’m sure old Adam and Winfried aren’t wizards; but I do think they must be some kind of good fairies, or at least they must have to do with fairies. Come along, Ruby, hand-in-hand;” and she held out her own hand.

But Ruby by this time had grown cross.

“I won’t give in to such rubbish,” she said. “I don’t want to go along hand-in-hand like two silly babies. If it was worth the trouble I’d climb up to the top of the stone and go home the proper way.”

This was all boasting. She knew quite well she could not possibly climb up the stone. But she walked on a few steps in sulky dignity. Suddenly she gave a little cry, slipped, and fell.

“Oh, I’ve hurt my ankle!” she exclaimed. “This horrid white gravel is so slippery.”

Mavis was beside her almost before she had said the words, and with her sister’s help Ruby got on to her feet again, though looking rather doleful.

“I believe it’s all a trick of that horrid boy’s,” she said. “I wish you hadn’t made me come to see that dirty old cottage, Mavis.”

Mavis stared.

“*Me* make you come, Ruby?” she said. “Why, it was yourself.”

“Well, you didn’t stop it, any way,” said Ruby, “and you seem to have taken such a fancy to that boy and his grandfather, and—”

“Ruby, we must go home,” said Mavis. “Try if you can get along.”

They were “hand-in-hand.” There was no help for it now. Ruby tried to walk; to her surprise her ankle scarcely hurt her, and after a moment or two she even began urging Mavis to go faster.



"I believe I could run," she said. "Perhaps the bone in my ankle got out of its place and now has got into it again. Come on, Mavis."

They started running together, for in spite of her boasting Ruby had had a lesson and would not let go of Mavis. They got on famously; the ground seemed elastic; as they ran, each step grew at once firmer and yet lighter.

"It isn't a bit slippery now, is it?" said Mavis, glowing with the pleasant exercise. "And oh, Ruby, do look up at the sky—isn't it lovely? And isn't that the evening star coming out—that blue light up there; no, it's too early. See—no, it's gone. What could it be? Why, here we are, at the gate of the low terrace!"

They had suddenly, as they ran, come out from the path, walled in, as it were, among the broken rocky fragments, on to a more open space, which at the first moment they scarcely recognised as one of the fields at the south side of the castle.

Ruby too gazed about her with surprise.

"It *is* a quick way home, certainly," she allowed, "but I don't see any star or blue light, Mavis. It must be your fancy."

Mavis looked up at the sky. The sunset colours were just beginning to fade; a soft pearly grey veil was slowly drawing over them, though they were still brilliant. Mavis seemed perplexed.

"It is gone," she said, "but I did see it."

"It must have been the dazzle of the light in your eyes," said Ruby. "I am seeing lots of little suns all over—red ones and yellow ones."

"No, it wasn't like that," said Mavis; "it was more like—"

"More like what?" asked Ruby.

"I was going to say more like a forget-me-not up in the sky," said her sister.

"You *silly* girl," laughed Ruby. "I never did hear any one talk such nonsense as you do. I'll tell cousin Hortensia, see if I don't."

"I don't mind," said Mavis quietly.

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## Chapter Three.

### The Princess with the Forget-me-not Eyes.

"For, just when it thrills me most,  
The fairies change into phantoms cold,  
And the beautiful dream is lost!"

Miss Hortensia was looking out for the little girls as they slowly came up the terraces.

"There you are at last," she called out. "You are rather late, my dears. I have been round at the other side, thinking I saw you go out that way."

"So we did," said Ruby. "We went down to the cove and along the shore as far as —. Oh, cousin Hortensia, we have had *such* adventures, and last of all, what *do* you think? Mavis has just seen a forget-me-not up in the sky."

Miss Hortensia smiled at Mavis; she had a particular way of smiling at her, as if she was not perfectly sure if the little girl were quite like other people. But Mavis, though she understood this far better than her cousin imagined, never felt angry at it.

"A forget-me-not in the sky," said the lady; "that is an odd idea. But you must tell me all your adventures when we are comfortably settled for the evening. Run in and take your things off quickly, for I don't want you to catch cold, and the air, now the sun is set, is chilly. There is a splendid fire burning, and we shall have tea in my room as I promised you."

"Oh, how nice," said Ruby. "Come along, Mavis. I'm as hungry as a hawk."

"And you'll tell us stories after tea, cousin Hortensia, won't you?" said Mavis; "at least you'll tell us about your queer dream."

"And about mamma's going to court," added Ruby, as she dashed upstairs. For by this time they were inside the house.

The part of the castle that the children and their cousin and the few servants in attendance on them occupied was really only a corner of it. A short flight of stairs led up to a small gallery running round a side-hall, and out of this gallery opened their sleeping-rooms and what had been their nursery and play-rooms. The school-room and Miss Hortensia's own sitting-room were on the ground-floor. To get to any of the turrets was quite a long journey. They were approached by the great staircase which ascended from the large white and black tiled hall, dividing, after the first flight, into two branches, each of which led to passages from which other smaller stairs went upwards to the top of the house. The grandest rooms opened out of the tiled hall on the ground-floor, and out of the passages on the

first floor. From this central part of the house the children's corner was shut off by heavy swing doors seldom opened.

So when Ruby and Mavis visited the turrets they had to pass through these doors, and go some way along the passages, and then up one of the side stairs—up, up, up, the flights of steps getting steeper and narrower as they climbed, till at last they reached the door of the turret-chamber itself. Of these chambers there were two, one in each turret, east and west. The west was their favourite, partly because from it they saw the sunset, and partly because it was nearer their own rooms. They had been allowed to make a sort of private nest of it for themselves, and to play there on rainy days when they could not get out, and sometimes in very cold or snowy weather they had a fire there, which made the queer old room very cheery. There were three windows in each turret, and they were furnished in an odd, irregular way with all sorts of quaint old-fashioned furniture discarded from other parts of the castle. In former days these turret-rooms had sometimes been used as guest-chambers when the house was very full of visitors. For the large modern rooms and the hall I have spoken of had been added by the children's grandfather—a very hospitable but extravagant man. And before he made these improvements there were often more guests than it was easy to find room for.

Ruby and Mavis were not long in taking off their out-door things and "tidying" themselves for their evening in Miss Hortensia's pleasant little room. They made a pretty picture as they ran downstairs, their fair curls dancing on their shoulders, though if I were to describe to you how they were dressed, I am afraid you would think they must have been a very old-world looking little pair.

"Here we are, cousin Hortensia," exclaimed Ruby as they came in, "and I do hope it's nearly tea-time."

"Not quite, my dear," Miss Hortensia replied, glancing at a beautifully carved Swiss clock which stood on the mantelpiece; "the little trumpeter won't tell us it's six o'clock for half an hour yet—his dog has just barked twice."

"Lazy things," said Ruby, shrugging her shoulders, "I'd like to shake that old trumpeter sometimes."

"And sometimes you'd like to pat him to sleep, wouldn't you?" said Mavis. "When cousin Hortensia's telling us stories, and he says it's bed-time."

Miss Hortensia looked at Mavis in some surprise, but she seemed very pleased too. It was not often Mavis spoke so brightly.

"Suppose you use up the half-hour in telling *me* stories," said their cousin. "Mine will keep till after tea. What were all the adventures you met with?"

"Oh," said Ruby, "it was too queer. Did you know, cousin, that there was a short way home from the sea-shore near old Adam's cottage? *Such* a queer way;" and she went on to describe the path between the rocks.

Miss Hortensia looked very puzzled.

"Who showed it to you?" she said; for Ruby, in her helter-skelter way, had begun at the end of the story, without speaking of the boy Winfried, or explaining why they—or she—had been so curious about the old man whom the villagers called a wizard.

"It was the boy," Mavis replied; "such a nice boy, cousin Hortensia, with funny bluey eyes—at least they're *sometimes* blue."

"Oh, Mavis, do not talk so sillily," said Ruby; "his eyes aren't a bit blue. She's got blue on the brain, cousin, she really has. Seeing forget-me-nots in the sky too! I don't think he *was* a particularly nice boy. He was rather cool. I'm sure we wouldn't have done his grandfather any harm. Did you ever hear of him, cousin? Old Adam they call him;" and then she went on to give a rather more clear account of their walk, and all they had seen and heard.

Miss Hortensia listened attentively, and into her own eyes crept a dreamy, far-away, or rather long-ago look.

"It is odd," she said; "I have a kind of fancy that I have heard of the old 'solitary,' for he must be almost a hermit, before. But somehow I don't think it was here. I wonder how long he has lived here?"

"I don't know," said Ruby. "A good while, I should think. He was here when Joan was our nurse."

"But that was only two years ago," said Miss Hortensia, smiling. "If he had been here many years the people would not count him so much of a foreigner. And the boy you met—has he come to take care of the old man?"

"I suppose so. We didn't ask him," said Ruby carelessly. "He was really such a cool boy, ordering us not to go near the cottage indeed! I told him he might come up to get some soup or jelly for his grandfather," she went on, with a toss of her head. "I said it, you know, just to put him in his place, and remind him whom he was speaking to."

"I'm sure he didn't mean to be rude," said Mavis; "and, cousin, there really was something rather 'fairy' about him. Isn't it *very* queer we never heard of that path before?"

"Yes," Miss Hortensia replied. "Are you sure you didn't both fall asleep on the shore and dream it all? Though, to be sure, it is rather too cold weather for you to have been overcome by drowsiness."

"And we couldn't both have dreamt the same thing if we had fallen asleep," said Mavis, in her practical way. "It wasn't like when you were a little girl and saw or dreamt—"

"Don't you begin telling the story if cousin Hortensia's going to tell it herself," interrupted Ruby. "I was just thinking I had forgotten it a good deal, and that it would seem fresh. But here's tea at last—I am so glad."

They were very merry and happy during the meal. Ruby was particularly pleased with herself, having a vague idea that she had behaved in a very grand and dignified way. Mavis's eyes were very bright. The afternoon's adventure had left on her a feeling of expecting something pleasant, that she could hardly put in words. And besides this, there was cousin Hortensia's story to hear.

When the table was cleared, cousin Hortensia settled herself with her knitting in a low chair by the fire, and told the children to bring forward two little stools and seat themselves beside her. They had their knitting too, for this useful art had been taught them while they were so young that they could scarcely remember having learnt it. And the three pairs of needles made a soft click-click, which did not the least disturb their owners, so used were they to it. Rather did it seem a pleasant accompaniment to Miss Hortensia's voice.

"You want me to tell you the story of my night in the west turret-room when I was a little girl," she began. "You have heard it before, partly at least, but I will try to tell it more fully this time. I was a very little girl, younger than you two—I don't think I was more than eight years old. I had come here with my father and mother and elder sisters to join a merry party assembled to celebrate the silver wedding of your great-grandparents. Your grandfather himself, their eldest child, was about three and twenty. He was not then married, so it was some time before your father was born. I don't quite know why they had brought me. It seems to me I would have been better at home in my nursery, for there were no children as young as I to keep me company. Perhaps it was that they wished to have me to represent another generation, as it were, though, after all, that might have been done by my sisters. The elder of them, Jacintha, was then nineteen; it was she who afterwards married your grandfather, so that besides being cousins of the family, as we were already, I am your grandmother's sister, and thus your great-aunt as well as cousin."

The little girls nodded their heads.

"I was so much younger than Jacintha," Miss Hortensia went on, "that your father never called me aunt. He and I have always been Robert and Hortensia to each other, and to me he has always been like a younger brother."

"But about your adventure," said Ruby, who was not of a sentimental turn.

"I am coming to it," said their cousin. "Well, as I said, the party was a merry one. They had dancing and music in plenty every evening, and the house, which was in some ways smaller than it is now, was very full. There were a great many bedrooms, though few of them were large, and I and my sisters, being relations, were treated with rather less ceremony than some of the stranger guests, and put to sleep in the turret-room. I had a little bed in one corner, and my sisters slept together in the same old four-poster which is still there. I used to be put to bed much earlier than they came, for, as I said, there were dancing and other amusements most evenings till pretty late. I was not at all a nervous or frightened child, and even sometimes when I lay up there by myself wide awake—for the change and the excitement kept me from going to sleep as quickly as at home—I did not feel at all lonely. From my bed I could see out of the window, for the turret windows are so high up that it has never been necessary to have blinds on them, and I loved to lie there watching the starlit sky, or sometimes, when the moon was bright and full, gazing up at the clouds that went scurrying over her face. One night I had been unusually wakeful. I lay there, hearing now and then very, very faint, far-off sounds of the music down below. It was a mild night, and I think the windows were a little open. At last I must have fallen asleep. When I awoke, or rather when I *thought* I awoke, the room was all in darkness except in one corner, the corner by the west window. There, there was a soft steady light, and it seemed to me that it was on purpose to make me look that way. For there, sitting on the old chair that still stands in the depth of that window was some one I had never seen before. A lady in a cloudy silvery dress, with a sheen of blue over it. My waking, or looking at her, for though it must all have been a dream, I could not make you understand it unless I described it as if it were real, seemed to be made conscious to her, for she at once turned her eyes upon me, then rose slowly and came over the room towards me."

"Weren't you frightened?" said Ruby breathlessly. In spite of her boasted disbelief in dreams and visions her cousin's story had caught her attention. Miss Hortensia shook her head.

"Not in the *very* least," she said. "On the contrary, I felt a strange and delightful kind of pleasure and wonder. It was more intense than I have ever felt anything of the kind in waking life; indeed, if it had lasted long I think it would have been more than I could bear—" Miss Hortensia stopped for a moment and leant back in her chair. "I have felt *something* of the same," she went on, "when listening to very, *very* beautiful music—music that seemed too beautiful and made you almost cry out for it to stop."

"I've never heard music like that," whispered little Mavis, "but I think I know what you mean."

"Or," continued Miss Hortensia, "sometimes on a marvellously beautiful day—what people call a 'heavenly' day, I have had a feeling rather like it. A feeling that makes one shut one's eyes for very pleasure."

"Well," said Ruby, "did you shut your eyes then, or what did you do?"

"No," said her cousin. "I could not have shut them. I felt she was looking at me, and her eyes seemed to catch and fasten mine and draw them into hers. It was her eyes above all that filled me with that beautiful wonderful feeling. I can never forget it—never. I could fancy sometimes even now, old woman as I am, that I am again the little enraptured child gazing up at the beautiful vision. I feel her eyes in mine still."

"How funny you are," interrupted Ruby. "A minute ago you said she pulled your eyes into hers, now you say hers came into yours. It would be a very funny feeling whichever it was; I don't think I should like it."

Miss Hortensia glanced at her, but gravely. She did not smile.

"It must be a very 'funny' feeling, as you call it, to a hitherto blind man the first time he sees the sunshine. I daresay he would find it difficult to describe; and to a still blind person it would be impossible to explain it. I daresay the

newly-cured man would not feel sure whether the sun had come into his eyes or his eyes had reached up to the sun.”

Ruby fidgeted.

“Oh, do go on about the fairy or whatever she was,” she said. “Never mind about what I said.”

Miss Hortensia smiled.

“The lady came slowly across the room to me,” she went on, “and stood by my bed, looking down at me with those wonderful blue eyes. Then she smiled, and it seemed as if the light about her grew still brighter. I thought I sat up in bed to see her better. ‘Are you a fairy?’ I said at last. She smiled still more. ‘If you like, you may call me a fairy,’ she answered. ‘But if I am a fairy my home must be fairyland, and this turret-room is one of my homes. So you are my guest, my little girl.’ I did not mind her saying that. I smiled too. ‘I’ve never seen you here before,’ I said. And she laughed a little—I never heard anything so pretty as her laugh. ‘No,’ she replied, ‘but I have seen you and every one that has ever been here, though every one has not seen me. Now listen, my child. I wanted you to see me because I have something to say to you. There will come a time when you will be drawn two ways, one will be back here to the old castle by the sea, after many years; many, many years as you count things. Choose that way, for you will be wanted here. Those yet unborn will want you, for they will want love and care. Look into my eyes, little girl, and promise me you will come to them.’ And in my dream I thought I gazed again into her eyes, and I felt as if their blue light was the light of a faith and truth that could not be broken, and I said, ‘I promise.’ And then the fairy lady seemed to draw a gauze veil over her face, and it grew dim, and the wonderful eyes were hidden, and I thought I fell asleep. In reality, I suppose, I had never been awake.”

“And when you did wake up it was morning, I suppose, and it had all been a dream?” asked Ruby.

Miss Hortensia gave a little sigh.

“Yes,” she said, “I suppose it had been a dream. It was morning, bright morning, the sun streaming in at the other window when I awoke, and I never saw the fairy lady again—not even in a dream. But what she had said came true, my dears. Many, many years after, when I was already beginning to be an old woman, it came true. I am afraid I had grown selfish—life had brought me many anxieties, and I had lived in a great city where there was much luxury and gaiety, and where no one seemed to have thought for anything but the rush of pleasure and worldly cares. I had forgotten all about my beautiful vision, when one day there came a summons. Your sweet young mother had died, my darlings, and your poor father in his desolation could think of no one better to come and take care of his little girls—you were only two years old—than his old cousin. And so I came; and then there crept back to me the remembrance of my dream. I had indeed been drawn two ways, for the friends I might have gone to live with were rich and good-natured, and they promised me everything I could wish. But I thought of the two little motherless ones, here in the old castle by the sea, in want of love and care as *she* had said, and I came.”

Miss Hortensia stopped. Even Ruby was impressed by what she had heard.

“Dear cousin,” she said, “it was very good of you.”

“And have you never seen the beautiful lady again?” said Mavis. “She told you the west turret was her own room, didn’t she? Have you never seen her there?”

Miss Hortensia shook her head.

“You forget, dear, it was only a dream. And even if it had been more than that, we grow very far away from angels and fairies as we get old, I fear.”

“Not *you*,” Mavis said; “you’re not like that. And the lady must have been so pleased with you for caring for us, I wonder she hasn’t ever come to see you again. Do you know,” she went on eagerly, after a moment’s pause, “I have a feeling that she *is* in the west turret-room sometimes!”

Miss Hortensia looked at the child in amazement. Mavis’s quiet, rather dull face seemed transformed; it was all flushed and beaming, her eyes sparkling and bright.

“Mavis!” she said, “you look as if you had seen her yourself. But it was only a dream, you mustn’t let my old-world stories make you fanciful. I am too fanciful myself perhaps—I have always loved the west turret, and that was why I chose it for your play-room when you were little dots.”

“I’m so glad you did,” said Mavis, drawing a long breath.

After that they were all rather silent for a while. Then Ruby claimed Miss Hortensia’s promise of the story or description rather of the grand court ball at which her mother’s beauty had made such a sensation, and when that was ended, the little trumpeter announced, much to the children’s displeasure, that it was time to go to bed.

“We *have* had a cosy evening,” said Mavis, as she kissed Miss Hortensia.

“And, oh Ruby,” she said, as her sister and she were going slowly upstairs, “*don’t* you wish we might sleep in the turret-room?”

“No indeed,” Ruby replied, in a most decided tone, “I certainly don’t.”

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## Chapter Four.

## A Boy and a Boat.

"Are little boats alive?  
And can they plan and feel?"

"A."

"If you please, there's a boy at the kitchen-door asking for the young ladies," said the young maid-servant Ulrica, who generally waited on Ruby and Mavis.

They were just finishing their morning lessons with Miss Hortensia, and Mavis was putting away the books, a task which usually fell to her share.

Miss Hortensia gave a little start.

"A boy," she exclaimed, "what kind of a boy? It can't be—oh no of course not. How foolish I am. At the kitchen-door, did you say, Ulrica? Who is it?"

"Oh, I know!" cried Ruby, jumping up with a clatter, delighted to avoid finding out the mistake in a sum which Miss Hortensia had told her she must correct. "It's Winfried; I'm sure it is. He's come for some soup or something. I told him he might, but I do think it's rather greedy to have come the very next day. Mayn't I go and speak to him, cousin?"

"Well, yes, I suppose so. No, I think it would be better for him to come in here. Show the boy in here, Ulrica—at least—ask him if he is old Adam's grandson."

In a minute or two the door was again opened.

"If you please, ma'am," said Ulrica's voice as before, "it's—it's the boy."

"The boy" walked in; he held his cap in his hand, and made a sort of graceful though simple obeisance to the ladies. He did not seem the least shy, yet neither was there a touch of boldness about him. On his face was the slight but pleasant smile that had more than once lighted it up the day before, and his eyes, as he stood there full in the bright gleam of the window—for it was a clear and sunny day—were *very* blue.

Ruby came forward.

"Oh, it's you, is it?" she said, with the half-patronising good humour usual to her when not put out. "I thought it was. It's Winfried, cousin Hortensia; the boy I told you of. I suppose you've come for some soup for your grandfather."

Winfried smiled, a little more than before. Mavis crept forward; she wished she could have said something, but she was afraid of vexing Ruby.

"No, miss," said Winfried, "I did not come for that, though grandfather said it was very kind of you, and some day perhaps—" he stopped short.

"I came to bring you this which I found on the rocks down below our cottage;" and he held out a little silver cross. Ruby started, and put her hand up to her neck.

"Oh dear," she said, "I never knew I had lost it. Are you sure it isn't yours, Mavis? I've got my cord on."

"Yes, but the cross must have dropped off," said Mavis. "I have mine all right."

And so it proved. Both little sisters wore these crosses, which were exactly alike. Ruby took hers from Winfried, and began examining it to see how it had got loose. Miss Hortensia came forward.

"It was very good of you to bring the little cross," she said kindly; for something about the boy attracted her very much. "Ruby, my dear," she went on half reprovingly. Ruby started and looked up. "I am sure you are very much obliged?"

"Oh yes, of course I am," said the little girl carelessly. "It certainly was very sharp of you to find it," she added with more interest.

"I can generally find things," said Winfried quietly.

"Is there anything we can do for your grandfather?" asked Miss Hortensia. "I am sorry to hear he's so ill."

The boy shook his head; a sad look passed across his bright face.

"Yes," he said, "he's pretty bad sometimes. But some days he's much better. He's better to-day. There's one thing he would like," he went on, "he told me to ask you if some day the young ladies might come to see him; he said I might ask—"

Ruby interrupted—

"Why, how funny you are," she said; "that was just what we wanted yesterday, and you wouldn't let us go near the cottage. You said we'd startle him."

"He was very tired yesterday," said Winfried; "and you see he wasn't looking for you."

"He was chattering and laughing all the same—or somebody was," said Ruby. "We heard them—don't you remember?"

Winfried did not speak. But he did not seem vexed.

"I believe it was the mermaids after all," Ruby went on. "Cousin Hortensia, if you let us go there the mermaids will steal us."

"No, indeed," exclaimed Winfried eagerly.

Miss Hortensia smiled at him.

"I am not afraid," she said. "Tell your grandfather the young ladies shall certainly go to see him some day soon."

"To-morrow," said Mavis, speaking almost for the first time. "Oh, do say we may go to-morrow—it's our half-holiday."

"Very well," said Miss Hortensia. "Are you sure you can find your way? I can send Ulrica with you."

"Mayn't I come to fetch the young ladies?" asked Winfried. "I know all the short cuts."

"I should think you did," laughed Ruby. "We told cousin Hortensia all about that queer path through the rocks. *She'd* never seen it either."

"I'll take you quite as nice a way to-morrow," said the boy composedly. "May I go now, please?" he added, turning to Miss Hortensia. "Grandfather may be wanting me, and thank you very much;" and in another moment he was gone.

Miss Hortensia was quite silent for a minute or two after he had left the room.

"Cousin," began Ruby; but her cousin did not seem to hear. "*Cousin*," repeated the child impatiently.

Miss Hortensia looked up as if awakened from a brown study.

"Did you speak, my dear?" she said.

"Yes, of course I did. I want you to say something about that queer boy. I suppose you think him very nice, or you wouldn't let Mavis and me go to his cottage. You're generally so frightened about us."

"I do think he is a very nice boy," said Miss Hortensia. "I am sure he is quite trustworthy."

"I believe he's a bit of a fairy, and I'm sure his old grandfather's a wizard," murmured Ruby. "And I quite expect, as I said to Joan, that we shall be turned into sea-gulls or frogs if we go there."

"I shouldn't mind being a sea-gull," said Mavis. "Not for a little while at least. Would you, cousin Hortensia?"

But Miss Hortensia had not been listening to their chatter.

"My dears," she said suddenly, "I will tell you one reason why I should be glad for you sometimes to have Winfried as a companion if he is as good and manly as he seems. I have had a letter from your father, telling me of a new guest we are to expect. It is a cousin of yours—a little nephew of your father's—your aunt Margaret's son. He is an only child, and, your father fears, a good deal spoilt. He is coming here because his father is away at sea and his mother is ill and must be kept quiet, and Bertrand, it seems, is very noisy."

"Bertrand," repeated Ruby, "oh, I remember about him. I remember father telling us about him—he is a horrid boy, I know."

"Your father did not call him a horrid boy, I'm sure," said Miss Hortensia.

"No," said Mavis, "he only said he was spoilt. And he said he was a pretty little boy, and nice in some ways."

"Well, we must do our best to make him nicer," said Miss Hortensia; "though I confess I feel a little uneasy—you have never been accustomed to rough bearish ways. And if Winfried can be with you sometimes he might help you with Bertrand."

"When is he coming?" asked Ruby.

"Very soon, but I do not know the exact day. Now run off, my dears; there is time for you to have half an hour's play in the garden before dinner."

It was curious that of the two little girls Mavis seemed the more to dislike the idea of the expected guest.

"Ruby," she said rather dolefully, "I do wish Bertrand weren't coming. He'll spoil everything, and we shan't know what to do with him."

"There's not much to spoil that I see," said Ruby.

"What do you mean?"

"Oh, our nice quiet ways. Cousin Hortensia telling us stories and all that," said Mavis. "And I'm sure Winfried won't want to have to look after a rough, rude little boy. It's quite different with *us*—Winfried likes us because we're—"

ladies, you know, and gentle and nice to him.”

Ruby laughed.

“How you go on about Winfried—Winfried!” she said mockingly. “I think it’s a very good thing Bertrand is coming to put him down a bit—a common fisher-boy! I wonder at cousin Hortensia. I’m sure if father knew he wouldn’t be at all pleased, but I’m not going to tell him. I mean to have some fun with Master Winfried before I have done with him, and I expect Bertrand will help me.”



“Ruby!” exclaimed Mavis, looking startled, “you don’t mean that you are going to play him any tricks?” Ruby only laughed again, more mockingly than before.

“I’d like to lock him up in the haunted room in the west turret one night,” she said. “I do hope he’d get a good fright.”

Mavis seemed to have recovered from her alarm.

“I don’t believe he’d mind the least scrap,” she said; “that shows you don’t understand him one bit. He’d like it; besides, you say yourself you think he’s a fairy boy, so why should he be afraid of fairies?”

“Nobody’s afraid of *fairies*, you silly girl. But if cousin Hortensia saw anything in the turret—and I don’t believe she did,—it wasn’t a fairy, it was quite different—more a sort of witch, I suppose.”

“You’re always talking of witches and wizards,” retorted Mavis, who seemed to be picking up a spirit which rather astonished Ruby. “I like thinking of nicer things—angels and—oh Ruby!” she suddenly broke off, “do look here—oh, how lovely!” and stooping down she pointed to a thick cluster of turquoise blossoms, almost hidden in a corner beneath the shrubs. “Aren’t they darlings? Really it’s enough to make one believe in fairies or kind spirits of some kind—to find forget-me-nots like these in November!” and she looked up at her sister with delight dancing in her eyes.

Even Ruby looked surprised.

“They are beauties,” she said; “and I’m almost sure they weren’t there yesterday. Didn’t we come round by here, Mavis?”

“Not till it was nearly dark. We ran in this way, you know, after we came out of Winfried’s path,” said Mavis.

“Oh, yes, I remember,” Ruby replied, and a half dreamy look stole over her face.

They were standing on the lower terrace. This side of the castle, as I have said, was much more sheltered and

protected than the other, but still already in November it was bleak and bare. The evergreen shrubs had begun to look self-satisfied and important, as I think they always do in late autumn, when their fragile companions of the summer are shivering together in forlorn misery, or sinking slowly and sadly, leaf by leaf, brown and shrivelled, into the parent bosom of Mother Earth, always ready to receive and hide her poor children in their day of desolation. Nay, more, far more than that does she for them in her dark but loving embrace; not a leaf, not a tiniest twig is lost or mislaid—all, everything, is cared for and restored again, at the sun's warm kiss to creep forth in ever fresh and renewed life and beauty. For all we see, children dear, is but a type, faint and shadowy, of the real things that *are*.

Then a strange sort of irritation came over Ruby. The soft wondering expression so new to her disappeared, and she turned sharply to Mavis.

"Rubbish!" she said. "Of course they were there yesterday. But they shan't be there to-morrow—here goes;" and she bent down to pick the little flowers.

Mavis stopped her with a cry.

"Don't gather them, Ruby," she said. "Poor little things, they might stay in their corner in peace, and we could come and look at them every day. They'd wither so soon in the house."

Ruby laughed. She was much more careless than actually unkind, at least when kindness cost her little.

"*What* a baby you are," she said contemptuously. "You make as much fuss as when I wanted to take the thrush's eggs last spring. Wouldn't you like to give your dear Winfried a posy of them?"

"No," Mavis answered, "he wouldn't like us to gather them; there are so few and they do look so sweet." The next day was clear and bright, but cold; evidently winter was coming now. But old Bertha had started the fires at last, as the date on which it was the rule at the castle for them to begin on was now past. So inside the house it was comfortable enough—in the inhabited part of it at least; though in the great unused rooms round the tiled hall, where all the furniture was shrouded in ghostly-looking linen covers, and up the echoing staircase, and up still higher in the turret-rooms where the wind whistled in at one window and out again at the opposite one, where Jack Frost's pictures lasted the same on the panes for days at a time—dear, dear, it *was* cold, even Bertha herself allowed, when she had to make her weekly tour of inspection to see that all was right.

"I will ask Miss Hortensia not to let the little ladies play in the west turret this winter," thought the old woman. "I'm sure it was there Miss Mavis caught her cold last Christmas. A good fire indeed! It'd take a week of bonfires to warm that room."

But old Bertha was mistaken, as you will see. There was no thought of playing in the west turret this half-holiday, however, for it was the right sort of day for a bright winter walk. And while the afternoon was still young, Ruby and Mavis, warmly wrapt up in their fur-lined mantles and hoods, were racing downstairs to Winfried, who had come punctually and was waiting for them, so Ulrica had come in to say, at the door in the archway on the sea side of the castle.

"What are you here for?" was Ruby's first greeting. "Why didn't you come to the garden side? Aren't you going to take us by the path between the rocks, down below the field?"

"No, Miss Ruby," said the boy, his cap in his hand. "We're going another way to-day. I think you will like it just as well. We must go down to the cove first."

"I don't mind," said Ruby, dancing on in front of the two others; "but I'm afraid Mavis has been dreaming of that nice cosy little path. She wouldn't let me even look for the entrance to it yesterday; she said we should wait for you to show it us."

"I think Miss Mavis will like to-day's way just as well," Winfried repeated.

They were some little distance down the cliff by this time. It was very clear and bright; for once, the waves, even though the tide was close up to the shore, seemed in a peaceful mood, and only as a distant murmur came the boom of their dashing against the rocks, round to the right beyond the little sheltered nook. Winfried stood still for a moment and gazed down seawards, shading his eyes with his hand, for winter though it was, the afternoon sunshine was almost dazzling.

"What is it? What are you looking for?" asked Ruby, coming back a step or two and standing beside him. "Do come on; it's too cold to hang about."

For once Winfried was less polite than usual. He did not answer Ruby, but turned to Mavis, who was a little behind.

"Do you see anything?" he asked.

And Mavis, following his eyes, answered, "Yes—there's—oh, there's a little boat drifting in—a tiny boat—is it drifting? No; there's some one in it,—some one with a blue cloak; no, it must have been the waves just touching; the waves are so blue to-day."

The boy gave a little sigh of satisfaction.

"I thought so," he said. Then he sprang forward eagerly: "Come on," he cried, "we mustn't be late."

Ruby followed, not too pleased.



"I've as good eyes as Mavis," she said. "Why didn't you ask me? I don't believe there's a boat at all."

But even Ruby had to give in when in a few minutes they found themselves at the edge of the cove, on the little half-circle of sand which was all that the sea left uncovered at full tide. For there *was* a boat, a most unmistakable and delightful boat, though scarcely larger than a sofa, and looking like a perfect toy as it rocked gently on the rippling water.

"Goodness!" said Ruby,—and it must be allowed that goodness is a prettier word than rubbish,—“how in the world did that boat come here? Did you bring it, Winfried? No, for if you had you wouldn't have been looking to see if it had come. But is it your boat?"

"No," answered the boy; "it's lent me, on purpose for you and Miss Mavis. Get in, please."

Ruby came forward, but hesitated.

"Are you sure it's safe?" she said. "You know the sea is very rough—round there near the village. And this is such a very little boat."

Winfried laughed.

"It's as safe as—as the safest thing you can think of," he said. "*You're* not afraid, Miss Mavis."

For all answer the little girl sprang into the boat; it danced under her feet, but she only laughed.

"Come on, Ruby," she called out; "it's lovely."

Ruby stepped in cautiously. The little boat was most dainty and pretty. There were cushions for the little girls, and one or two soft rich coloured shawls, of a fashion and material such as they had never seen before.

"Dear me," said Ruby, settling herself in the most comfortable place and drawing the pretty rugs round her, "what a nice little boat! Your friends must be very rich, Winfried. But I know what I know;" and she shook her head mysteriously.

"What do you mean, Ruby?" said Mavis.

Winfried was busy with his oars and did not seem to be attending to them. Ruby leant forward and whispered, close into her sister's ear, "*Mermaids!*" Then seeing or thinking that the boy was not listening, she went on. "You know mermaids *are* very rich. They dive down into the shipwrecked vessels and fish up all the treasures. I daresay these shawls have come from some strange country, right over at the other side of the world. Indeed, *some* people say that the horrid things sing to make the sailors turn to look for them and get their ships all in among the rocks."

Mavis looked puzzled.

"I don't think that's *mermaids*," she said. "There's another name for those naughty, unkind creatures."

"Syrens," came Winfried's voice from the other end of the boat. And he looked up with a smile at the little girls' start of surprise. "Don't be afraid," he said, "my friends are neither mermaids nor syrens; you're not going to be shipwrecked in this boat, I promise you." Somehow the boy seemed to have gained a new kind of dignity now that the children were, so to say, his guests. Ruby said, "Thank you," quite meekly and submissively for her.

Then they were all quite silent for a while, only the splash of Winfried's oars broke the stillness. And somehow out there on the water it seemed to have grown warmer, at least the children felt conscious of neither cold nor heat, it was just perfectly pleasant. And the sun shone on mildly. There was a thorough feeling of "afternoon," with its quiet and mystery and yet faint expectation, such as one seldom has except in summer.

"It is lovely," said Mavis presently; "only I'm a little afraid I'm getting sleepy."

"No, you needn't be afraid," said Winfried; and just as he said the words, Mavis started, as something flitted against her cheek.

"Ruby, Ruby!" she exclaimed, "did you see it? A butterfly—a blue butterfly—in November! Oh, where has it gone to?" and she gazed all round anxiously.

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## Chapter Five.

### The Fisherman's Hut.

"... There are things which through the gazing eye  
Reach the full soul and thrill it into love."

*To my Child.*

Ruby burst out laughing.

"You've been asleep and dreaming, you silly girl," she said. "Winfried, do you hear? Mavis says a blue butterfly flew past."

"It kissed my cheek," said Mavis.

Winfried smiled: "It's quite possible," he said. Ruby was just turning upon him with her laughter, when something made *her* jump in turn. Something cold and damp touched her hand: she had taken her glove off and was dabbling idly in the water.

"Ugh," she said, "I do believe that was a toad." The laugh was against her now.

"A toad, Ruby, out at sea! What are you thinking of?" said Mavis. "You needn't make fun of my butterfly if you talk of toads."

"Well, it was something slimy and horrid like a toad," said Ruby. "Perhaps it was only a fish. But whatever it was, I believe it was a trick of Winfried's. I'm sure, positive sure, you're a wizard, Winfried."

She was half in fun and half in earnest. But the boy took it quite composedly.

"No, I'm not," he said; "and no more is gran. But—people don't understand, you see. If they see that one's a bit different from others they've no words for it but wizard and uncanny, and they get frightened when it should be just the other way."

This was much more of a speech than the fisher-boy was in the habit of making. Both the children listened with interest.

"How is your gran different from others?" asked Ruby.

"You'll see it in his face; at least, I think you will," said Winfried. "But now I mustn't talk, we're close to the little creek."

He got the boat in most cleverly, to a very tiny creek, where was a little landing-place, and leading upwards from it a flight of steps cut in the rock.

"How funny, how very funny we never saw this place before," exclaimed the little girls. "Do you keep the boat here, Winfried?"

"Sometimes," he replied, "but not to-day. We won't need it again."

He folded up the shawls and laid them neatly on the cushions, then he drew in the oars, and in another moment he had helped the children to get on shore, and all three had mounted several of the rock steps when Winfried called to them to stop for a moment.

"Look down," he said; and as he spoke, the little girls saw something moving there below where they had just landed. It was the little boat; calmly and steadily it was moving out to sea, though it had no sails, and the oars were lying just as Winfried had drawn them in.

"Oh Winfried," exclaimed Ruby; "the dear little boat, it's drifting out, it will be lost. Can't you jump into the water and drag it back?"

"It's all right," said the boy. "It's going home till it's needed again. I only wanted you to see how quietly it goes off, once its business is done."

And he turned and began to whistle softly as he went on up the steps.

"*Now*," said Ruby, half triumphant and half frightened, in a whisper to Mavis, "now, can you say he's not a wizard? I think cousin Hortensia was very silly to let us come with him, but it was all you, Mavis, going on about him so. If we're not turned into toads or lizards before we get home, I—"

"Butterflies would be nicer," said Mavis, laughing.

"I'll ask Winfried and his gran to make me into a blue butterfly, and you can be a yellow one if you like."

She seemed to have caught something of Winfried's happy confidence, Ruby looked at her in surprise, but it was mixed with anger. What she was going to have said I don't know, for just then their guide called out again.

"Here we are," he said, "if you'll stoop your heads a little;" and looking up, the children saw before them a narrow, low archway, at the entrance to which the steps stopped. Ruby hung back a little, but Mavis ran forward.

"It's all right, Ruby," she called back; "and oh, what a pretty garden! Do come quick."

Ruby followed. It was only necessary to stoop for a moment or two, then she found herself beside her sister, and she could not help joining in her exclamation of pleasure. Somehow or other they had arrived at the back of the cottage, which at this side, they now saw, stood in a pretty and sheltered garden. Perhaps garden is hardly the word to use, for though there were flowers of more than one kind and plants, there were other things one does not often see in a garden. There were ever so many little bowers and grottoes, cleverly put together of different kinds of queerly-shaped and queerly-coloured fragments of rock; there were two or three basins hollowed out of the same stones, in which clear water sparkled, and brilliant seaweed of every shade, from delicate pink to blood-red crimson, glowed; there were shells of strange and wonderful form, and tints as many as those of the rainbow, arranged so that at a little distance they looked like groups of flowers—in short, Ruby was not far wrong when returning to her old idea, she whispered to Mavis, "It's a *mermaid's* garden."

"And I only hope," she went on in the same tone, "we shan't find that somehow or other he has got us down under the sea without our knowing."

Mavis broke into a merry laugh.

"Don't be afraid," she said. "Look up; there's the good old sun, smiling as usual, with no water between him and us. And see here, Ruby," and she ran forward, "there are earth flower's too, as well as sea ones."

She was right; on a border sheltered by the wall of the cottage were great masses of fern, still green and luxuriant, and here and there among them clumps, brilliantly blue, of the tender, loving forget-me-not.

"It's *just* like that bunch of it we found on our terrace," said Mavis, joyfully. "I really could believe you had brought a root of it and planted it there for us, Winfried. I never saw such beauties."

"Gran loves it," was all the boy said. Then he led them round to the front of the house, and opened the door for them to enter.

Inside the cottage all was very plain, but very, very neat and clean. In an old-fashioned large wooden arm-chair by the fire sat old Adam. He looked very old, older than the children had expected, and a kind of awe came over them. His hair was white, but scarcely whiter than his face, his hands were unusually delicate and refined, though gnarled and knotted as are those of aged people. He looked up with a smile, for his sight was still good, as his visitors came in.

"You will forgive my not standing up, my dear little ladies," he said. "You see I am very old. It is good of you to come to see me. I have often seen you, oftener than you knew, since you were very tiny things."

"Have you lived here a long time, then?" asked Ruby.

"It would seem a long time to you, though not to me," he said with a smile. "And long ago before that, I knew your grandmother and the lady who takes care of you. When I was a young man, and a middle-aged man too for that matter, my home was where theirs was. So I remember your mother when she was as little as you."

"Oh, how nice," exclaimed Mavis. "Was our mother like us, Mr Adam?"

"You may be very like her if you wish," he said kindly.

But their attention was already distracted. On a small table, close beside the old man's chair, in what at first sight looked like a delicate china cup, but was in reality a large and lovely shell, was a posy, freshly gathered apparently, of the same beautiful forget-me-nots.

"Oh, these are out of your garden," said Ruby; "how do you manage to make them grow so well and so late in the year?"

"The part of the garden where they grow is not mine," said Adam quietly; "it belongs to a friend who tends it herself. I could not succeed as she does."

"Is—is she a mermaid?" asked Ruby, her eyes growing very round.

"No, my dear. Mermaids' flowers, if they have any, would scarcely be like these, I think."

"You speak as if there are no such things as mermaids; do you not think there are?" said Mavis.

Old Adam shook his head.

"I have never seen one; but I would never take upon myself to say there is nothing but what I've seen."

"Tell us about the friend who plants these in your garden," said Ruby, touching the forget-me-nots. "Could it have been she who put some on the terrace at the castle for us?"

"Maybe," said the old man.

"Is she a lady, or—or a fairy, or what is she, if she's not a mermaid?" asked Ruby.

Before the old man could answer, Winfried's voice made her start in surprise.

"She's a princess," he said; and he smiled all over his face when he saw Ruby's astonishment.

"Oh!" was all she said, but her manner became more respectful to both Adam and his grandson from that moment.

Then the old man made a sign to Winfried, and the boy went out of the room, coming back in a moment with a little plain wooden tray, on which were two glasses of rich tempting-looking milk and a basket of cakes, brown and crisp, of a kind the children had never seen before. He set the tray down on a table which stood in the window, and Adam begged the children to help themselves.

They did so gladly. Never had cake and milk tasted so delicious. Ruby felt rather small when she thought of her condescending offer of soup from the Castle kitchen.

"But then," she reflected, "of course I didn't know—how could I?—that a princess comes to see them. I daresay she sends them these delicious cakes. I wish Bertha could make some like them."

"I never saw cakes like these before," said little Mavis. "They are *so* good."

Old Adam seemed pleased.

"My boy isn't a bad cook," he said proudly, with a glance at Winfried.

"Did *you* make them?" said Ruby, staring at Winfried. "I thought perhaps as a princess comes to see you that *she* sent you them—they are so very good."

Winfried could not help laughing: something in Ruby's speech seemed to him so comical.

Then at the little girls' request he took them out again to examine some of the wonders of the grotto-garden. He fished out some lovely sprays of seaweed for them, and gave them also several of the prettiest shells; best of all, he gathered a sweet nosegay of the forget-me-nots, which Mavis said she would take home to cousin Hortensia. And then, as the sun by this time had travelled a long way downwards, they ran in to bid old Adam good-bye, and to thank him, before setting off homewards.

"How are we going?" asked Ruby. "You've sent away the boat."

"I could call it back again, but I think we had better go a shorter way," said Winfried. "You're not frightened of a little bit of the dark, are you? There's a nice short cut to the rock path through one of the arbours."

The little girls followed him, feeling very curious, and, perhaps, just a tiny scrap afraid. He led them into one of the grottoes, which, to their surprise, they found a good deal larger than they had expected, for it lengthened out at the back into a sort of cave. This cave was too dark for them to see its size, but Winfried plunged fearlessly into its recesses.

"I must see that the way is clear," he said, as he left them; "wait where you are for a few minutes."

Ruby was not very pleased at being treated so unceremoniously.

"I don't call waiting here a quick way of getting home," she said, "and I hate the dark. I've a good mind to run out and go back the regular way, Mavis."

"Oh no," Mavis was beginning, but just then both children started. It seemed to have grown suddenly dark outside, as if a cloud or mist had come over the sky; and as they gazed out, feeling rather bewildered, a clear voice sounded through the grotto.

"Ruby; Mavis," it said.

Ruby turned to Mavis.

"It's a trick of that boy's," she said. "He wants to startle us. He has no business to call us by our names like that. I'll not stay;" and she ran out. Mavis was following her to bring her back when a ray of light—scarcely a ray, rather, I should say, a soft glow—seemed to fill the entrance to the grotto. And gradually, as her eyes got used to it, she distinguished a lovely figure—a lady, with soft silvery-blue garments floating round her and a sweet grave face, was standing there looking at her. A strange thrill passed through the child, yet even as she felt it she knew it was not a thrill of fear. And something seemed to draw her eyes upwards—a touch she could not have resisted if she had wished—till they found their resting-place in meeting those that were bent upon her—those beautiful, wonderful blue eyes, eyes like none she had ever seen, or—nay, she had *heard* of such eyes—they were like those of the fairy lady in her old cousin's dream. And now Mavis knew in part why the strange vision did *not* seem strange to her; why, rather, she felt as if she had always known it would come, as if all her life she had been expecting this moment.



"Mavis," said the soft yet clear and thrilling voice, "you see me, my child?"

"Yes," said the little girl, speaking steadily, though in a whisper, "I see you, and I see your eyes. Who are you? I may ask you, may I not?"

The fairy—if fairy she was—smiled.

"I have many names," she said; "but if you like you may think of me by the one Winfried loves. He calls me 'Princess with the Forget-me-not Eyes,' or 'Princess Forget-me-not.'"

"Yes," said Mavis, "I like that; and I will never forget you, princess."

Again the lovely vision smiled.

"No, my child, you never will, for, to tell you a secret, you cannot, even if you wished. Afterwards, when you know *me* better, you will see how well my name suits me. But it does not seem to all a sweet name, as I think it always will to you," and she sighed a little. "There are those who long to forget me; those who wish they had never seen me."

The sadness in her eyes was reflected in the child's.

"How can that be?" asked Mavis.

The blue-eyed princess shook her head.

"Nay, my darling, I cannot tell you, and I scarce would if I could," she said gently. But then a brighter look came over her face again, "Don't look so sad. They change again some of them, and seek me as earnestly as they would have before fled from me. And some day you may help and guide such seekers, simple as you are, my little Mavis. Now I must go—call Ruby—she would not stay for me; she has not yet seen me. But she heard my voice, that is better than nothing. Good-bye, little Mavis, and if you want me again before I come of myself, seek me in the west turret."

Mavis's face lighted up.

"Then it *was* you—you are cousin Hortensia's fairy, and it wasn't a dream after all. And of course you must be a fairy, for that was ever, ever so long ago. She was a little girl then, and now she is quite old, and you look as young as—as"

"As who or what?" asked the princess, smiling again.

"As the Sleeping Beauty in the wood," replied Mavis, after deep consideration.

At this the princess did more than smile; she laughed,—the same clear delicate laugh which the children had heard that day in the distance.

And Mavis laughed too; she could not help it.

“May I tell cousin Hortensia?” she asked. “Oh do say I may.”

“You may,” said Forget-me-not, “if—if you *can!*”

And while Mavis was wondering what she meant, a breath of soft wind seemed to blow past her, and glancing up, the princess was gone!

Mavis rubbed her eyes. Had she been asleep? It seemed a long time since Winfried told her and Ruby to wait for him in the grotto; and where was Ruby? Why did she not come back? Mavis began to feel uneasy. Surely she had been asleep—for—was she asleep still? Looking round her, she saw that she was no longer in the grotto-cave behind old Adam’s cottage, but standing in the archway at the sea side of the castle—the archway I have told you of into which opened the principal entrance to the grim old building. And as she stood there, silent and perplexed, uncertain whether she was not still dreaming, she heard voices coming near. The first she could distinguish was Ruby’s.

“There you are, Mavis, I declare,” she exclaimed. “Now it’s too bad of you to have run on so fast without telling, and I’ve been fussing about you all the way home, though Winfried said he was sure we should find you here. How *did* you get back?”

“How did *you?*” asked Mavis in return. “And why didn’t you come back to me in the grotto? I—I waited ever so long, and then—” but that was all she could say, though a smile broke over her face when she thought of what she had seen.

“You look as if you had been asleep,” said Ruby impatiently.

“And having pleasant dreams,” added Winfried. “But all’s well that ends well. Won’t you run in now, my little ladies, and let Miss Hortensia see that I’ve brought you safe back. It is cold and dark standing out here, and I must be off home.”

“Good-night then,” said Ruby; “you’re a very queer boy, but you brought *me* home all right any way, and those cakes were very good.”

“You will come to see us soon again, won’t you, Winfried?” said Mavis, who felt as if she had a great deal to ask which only he could answer, though with Ruby there beside her she could not have explained what she wanted to know.

“To be sure I will, if you want me,” said the boy.

“Don’t be puzzled, Miss Mavis, pleasant dreams don’t do any one harm.”

And as they pushed open the great, nail-studded door which was never locked till after nightfall Winfried ran off.

They stood still for a moment just inside the entrance. They could hear him whistling as he went, smoothly at first, then it seemed to come in jerks, going on for a moment or two and then suddenly stopping, to begin again as suddenly.

“He’s jumping down the cliff. I can hear it by his whistle,” said Ruby. “How dangerous!”

“He’s very sure-footed,” said Mavis with a little sigh. She was feeling tired—and—*was* it a dream? If so, how had she got home? Had the fairy lady wrapped her round in her cloak of mist and flown with her to the castle? Mavis could not tell, and somehow Ruby did not ask her again.

“How did you come home, Ruby?” Mavis asked as they were going along the passage to their sitting-room.

“Oh,” said Ruby, “Winfried took me down some steps, and then up some others, and before I knew where we were, we were in the rock path not far from home. It was like magic. I can’t make out that boy,” she said mysteriously; “but we’re not turned into frogs or toads *yet*. Here we are, cousin Hortensia,” she went on, as the good lady suddenly appeared at the end of the passage, “safe home from the wizard’s haunts.”

But Miss Hortensia only smiled.

“I was not uneasy,” she said. “I thought you would be quite safe.”

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## Chapter Six.

### Bertrand.

“But the unkind and the unruly,  
And the sort who eat unduly,  
Theirs is quite a different story.”

*Good and Bad Children:* Louis Stevenson.

They were just beginning tea, and Ruby’s tongue was going fast as she described to Miss Hortensia all that happened

that afternoon, while Mavis sat half-dreamily wondering what the fairy lady had meant by saying she might tell her cousin about her "if she *could*," when there came a sudden and unusual sound that made them all start. It was the clanging of the great bell at the principal entrance on the south side—the entrance by which, you remember, all visitors, except those coming by sea, came to the castle.

"Who can that be?" exclaimed Ruby, jumping up and looking very pleased—Ruby loved any excitement. "Can it be father? What fun if he's come to surprise us! Only I hope he won't have forgotten our presents. He generally asks us what we want before he comes."

Mavis had grown a little pale; somehow the things that Ruby was frightened of never alarmed her, and yet she was more easily startled by others that Ruby rather enjoyed.

"I hope it isn't a message to say that anything is the matter with dear father," she said anxiously.

Miss Hortensia got up from her seat and went to the door. She did not seem frightened, but still rather uneasy.

"I'm afraid," she began, "I'm afraid—and yet I should not speak of it that way; it is not kind. But I did so ask them to give us notice of his coming." She had left the room almost before she had finished speaking. The children looked at each other.

"I say, Mavis," said Ruby, "it's Bertrand! Don't you think we might run out and see?"

"No," Mavis replied decidedly, "certainly not. Cousin Hortensia would have told us to come if she had wanted us."

But they went to the open door and stood close beside it, listening intently. Then came the sound of old Joseph's steps along the stone passage from the part of the house which he and Bertha—Joseph was Bertha's husband—inhabited, then the drawing back of the bolts and bars, and, most interesting and exciting of all, a noise of horses stamping and shaking their harness as if glad to have got to the end of their journey. Then followed voices; and in a minute or two the children heard Miss Hortensia coming back, speaking as she came.

"You must be very cold, my dear boy, and hungry too," she was saying. "We are just beginning tea, so you had better come in at once as you are."

"It's terribly cold, and that fool of a driver wouldn't come any faster; he said his horses were tired. I wish I could have got a cut at them—what are horses for?" was the reply to Miss Hortensia's kind speech.

Mavis touched Ruby.

"Come in. Cousin Hortensia wouldn't like to see us standing at the door like this," she said.

They sat down at their places again, only getting up as Miss Hortensia came in.

She was followed by a boy. He was about the height of the twins, broad and strong-looking, wrapped up in a rich fur-lined coat, and with a travelling cap of the same fur still on his head. He was dark-haired and dark-eyed, a handsome boy with a haughty, rather contemptuous expression of face—an expression which it did not take much to turn into a scowl if he was annoyed or put out.

"These are your cousins, Bertrand; your cousins Ruby and Mavis—you have heard of them, I am sure, though you have never met each other before."

Bertrand looked up coolly.

"I knew there were girls here," he answered. "Mother said so. But I don't care for girls—I told mother so. I'm awfully hungry;" and he began to pull forward a chair.

"My dear," said Miss Hortensia, "do you know you have not taken off your cap yet? You must take off your coat too, but, above all, your cap."

Bertrand put up his hand and slowly drew off his cap.

"Mother never minds," he said. But there was a slight touch of apology in the words.

Then, more for his own comfort evidently than out of any sense of courtesy, he pulled off his heavy coat and flung it on to a chair. The little girls had not yet spoken to him, they felt too much taken aback.

"Perhaps he is shy and strange, and that makes him seem rough," thought Mavis, and she began drawing forward another chair.

"Will you sit here?" she was saying, when Bertrand pushed past her.

"I'll sit by the fire," he said, and he calmly settled himself on what he could not but have seen was her seat or Ruby's; "and I'm awfully hungry," he went on.

"At home I have dinner, at least if I want it, I do. It's only fit for girls to have tea in this babyish way."

He helped himself to a large slice of cake as he spoke; and not content with this, he also put a big piece of butter on his plate. Miss Hortensia glanced at him, and was evidently just going to speak, but checked herself. It was Bertrand's first evening, and she was a very hospitable person. But when Bertrand proceeded to butter his cake thickly, Ruby, never accustomed to control her tongue, burst out.

"That's cake, Bertrand," she said. "People don't butter *cake*."

"Don't they just?" said the boy, speaking with his mouth full. "I do, I know, and at home mother never minds."

"Does she let you do whatever you like?" asked Ruby.

"Yes," said Bertrand; "and whether she did or not I'd do it all the same."

Then he broke into a merry laugh. It was one of the few attractive things about him, beside his good looks, that laugh of his. It made him seem for the time a hearty, good-tempered child, and gave one the feeling that he did not really mean the things he said and did. And now that his hunger was appeased, and he was warm and comfortable, he became much more amiable. Ruby looked at him with admiration.

"I wish I lived with your mother," she said, "how nice it must be to do always just what one likes!"

"Do you think so," said Mavis. "I think it would be quite miserable."

"Quite right, Mavis," said Miss Hortensia. "When I was a child I remember reading a story of a little girl who for a great treat one birthday was allowed to do just what she wanted all day, and—oh dear!—how unhappy she was before evening came."

Bertrand stared at her with his big eyes. *Some* eyes are very misleading; his looked now and then as if he had nothing but kind and beautiful thoughts behind them.

"What a fool she must have been," he said roughly. And poor Miss Hortensia's heart sank.

The evening was not a long one, for Bertrand was tired with his journey, and for once willing to do as he was told, by going to bed early. A room near his cousins' had been preparing for him, and though not quite ready, a good fire made it look very cosy. They all went upstairs with him to show him the way. As they passed the great baize door which divided their wing from the rest of the house. Bertrand pushed it open.

"What's, through there?" he asked, in his usual unceremonious way.

"Oh, all the rest of the castle," said Ruby importantly.

Bertrand peered through. It was like looking into a great church with all the lights out, for this door opened right upon the gallery running round the large hall.

"What a ramshackle old cavern!" said Bertrand. A blast of cold air rushed in through the doorway as he spoke and made them all shiver.

"Nonsense, Bertrand," said Miss Hortensia, more sharply than she had yet spoken to him. "It is a splendid old house."

"You should see the staircases up to the turrets," said Ruby. "They are as high as—as I don't know what. If you are naughty we can put you to sleep in the west turret-room, and they say it's haunted."

"I shouldn't mind that," laughed Bertrand.

"Nor should I," said Ruby boastfully. "Mavis here is a dreadful coward. And—oh, Bertrand—I'll tell you something tomorrow. I have such an idea. Don't you love playing tricks on people—people who set themselves up, you know, and preach at you?" Her last words were almost whispered, and Miss Hortensia, who had gone on in front—they had closed the swing door by this time—did not hear them. But Mavis caught what Ruby said, and she waited uneasily for Bertrand's answer.

"Prigs, you mean," he said. "I hate prigs. Yes, indeed, I'll join you in any game of that kind. You should have seen how we served a little wretch at school who tried to stop us teaching a puppy to swim—such a joke—the puppy could scarcely walk, much less swim. So we took Master Prig and made *him* swim instead. It was winter, and he caught a jolly cold, and had to leave school."

"Did he get better?" said Mavis, in a strange voice.

"Don't know, I'm sure. I should think not. His mother was too poor to pay for a doctor, they said. He'd no business to be at a school with gentlemen," said Bertrand brutally.

Mavis gasped. Then suddenly, without saying good-night to any one, she rushed down the passage to the room she shared with her sister; and there Ruby found her a few minutes later on her knees and all in the dark.

"What's the matter with you? Cousin Hortensia told me to say good-night to you for her. It wasn't very civil to fly off like that the first night Bertrand was here. I'm sure cousin Hortensia thought so too," said Ruby carelessly. "My goodness, are you *crying*?" as the light she carried fell on Mavis's tear-stained face.

"Cousin Hortensia didn't *hear*," said Mavis. "Oh, Ruby, I can't bear it."

"What?"

"That wicked boy. Oh, Ruby, you can't say you like him?"

"I think he's lots of fun in him," said Ruby wonderingly. "He's only a boy; you are so queer, Mavis." But catching sight again of her sister's expression she suddenly changed. "Poor little Mavis," she cried, throwing her arms round her,



“you’re such a goose. You’re far too tender-hearted.”

Mavis clung to her, sobbing.

“Oh, Ruby, my Ruby,” she said, “don’t speak like that. I couldn’t *bear* you to get hard and cruel.”

But Ruby was, for her, wonderfully gentle and kind, and at last the two little sisters kissed each other, promising that nothing should ever come between them.

A good night’s rest and a huge breakfast put Master Bertrand into a very fairly amiable humour the next morning. He flatly refused, however, to do any lessons, though it was intended that he should; and Miss Hortensia, judging it best to make a virtue of necessity, told him he should have his time to himself for three days, after which he must join the twins in the school-room.

“For these three days,” she said, “I will give Ruby and Mavis a half-holiday, so that they may go about with you and show you everything. But if you do not come regularly and punctually to lessons after that, I will not give your cousins any extra holidays while you are here.”

She spoke firmly, and Bertrand looked at her with surprise. He was surprised indeed into unusual meekness, for he said nothing but “All right.”

They gave him some directions as to where he would be most likely to amuse himself and with safety. Indeed, unless one were *determined* to hurt oneself, there were no really dangerous places about the castle; in spite of the cliffs and the sea, Ruby and Mavis had played there all their lives without ever getting into mischief.

“He is not a stupid boy,” said Miss Hortensia, after giving her instructions to Bertrand, “and I have no doubt he can take care of himself if he likes.”

“I’m sure he wouldn’t like to hurt himself,” said Ruby with a little contempt; “he’s the sort of boy that would hate pain or being ill.”

“It is to be hoped nothing of that kind will happen while he is here,” said Miss Hortensia. “But I can only do my best. I did not seek the charge, and it would be quite impossible to shut him up in the house.”

“He’d very likely try to get out of the window if you did, cousin Hortensia,” said Mavis with her gentle little laugh. She was feeling happy, for Ruby had continued kind and gentle this morning. “And if I were a boy I’m not sure but that I would too, if I were shut up.”

“Well, let us get to our work,” said Miss Hortensia with a resigned little sigh.

Lessons were over; Ruby and Mavis had had their usual morning run along the terrace, had brushed their hair and washed their hands, and were standing up while Miss Hortensia said grace before beginning dinner, when Bertrand appeared.

He came banging in, his cap on his head, his boots wet and dirty, his cheeks flushed, and his eyes bright with running and excitement. He looked very pretty notwithstanding the untidy state he was in, but it was impossible to welcome him cordially; he was so rude and careless, leaving the door wide open, and bringing in a strong fishy smell, the reason of which was explained when he flung down a great mass of coarse slimy seaweed he had been carrying.

“You nasty, dirty boy,” said Ruby, turning up her nose and sniffing.

“Really, Bertrand, my dear,” began Miss Hortensia, “what have you brought that wet seaweed here for? It cannot stay in this room.”

“I’ll take it away,” said Mavis, jumping up.

“What harm does it do?” said Bertrand, sitting down sideways on his chair. “I want it. I say you’re not to go pitching it away, Mavis. Well when am I to have something to eat?”

“Go and wash your hands and hang up your coat and come and sit straight at the table and then I will give you your dinner,” said Miss Hortensia drily.

“Why can’t you give it me now?” said Bertrand, with the ugly scowl on his face.

“Because I will not,” she replied decidedly.

The roast meat looked very tempting, so did the tart on the sideboard. Bertrand lounged up out of his seat, and in a few minutes lounged back again. Eating generally put him into a better temper. When he had got through one plateful and was ready for another, he condescended to turn to his companions with a more sociable air.

“I met a fellow down there—on the shore,” he said, jerking his head towards where he supposed the sea to be; “only a common chap, but he seems to know the place. He was inclined to be cheeky at first, but of course I soon put him down. I told him to be there this afternoon again; we might find him useful, now he knows his place.”

Ruby’s eyes sparkled.

“I’m very glad you did put him down,” she said. “All the same—” then she hesitated.

“Do you know who he is?” asked Bertrand.

"He's the best and nicest and cleverest boy in all the world," said little Mavis.

Bertrand scowled at her and muttered something, of which "a dirty fisher-boy," was all that was audible. Miss Hortensia's presence did overawe him a little.

"I am afraid there can be no question of any of you going out this afternoon," she said, glancing out of the window as she spoke; "it is clouding over—all over. You must make up your minds to amuse yourselves indoors. You can show Bertrand over the house—that will take some time."

"May we go up into the turret-rooms and everywhere?" said Ruby.

"Yes, if you don't stay too long. It is not very cold, and you are sure to keep moving about. There—now comes the rain."

Come indeed it did, a regular battle of wind and water; one of the sudden storms one must often expect on the coast. But after the first outburst the sky grew somewhat lighter, and the wind went down a little, the rain settling into a steady, heavy pour that threatened to last several hours. For reasons of her own, Ruby set herself to coax Bertrand into a good humour, and she so far succeeded that he condescended to go all over the castle with them, even now and then expressing what was meant to be admiration and approval.

"It isn't ramshackle, any way," said Ruby. "It's one of the strongest built places far or near."

"If I were a man and a soldier, as I mean to be," said Bertrand boastfully, "I'd like to cannonade it. You'd see how it'd come toppling over."

"You wouldn't like to see it, I should think," said Mavis. "It's been the home of your grandfathers just as much as of ours. Don't you know your mother is our father's sister?"

Bertrand stared at her.

"What does it matter about old rubbishing grandfathers and stuff like that?" he said. "That was what that fisher-fellow began saying about the castle, as if it was any business of his."

"Yes indeed," said Ruby, "he's far too fond of giving his opinion." She nodded her head mysteriously. "We'll have a talk about him afterwards, Bertrand."

"Ruby," began Mavis in distress; but Ruby pushed her aside.

"Mind your own business," she said, more rudely than Mavis had ever heard her speak.

"It's all Bertrand," said Mavis to herself, feeling ready to cry. "I'm sure they are going to plan some very naughty unkind thing."

They were on their way up the turret-stair now; the west turret. They had already explored the other side. Suddenly a strange feeling came over Mavis; she had not been in this part of the castle since the adventure in the grotto.

"She said she comes to the west turret still," thought the child; "just as she did when cousin Hortensia was a little girl. I wonder if she only comes in the night? I wonder if possibly I shall see her ever up here? If I did, I think I would ask her to stop Bertrand making Ruby naughty. I am sure dear Princess Forget-me-not *could* make anybody do anything she liked."

And she could not help having a curious feeling of expecting something, when Ruby, who was in front, threw open the turret-room door.

"This is the *haunted* room, Bertrand," she said, and there was a mocking tone in her voice. "At least so Mavis and cousin Hortensia believe. Cousin Hortensia can tell you a wonderful story of a night she spent here if you care to hear it."

Bertrand laughed contemptuously.

"I'd like to see a ghost uncommonly," he said.

"It would take a good lot of them to frighten *me*."

"That's what I say," said Ruby. "But the room looks dingy enough, doesn't it? I don't think I ever saw it look so dingy before."

"It looks as if it was full of smoke," said Bertrand, sniffing about; "but yet I don't smell smoke."

There *was* something strange. Mavis saw it too, and much more clearly than did the others. To her the room seemed filled with a soft blue haze; far from appearing "dingy," as Ruby said, she thought the vague cloudiness beautiful; and as she looked, it became plain to her that the haze all came from one corner, where it almost seemed to take form, to thicken and yet to lighten; for there was a glow and radiance over there by the window that looked towards the setting sun that did not come from any outside gleam or brightness. No indeed. For the rain was pouring down, steadily and hopelessly, with dull pitiless monotony from a leaden sky. Scarcely could you picture to yourself a drearier scene than the unbroken grey above, and unbroken grey beneath, which was all there was to be seen from the castle that afternoon. Yet in Mavis's eyes there was a light, a reflection of something beautiful and sunshiny, as she stood there gazing across the room, with an unspoken hope in her heart.

The others did not see the look in her face, or they saw it wrong, Ruby especially, strange to say.

"What are you gaping at, Mavis?" she said.

"You do look so silly."

Bertrand stared at her in his turn.

"She looks as if she was asleep, or dreaming," he said curiously.

Mavis rubbed her eyes.

"No, no," she said brightly, "I'm not."

And then she tried to be very kind and merry and pleasant to the others. She felt as if "somebody" was watching, and would be pleased. And Bertrand was a little bit gentler and softer than he had yet been, almost giving Mavis a feeling that in some faint far-off way the sweet influence was over him too.

But Ruby was very contradictory. She ran about making fun of the old furniture and mocking at Miss Hortensia's story till she got Bertrand to join with her, and both began boasting and talking very foolishly—worse than foolishly indeed. More than once Mavis caught words and hints which filled her with distress and anxiety. She knew, however, that when Ruby was in this kind of humour it was less than useless to say anything, now above all that she had got Bertrand to back her up.

Suddenly the boy gave an impatient exclamation.

"I hate this cock-loft," he said. "It's so stuffy and choky, and that smoke or mist has got into my eyes and makes them smart. Come along, Ruby, do."

"It's not stuffy. I think it's dreadfully cold," she replied. "But I'm sure I don't want to stay here. The mist's quite gone—not that I ever saw any really; it was only with the room being shut up, I suppose. I'm quite ready to go; let's run down and get a good warm at the school-room fire, and I'll tell you something—a grand secret, Bertrand."

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## Chapter Seven.

### In the Turret-Room.

"The wind with the clouds is battling,  
Till the pine-trees shriek with fear."

*Pan.*

They ran off, leaving Mavis alone in the turret-room. Poor Mavis! all her happy and hopeful feelings were gone.

"It is no use," she said to herself; "I can't stop Ruby. Bertrand will just make her as naughty as himself. Oh, *how* I do wish he had never come! All our happiness is spoilt."

And feeling very sorry for herself, and for every one concerned except Bertrand, towards whom, I fear, her feelings were more of anger than grief, Mavis sat down on one of the capacious old chairs that stood beside her and began to cry quietly. Suddenly a strange sensation came over her—through her, rather. She drew her handkerchief from her eyes and looked up—she *had* to look up—and—yes, there it was again, there *they* were again. The wonderful unforgettable blue eyes, so searching, so irresistible, so tender. Sweet and perfectly loving as they were, it was yet impossible to meet them without a half-trembling thrill. And the first thought that flashed through the little girl was, "How could I bear her to look at me if I had been naughty?"

"Naughty" she had not been, but—she felt her cheeks flush—look down she could not, as she said to herself that she was afraid she had been—

The word was taken out of her thoughts and expressed just as she came to it.

"Silly," said the clear soft voice. "Silly little Mavis. What is it all about? Is everything going wrong at the first trial?"

Then as Mavis gazed, the silvery-blue mist grew firmer and less vague, and gradually the lovely form and features became distinct.

"Oh dear princess," said the child, "I am *so* glad you have come. Yes, I daresay I am silly, but I am so unhappy;" and she poured out all her troubles. "I shall not be unhappy any more," she ended up, "now I know you are *true*. I had almost begun to fancy you were all a dream."

Forget-me-not smiled, but for a moment or two she did not speak. Then she said—

"What is it you are afraid of Ruby doing—Ruby and Bertrand?"

"Playing some unkind trick on Winfried," replied Mavis eagerly; "or even worse—for Ruby knows that would hurt him most—on his old grandfather. It would be so horrid, so *wicked*," and Mavis's voice grew tearful again, "when they have been so kind to us. Oh dear princess, will you stop them?" Forget-me-not looked at her gravely.

"My child," she said, "do they not *know* it would be wrong to do such a thing?"

"Yes," Mavis replied, "of course they do."

"Then how could I stop them? I mean to say, what would be the good of stopping them, if they know already it is wrong?" said the princess.

Mavis looked puzzled.

"But if—if—they were to hurt or frighten old Adam or Winfried?" she said.

Forget-me-not smiled again.

"Ah yes," she said, "*that* I can promise you shall not be. But beyond that, if it is in their hearts wilfully to do what they know to be wrong, I fear, little Mavis, I fear they must do it, and perhaps learn thereby. When people *know*—"

Mavis's eyes told that she understood; she looked very grave, but still somewhat relieved.

"I am glad you won't let it hurt Winfried or his grandfather," she said. "But oh, I can't bear Ruby to be made naughty by that horrid boy," and she seemed on the point of bursting into tears. "Dear princess," she went on, "couldn't you speak to her—the way you do to me? You make me feel that I would—I would do *anything* you told me."

"Dear child, Ruby cannot hear me yet; she cannot see me. If she could, she would feel as you. Be patient, Mavis, love her as you have always done; that will not be difficult. But that is not all. You must try to love Bertrand too."

Mavis's face grew very long.

"I don't think I *can*," she said at last.

"But you must, sooner or later, and it may as well be sooner. I will tell you one thing—a secret, which perhaps will make it easier for you. I mean to make him love *me* before I have done with him, though he may begin by hating me."

The little girl looked very grave.

"And Ruby?" she said. "I should care most for Ruby to love you."

Strange to say, Forget-me-not's eyes looked sadder than when she had been talking of Bertrand.

"It may be more difficult," she murmured, so low that Mavis hardly caught the words.

"Oh no, dear princess," she said eagerly, "Ruby isn't anything like as naughty as Bertrand. You mustn't fancy that. She's just—just—she doesn't think—"

"I know," said Forget-me-not; but that was all, and her eyes still looked sad.

Then she glanced round. The old room seemed like a background to her lovely figure, it was like gazing at a picture in a dark setting.

"I must go," she said, "and when I go you will be all in the dark. The clouds are so heavy and the day is getting on. Can you find your way all down the stair alone, Mavis? The others have not thought about leaving you up here alone."

"I don't think I mind," said Mavis; but her voice was a little tremulous, for the corner where the door was, across the room from where Forget-me-not stood, loomed dark and gloomy.

The princess smiled.

"Yes you do, dear. Don't tell stories. I was only trying your courage a tiny bit. Come here, darling."

Mavis crept nearer her, nearer than she had yet been.

"I am afraid of soiling your lovely dress," she said.

"My pinafore's rather dirty; we've been playing all over the dusty rooms, you see."

Then Forget-me-not laughed. Her talking was charming, her smile was bewitching, her grave sad looks were like solemn music—what words have we left to describe her laugh? I can think of none. I can only tell you that it made little Mavis feel as if all the birds in the trees, all the flowers in the fields, all the brooks and waterfalls, all the happy joyous things in the world had suddenly come together with a shout—no, shout is too loud and rough,—with a warble and flutter of irrepressible glee.

"Oh," said Mavis, "how beautiful it is to hear you, princess, and how—"

She did not finish her sentence. In another moment she felt herself lifted up—up in the air ever so far, it seemed, and then cosily deposited most comfortably on Forget-me-not's shoulder. It was years and years since Mavis had thought herself small enough to ride even on her father's shoulder—great, strong tall father—and the princess who looked so slight and fairy-like, how could she be so strong? Yet the arms that had lifted her *were* strong, strong and firm as father's, nay stronger. And the hand that held her up in her place was so secure in its gentle grasp that the little girl

felt she *could* not fall, and that is a very pleasant feeling, I can assure you.

“Shut your eyes, Mavis,” said Forget-me-not, “I am quick in my movements. You are quite firm—there now, I have thrown my scarf over you. I am going to take you rather a round-about way, I warn you.”

A soft whirr and rush—where were they? Out of the window somehow they had got, for Mavis felt the chilly air and heard the swish of the rain, though strange to say the chill seemed only a pleasant freshness, and the raindrops did not touch her. Then up, up—dear, dear, where *were* they off to? Had Forget-me-not suddenly turned into the old woman who goes up to brush away the cobwebs in the sky? Mavis laughed as the fancy struck her; she did not care, not she, the higher the better, the faster they flew the merrier she felt. Till at last there came a halt. Forget-me-not stopped short with a long breath.

“Heigh-ho!” she exclaimed, “I’ve given you a toss up, haven’t I? Look out, Mavis; we’ve come ever so far,—peep out and you’ll see the stars getting ready to bid you good-evening. It’s quite clear, of course, up here above the clouds.”

Mavis opened her eyes and peeped out from the folds of Forget-me-not’s scarf, which, light as it was, had yet a marvellous warmth about it.

Clear, I should think it *was* clear! Never had Mavis pictured to herself anything so beautiful as that evening sky, up “above the clouds,” as the princess had said. I have never seen it, so I cannot very well describe it; indeed, I should be rather afraid to do so on hearsay, for I should be sure to make some mistake, and to name the wrong planets and constellations.

“Oh,” said Mavis, “how nice!”

It was rather a stupid little word to say, but Forget-me-not was too “understanding” to mind.

“Look about you well for a minute or two. Who knows when you may have such a chance again?” and for a little there was silence. Then “Shut your eyes again, dear, and clasp me tight; little girls are apt to get giddy in such circumstances. Yes, that’s right.”

“The stars are like your eyes,” said Mavis.

Then again the soft rash; a plunge downwards this time, which made Mavis need no second bidding to clasp her friend closely. There came over her a misty, sleepy feeling. She could not have told exactly when they stopped; she only felt a sort of butterfly kiss on her eyes, and a breath that sounded like good-night, and then—she was standing in the school-room by the fire; the lamp was lighted, it looked bright and cosy, and Mavis had never felt happier or stronger in her life.

“That nice fresh air has brightened me up so,” she said to herself. But her hands were rather cold. She went close up to the fire to warm them. There was no one in the room.

“I wonder where Ruby and Bertrand are,” thought Mavis. Just then she heard Miss Hortensia’s voice.

“Poor dear,” she was saying. “Ruby, how could you be so thoughtless? I must get lights at once and go and look for her.”

“We’ve called and called up the stair, but she didn’t answer,” said Ruby in rather an ashamed tone of voice.

“Called,” repeated Miss Hortensia, “why didn’t you *go*?”

“It was so dark when we remembered about her, and—”

“You were afraid, I suppose,” said her cousin.

“Really; and yet you would leave poor Mavis all alone—and a great boy like you, Bertrand.”

“I wasn’t afraid, but I wasn’t going to bother to go up all that way. She could come down by herself,” said Master Bertrand rudely.

But before Miss Hortensia could reply again Mavis ran out.

“Here I am, dear cousin,” she said. “I’m all right.” And indeed she did look all right, as she stood there sideways in the doorway, the light from the room behind her falling on her pretty hair and fair face.

“The dear child,” thought Miss Hortensia. “No one could say Mavis isn’t as pretty as Ruby now.” And aloud she exclaimed: “My darling, where have you been? And were you afraid up there in the dark all by yourself?”

“Why didn’t you come with us?” said Ruby crossly. “It was all your own fault.”

“I didn’t mind,” said Mavis. “I’m only sorry cousin Hortensia was frightened. I’m all right, you see.”

“I was frightened about you too,” grumbled Ruby.

“I wasn’t,” said Bertrand with a rough laugh. “There’s nothing to *frighten* one up in that cock-loft; dingy, misty place that it is.”

“Misty!” exclaimed Miss Hortensia in surprise, “what does the child mean?”

"Bertrand will say the turret was full of blue smoke," said Ruby, "and that it hurt his eyes."

"It did," said the boy; "they're smarting still." Mavis smiled. Miss Hortensia seemed perplexed, and rather anxious to change the subject.

"I do hope," she said, "that to-morrow will be fine, so that Bertrand and you, Ruby, may get rid of some of your spirits out-of-doors."

"I hope too that it will be fine," said Ruby meaningly. "Bertrand and I have planned a very long walk. You needn't come," she went on, turning to Mavis, "if you think you'd be tired."

"I don't get tired quicker than you do," said Mavis quietly. Her heart sank within her at Ruby's tone; for though she was glad to think Forget-me-not would prevent any harm to old Adam or Winfried, she did not like to think of Ruby's heartlessness and folly. And when she glanced at Bertrand and saw the half-scornful smile on his face, it was all she could do to keep back her tears.

All that evening the rain kept pouring down in torrents, and the wind beat on the window, shaking even the heavy frames, like a giant in a fury, determined to make his way in.

"What a storm," said Miss Hortensia more than once, with a little shiver. "I cannot bear to think of the poor souls at sea."

Bertrand laughed.

"It would be great fun to see a shipwreck, if one was safe out of harm's way. I wouldn't mind staying up in that musty old turret a whole afternoon to have a good view."

Even Ruby was startled.

"Oh Bertrand," she said, "you can't know what a shipwreck means if you speak like that."

"I've read stories of them," said the boy, "so I should know."

There was a very slight touch of something in his tone which made Mavis wonder if he really meant all the naughty things he said. She glanced up at him quickly.

"If there ever were a shipwreck here," she said, "I know who'd help and who wouldn't."

Bertrand's face hardened at once.

"That's meant for me," he retorted; "for me and that precious lout of a friend of yours. You think him so grand and brave! Ah well! wait a bit and see. When people don't know their proper place they must be taught it."

Mavis drew herself up.

"Yes," she said, "we *will* wait a bit and see. But it won't be the sort of seeing you'll like perhaps."

"You've no business to speak like that," said Ruby. "I think you're quite out of your mind about that common boy and his grandfather—or else—and I shouldn't wonder if it was that, they've bewitched you, somehow."

She dropped her voice with the last words, for she did not want her cousin to hear. But Miss Hortensia, though she was busily counting the rows of her knitting at the other end of the room, noticed the tone of the children's voices.

"Come, come, my dears," she said, "no wrangling—it would be something quite new here. I do *hope*," she added to herself, "that it will be fine to-morrow; it is so much better for children when they can get out."

It *was* fine "to-morrow"; very fine. It was almost impossible for the little girls to believe that so few hours before the storm spirits had been indulging in their wild games, when they looked out of their window on to the bright clear winter sky, where scarcely a cloud was to be seen, the sun smiling down coldly but calmly; not a breath of wind moving the great fir-trees on the south side of the castle. Yet looking a little closer there were some traces of the night's work; the ground was strewn with branches, and the last of the leaves had found their way down to their resting-place on old Mother Earth's brown lap.

In spite of her anxieties, Mavis could not help her spirits rising.

"What a nice afternoon Ruby and I might have had with Winfried, if *only* Bertrand hadn't come," she thought.

Ruby was all smiles and gaiety.

"Perhaps," Mavis went on to herself, "perhaps she's really going to be nice and good. And if we two keep together, we can stop Bertrand being very naughty."

Miss Hortensia was anxious for them to profit by the fine day. She had not much faith in the clear thin sunshine's lasting, she said, and she shortened the lessons so that dinner might be very early, and the afternoon free.

It was still very bright and fine when the three children found themselves standing at the entrance of the archway, on the sea side of the castle.

"Which way shall we go?" said Mavis.

"Oh, down to the shore," Ruby replied. "We may," she went on, with a very slight glance in Bertrand's direction, and a tone in her voice which struck Mavis oddly, though she scarcely knew why—"we *may* meet Winfried."

"Yes," said Bertrand in an off-hand way. "I told the fellow we might be somewhere about if it was fine to-day, and I said he might as well have his boat ready. I don't mind paying him for the use of it. I've any amount of pocket-money;" and he thrust his hands into his pockets, jingling the coins which were in them.

Mavis thought to herself that she had never disliked him as much as now. But she said nothing, and they all three walked on. The pathway soon became steep and rugged, as I have told you. Ruby and Mavis were accustomed to it, and Bertrand was a strong, well-made boy. Still none of them were agile and nimble as the fisher-lad.

"You should see Winfried running down here," said Ruby; "he goes like a stag, or a chamois, rather."

She glanced at Bertrand as she spoke. Notwithstanding her alliance with him, there was something in Ruby's nature that made it impossible for her to resist vexing him by this little hit.

The black look came over the boy's face.

"What do you mean by that?" he muttered. "I'm not going to—"

"Rubbish, Bertrand," interrupted Ruby. "I never said anything about *you*. Winfried's a fisher-boy; it's his business to scramble about."

Then she went close up to her cousin and whispered something to him, which seemed to smooth him down, though this only made Mavis more anxious and unhappy.

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## Chapter Eight.

### A Naughty Plan.

"The boatie rows, the boatie rows, the boatie rows fu' weel."

Ewen.

They were nearly at the cove, when they caught sight of a scarlet cap moving up and down among the rocks.

"There's Winfried," cried Mavis joyfully. She could not help having a feeling of safety when the fisher-lad was with them, in spite of her fears about the mischief the other two were planning. "Winfried, Winfried," she called, "here we are."

He glanced up with his bright though rather mysterious smile.

"I knew you'd be coming," he said quietly.

"Of course you did," said Bertrand in his rough, rude way, "considering I told you to meet us here. Have you got that boat of yours ready?"

"Yes," said Winfried, and he pointed towards the cove. There, sure enough, was the little boat, bright and dainty, the sun shining on its pretty cushions and on the white glistening oars.

Bertrand was running forward, when there came a sudden exclamation from Ruby. She had put up her hand to her neck.

"Oh, my cross," she cried, "my little silver cross. I forgot to fetch it from the turret-room. I left it there last night, and I meant to go and get it this morning. And I daren't go on the sea without it—I'd be drowned, I know I should be."

Mavis looked at her.

"Ruby," she said, "I don't, think you could have left it up there. You had no reason to take it off up there."

"Oh, but I did, I did," said Ruby. "I have a trick of taking it off; the cord gets entangled in my hair. I know it's there."

"I'll fetch it you," said Bertrand, with perfectly astounding good-nature. And he actually set off up the rocky path. Winfried started forward.

"I will go," he said. "I can run much faster than he," and he hastened after Bertrand.

But Bertrand had exerted himself unusually. He was already some way up before Winfried overtook him.

"No," he said, when Winfried explained why he had come, "I want to go. But you may as well come too. I want to carry down my fishing-tackle—I'd forgotten it. You haven't got any in the boat, I suppose?"

"No," said Winfried, "it would keep us out too long. It's too cold for the little ladies, and we should have to go too far out to sea."

"I'll bring it all the same," said Bertrand doggedly; "so mind your own business." But as Winfried walked on beside him without speaking, he added more civilly, "you may as well look at it and tell me if it's the right kind. It's what my

father gave me.”

“I’m pretty sure it’s not right,” said Winfried. “The fishing here is quite different to anything you’ve ever seen. And any way we cannot keep your cousins waiting while we look at it.”

They were at the arched entrance by now.

“Well, then,” said Bertrand, “you run up and look for the cross. No need for two of us to tire our legs. I’ll wait here.”

Winfried entered the castle, and after one or two wrong turnings found himself on the right stair. He knew pretty exactly where he had to go, for he had often looked up at the west turret from the outside. But just as he got to the door he was overtaken by Bertrand, who had naturally come straight up without any wrong turnings.



“What a time you’ve been,” said Bertrand, pushing in before him. “Now, let’s see—where did Ruby say she’d left her cross? Oh yes, hanging up there; she must have stood on a chair to reach it.” And sure enough, on a nail pretty high up on the wall hung the little ornament.

Winfried drew forward a chair; in another minute he had reached down the cross.

“Here it is,” he said, turning to Bertrand. But—he spoke to the air! Bertrand was gone. Winfried’s face flushed; but he controlled himself. He walked quietly to the door and turned the handle. It did not open. It was locked from the outside. He was a prisoner!

“I knew something of the kind would come,” he said to himself. “What will they do now? Poor little Mavis! I must trust her to the princess.”

But he could not help a feeling of bitter anger. It was no light punishment to the active energetic boy to have to spend all the bright afternoon hours shut up here like an old owl in a church tower. And he knew that till some one came to let him out, a prisoner he verily was. For he might have shouted his voice hoarse, no one down below could have heard him. And the chance of any one in the castle coming up was very small.

“What will gran think?” he said to himself.

“And, if these naughty children try to play him any trick. I know Ruby more than half believes all that nonsense about his being a wizard and about the mermaids, and Bertrand will egg her on.”

He went to the window and stood looking out, trying to keep down the dreadful restless *caged* feeling which began to come over him.



"How can I bear it?" he said. "If I had tools now, and could pick the lock; but some of these old locks are very strong, and I have nothing. If only I had wings;" and he gazed again out of the window.

When he turned round, though it was quite bright and sunny outside, it almost seemed as if the evening haze had somehow got into the room before its time. It was filled with a thin bluish mist. Winfried's eyes brightened.

"My princess!" he exclaimed. "Are you there?" A little laugh answered him, and gradually the mist drew together and into shape, and Forget-me-not stood before him.

"My boy," she exclaimed, "I am surprised at you. Why, you were looking quite depressed!"

Winfried reddened.

"It was the horrid feeling of being locked up," he said. "I never felt it before, and—it seems such a shame, such a mean trick. I wouldn't have minded a stand-up fight with any fellow, but—"

"Of course you wouldn't; but you've got a good bit farther than *that*, I hope, Winfried," she said with a smile. "And besides, Bertrand is much smaller than you. But it had to be, you know. I have explained enough to you—you and little Mavis;—it had to be."

Winfried started.

"That's another thing," he said. "I am uneasy about her. What will they do? They don't understand the boat, you know, princess, and she is alone with them."

Forget-me-not smiled again.

"How faithless you are to-day, Winfried," she said. "Mavis will be getting before you if you don't take care, simple and ignorant as she is. Can't you trust her to me?" And as the boy's face brightened.

"Come," she said, "I see you are recovering your usual ground, so I will tell you how I am going to do. But first, shut your eyes, Winfried; and here, wrap the end of my scarf round you. You might feel giddy still, though it's not the first time. Ready?—that's right—there now, give me your hand—we're up on the window ledge. You were wishing for wings—isn't this as good as wings?"

Bertrand rushed down—as much as he could rush, that is to say, over the steep and rough path—to the shore where the sisters were waiting.

"Have you got it?" asked Mavis eagerly.

"What?" asked Bertrand, out of breath.

"*What?* Why, Ruby's cross, of course, that you went for. And where is Winfried?"

"All right," said Bertrand, in a curious voice; "he's coming directly. We're to get into the boat and go on a little way, keeping near the shore. He's coming down another way."

(Yes, Bertrand, that he is!)

Mavis looked up anxiously.

"And the cross?" she said.

"Winfried's got it," he said. Which was true. Then he turned away, the fact being that he was so choking with laughter that he was afraid of betraying himself.

"Ruby," he called, "come and help *me* to drag the boat a little nearer;" and as Ruby came close he whispered to her, "I've done it—splendidly—he's shut up in his tower! Locked in, and the locks are good strong ones—now we can have a jolly good spree without that prig of a fellow. Only don't let Mavis know till we're safe out in the boat."

Ruby jumped with pleasure.

"What fun!" she exclaimed. "How capital! You have been clever, Bertrand. But take care, or Mavis will suspect something. Quick, Mavis," she went on, turning to her sister, "help us to pull in the boat. There, we can jump in now, Bertrand. You and Mavis steady it while I spring;" and in another moment she was in the boat, where her sister and Bertrand soon followed her.

All seemed well; the sky was clear and bright, the sun still shining. The faces of two of the party were sparkling with glee and triumph. But Mavis looked frightened and dissatisfied.

"I wish Winfried had come back with you, Bertrand," she said. "Why didn't he? Did cousin Hortensia keep him for anything?"

"Goodness, no," said Bertrand. "What a fuss you make, child! He's all right; you can look out for him, and tell me if you see him coming. I shall have enough to do with rowing you two."

"Winfried doesn't find the boat hard to row," said Mavis; "it's your own fault if it is hard. You might as well wait for him; he'd see us as he comes down the cliffs."

"Oh no, that would be nonsense," said Ruby hastily; "besides, he's not coming that way. You heard Bertrand say so. / could row too, Bertrand," she went on.

But the boy had already got his oars in motion, and though he was neither skilful nor experienced, strange to say the little boat glided on with the utmost ease and smoothness.

"There now," said Bertrand, considerably surprised, to tell the truth, at his own success, "didn't I tell you I could row?"

"No," said Mavis bluntly, "you said just this moment you'd have enough to do to manage it."

"Mavis, why are you so cross?" said Ruby. "It is such a pity to spoil everything."

She spoke very smoothly and almost coaxingly, but Mavis looked her straight in the eyes, and Ruby grew uncomfortable and turned away. But just then a new misgiving struck Mavis.

"Bertrand," she cried, "either you can't manage the boat, or you're doing it on purpose. You're not keeping near the shore as you said you would. You're going right out to sea;" and she jumped up as if she would have snatched the oars from him.

"Sit down, Mavis," said Ruby. "I'm sure you know you should never jump about in a boat. It's all right. Don't you know there's—there's a current hereabouts?" Current or no, *something* there was, besides Bertrand's rowing, that was rapidly carrying them away farther and farther from the shore. Mavis looked at Bertrand, not sure whether he could help himself or not. But—

"Winfried wouldn't have told you to keep near the shore if you couldn't," she said; "he knows all about the currents."

Bertrand turned with a rude laugh.

"Does he indeed?" he said. "It's more than I do; but all the same this current, or whatever it is that is taking us out so fast, has come just at the right minute. I never meant to keep near in, there's no fun in that. We're going a jolly good way out, and when we're tired of it we'll come back and land close to the old wizard's cottage. Ruby and I are going to play him a trick; we want to catch him with the mermaids Ruby heard singing the other day. If we set the villagers on him, they'll soon make an end of him and his precious grandson."

"Yes," said Ruby spitefully; "and a good riddance they'd be. That Winfried setting himself up over us all."

Mavis grew pale.

"Ruby; Bertrand," she said, "you cannot mean to be so wicked. You know the villagers are already set against old Adam rather, even though he has been so good to them, and if you stir them up—they might kill him if they really thought he was a wizard."

"We're not going to do anything till we know for ourselves," said Ruby. "We're first going to the cottage really to find out if it's true. You know yourself, Mavis, we *did* hear some one singing and speaking there the other day who wasn't to be seen when we got there. And I believe it *was* a mermaid, or—or a syren, or some witchy sort of creature." Mavis was silent. She had her own thoughts about the voice they had overheard, thoughts which she could not share with the others.

"Oh, dear Princess Forget-me-not," she said to her self, "why don't you make them see you, and understand how naughty they are?"

For the moment she had forgotten the princess's promise that neither Winfried nor his grandfather should suffer any harm, and she felt terribly frightened and unhappy.

"Where is Winfried?" she said at last. "He will see us going out to sea when he comes down to the shore, and if he tells cousin Hortensia she can easily get some of the fishermen to come after us. They can row far quicker than you."

Bertrand stopped rowing to laugh more rudely than before.

"*Can* they?" he said. "I doubt it. And as for Winfried telling—why, he doesn't know; he's locked in safe and sound in the west turret! He'll be quite comfortable there for as long as I choose to leave him, and however he shouts no one can hear him. Not that there's much fear of any of those lumbering boats overtaking us if they tried—why—"

He took up the oars again as he spoke, but before he began to row he half started and glanced round. No wonder; the boat was gliding out to sea without his help, quite as fast as when he was rowing.

"How—how it drifts!" he said in a rather queer tone of voice. "Is there a current hereabouts, Ruby?"

"I suppose so," said Ruby. "Try and row the other way, that'll soon show you."

But it was all very well to speak of "trying." No efforts of Bertrand's had the very slightest effect on the boat. On it sped, faster and faster, as if laughing at him, dancing along the water as if it were alive and enjoying the joke. Bertrand grew angry, then, by degrees, frightened.

"It isn't my fault," he said. "I don't pretend to know all about the currents and tides and nonsense. You shouldn't have let me come out here, Ruby?"

Ruby was terrified, but angry too.

"It isn't *my* fault," she said. "You planned it all; you know you did. And if we're all—"

"Be quiet, Ruby," said Mavis, who alone of the three was perfectly calm and composed. "If it stops you and Bertrand carrying out your naughty plan, I am very glad if we are taken out to sea."

"That's *too* bad of you," said Ruby, angry in spite of her terror. "I believe you'd rather we were drowned than that your precious Winfried and his grandfather should get what they deserve. And we *are* going to be drowned, or any way starved to death. We're going faster and faster. Oh, I do believe there must be a whirlpool somewhere near here, and that we are going to be sucked into it."

She began to sob and cry. Bertrand, to do him justice, put a good face upon it. He looked pale but determined.

"This is what comes of having to do with people like that," he said vindictively. "I believe he's bewitched the boat to spite us. I'll have another try, however."

But it was all no use. The boat, slight and fragile as it seemed, resisted his efforts as if it were a living thing opposing him. Crimson with heat and vexation, the boy muttered some words, which it was to be hoped the girls did not catch, and flung down the oars in a rage. One fell inside, the other was just slipping over the edge when Mavis caught it. Strange to say, no sooner was it in her hold than the motion stopped; the boat lay still and passive on the water, swaying gently as if waiting for orders.

"We've got out of the current," exclaimed Ruby. "Try, Mavis, can you turn it?"

It hardly seemed to need trying. The boat turned almost, as it were, of itself, and in another moment they were quietly moving towards the shore. Nor did it seem to make any difference when Bertrand took the oars from Mavis and resumed his rowing.

"If I only waited another moment," he said. "We got out of the current just as you caught the oar, Mavis."

She shook her head doubtfully.

"I don't know. I don't think it was that," she said. "But any way now it is all right again, and we are going back, you and Bertrand, Ruby, will not think of playing any trick, or setting the villagers on to old Adam."

"Why not, pray?" said Bertrand. "And—"

"I don't see what has made any difference," said Ruby pertly. "Suppose the horrid things had bewitched the boat, is that any reason for not showing them up? You think it's all your wonderful cleverness that got the boat round, do you, Mavis?"

"No, I don't. I think a good many things I'm not going to tell you," said the little girl. "But one thing I will tell you, I will not leave the boat or come on shore unless you promise me to give up your naughty cruel plan."

She spoke so firmly that Ruby was startled. And indeed her own words seemed to surprise Mavis herself. It was as if some one were whispering to her what to say. But on Bertrand they made no impression.

"You won't, won't you?" he said. "Ah, well, we'll see to that."

They were close to the shore by this time. The marvellous boat had "got over the ground," I was going to say—I mean the *water*—even more quickly than when going out to sea. And in another minute, thanks to something—no doubt Bertrand thought it was thanks to his wonderful skill—they glided quietly into the little landing-place where Winfried had brought them two days ago.

Up jumped Ruby.

"That's capital," she said. "We can easily make our way to the old wizard's cottage from here. And before we peep in on him himself, Bertrand, we may as well look round his garden, as he calls it. It is the queerest place you ever saw, full of caves and grottoes." Both Bertrand and she had jumped on shore.

"Come on, Mavis," cried they. "What are you so slow about?"

For Mavis sat perfectly still in her place.

"I am not coming on shore," she said quietly, "not unless you promise to give up whatever mischief it is that you are planning."

"Nonsense," said Bertrand. "You just *shall* come; tell her she must, Ruby, you're the eldest."

"Come, Mavis," said Ruby. "You'd better come, for everybody's sake, I can tell you," she added meaningly. "If you're there you can look after your precious old wizard. I won't promise anything."

"No," Mavis repeated. "I will not come. We have no right to go forcing ourselves into his cottage. It is as much his as the castle is ours, and you know you have locked up Winfried on purpose so that he can't get out. No, I will not go with you."

"Then stay," shouted Bertrand, "and take the consequences."

And he dragged Ruby back from the boat.

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## Chapter Nine.

### Beginnings?

"Very wrong, very wrong,  
Very wrong and bad."

*Child World.*

"Let's run on fast a little way," said Bertrand, "to make her think we won't wait for her. That will frighten her, and she will run after us, you'll see. Don't look round, Ruby."

In his heart he really did not believe that Mavis would change her mind or run after them. And he did not care. Indeed, he much preferred having Ruby alone, as he knew he could far more easily persuade her by herself to join in his mischievous schemes. But he felt that she was half-hearted about leaving her sister, and so he did not hesitate to trick her too.

They hurried on for some distance. Then Ruby, who was growing both tired and cross, pulled her hand away from Bertrand.

"Stop," she said. "I'm quite out of breath. And I want to see if Mavis is coming."

Bertrand had to give in. They were on higher ground than the shore, and could see it clearly. There lay the little boat as they had left it, and Mavis sitting in it calmly. To all appearance at least.

"She's not coming—not a bit of her," exclaimed Ruby angrily. "I don't believe you thought she would, Bertrand."

"She *will* come, you'll see," said the boy, "and even if she doesn't, what does it matter? We'll run on and spy out the old wizard and have some fun. Mavis will stay there safe enough till we get back."

"I thought you meant to go home by the village and tell the people about old Adam, if we *do* see anything queer," said Ruby.

"So I did, but if you're in such a fidget about Mavis perhaps we'd better go home as we came, and not say anything in the village to-day. I'd like to see what Master Winfried has been up to when we get back. Perhaps he'll have got some old witch to lend him a broomstick, and we shall find him flown;" and Bertrand laughed scornfully.

Ruby laughed too.

"I don't think that's likely," she said. "But there's no telling. I do wish he and his grandfather were out of the country altogether. There's something about Winfried that makes me feel furious. He *is* such a prig; and he's even got cousin Hortensia to think him a piece of perfection."

"He may take his perfections elsewhere, and he shall, too," said Bertrand. And the fierceness of his tone almost startled even Ruby.

They were not far from the old fisherman's cottage by this time. They stopped again to take breath. Mavis and the boat were not visible from where they stood, for the path went in and out among the rocks, and just here some large projecting boulders hid the shore from sight.

Suddenly, as if it came from some cave beneath their feet, both children grew conscious of a faint sound as of distant music. And every moment it became clearer and louder even though muffled. Bertrand and Ruby looked at each other.

"Mermaids!" both exclaimed.

"They always sing," said Bertrand.

"Yes," added Ruby, with her old confusion of ideas about syrens; "and they make people go after them by their singing, and then they catch them and kill them, and I'm not sure but what they *eat* them. I know I've read something about bare dry bones being found. Shall we put our fingers in our ears, Bertrand?" She looked quite pale with fear.

"Nonsense," said the boy. "That's only sailors at sea. They lure them in among the rocks. We're quite safe on dry land. Besides, I don't think it's *mermaids* that do that. They're miserable crying creatures; but I don't think they kill people."

The subterranean music came nearer and nearer. Somehow the children could not *help* listening.

"Didn't you say you and Mavis heard singing the day you were here before—at the wizard's cottage, I mean?" said Bertrand.

"N-no, not exactly singing. It was laughing, and a voice calling out good-bye in a singing way," answered Ruby.

As if in response to her words, the ringing suddenly stopped, and from below their feet—precisely below it seemed—came the sound of ringing, silvery laughter, clear and unmistakable.

"Oh," cried Ruby, "come away, Bertrand. I'm sure it's the mermaids, and they *will* catch us and kill us, you'll see."

Her boasted courage had not come to much. And yet there was nothing very alarming in the pretty sounds they had heard.

"And what if it is the mermaids?" said Bertrand coolly. "We came out to catch them, didn't we? It's just what we wanted. Come along, Ruby. How do we get to the cottage? There seems to be a sort of wall in front."

"We go round by the back," said Ruby. "It's there there are the queer grottoes and little caves. But you won't go far into them, will you, Bertrand? For I am not at all sure but that the mermaids come up from the sea through these caves; you see they *do* come some underground way."

Bertrand gave a sort of grunt. What Ruby said only made him the more determined to explore as far as he possibly could.

They entered the strange little garden I have already described without further adventure. There seemed no one about, no sound of any kind broke the almost unnatural stillness.

"How *very* quiet it is," said Ruby with a little shiver. "And there's no smoke coming out of the chimney—there was the last time, for there was a good fire in the kitchen where old Adam was."

And as she said this there came over her the remembrance of the kind old man's gentle hospitality and interest in them. Why had she taken such a hatred to Winfried and his grandfather, especially since Bertrand's arrival? She could not have given any real reason.

"I hope he isn't very ill—or—*dead*," she said, dropping her voice. "And Winfried locked up and not able to get to him. It would be our fault, Bertrand."

"Nonsense," said Bertrand roughly, with his usual scornful contempt of any softer feelings. "He's fallen asleep over his pipe and glass of grog. I daresay he drinks lots of grog—those fellows always do."

"I'm sure *he* doesn't," contradicted Ruby, feeling angry with herself as well as Bertrand. "Let's go to the window and peep in before we look at the caves."

She ran round to the front, followed by her cousin, taking care to make as little sound as possible. She remembered on which side of the door was the kitchen, and softly approached what she knew must be its window. But how surprised she was when she looked in! It was the kitchen; she remembered the shape of the room; she recognised the neat little fireplace, but all was completely deserted. Every trace of furniture had disappeared; old Adam's large chair by the hearth might never have been in existence, well as she remembered it. Except that it was clean and swept, the room might not have, been inhabited for years.

Ruby turned to Bertrand, who was staring in at another window.

"I say, Ruby," he whispered, "the room over here is quite—"

"I know," she said. "So is the kitchen. They're gone, Bertrand, quite gone, and we've had all our trouble for nothing. It's too bad."

"*They!*" repeated Bertrand, "you can't say *they*, when you know that Winfried is locked up in the turret-room."

"Oh," exclaimed Ruby starting, "I quite forgot. He must have hidden his grandfather somewhere. And yet I don't see how they could have managed it so quietly. We always know when any of the village people are moving their furniture; they send to borrow our carts."

"Well," said Bertrand, "there's one thing certain. If you didn't believe it before, you must now; I should think even Mavis would—the old fellow *is* a wizard, and so's his precious grandson."

"Shall we go into the house?" said Ruby, though she looked half afraid to do so.

"Isn't the door locked?" said Bertrand, trying it as he spoke. It yielded to his touch; he went in, followed, though tremblingly, by Ruby.

But after all there was little or nothing to see; the three rooms, though scrupulously clean, even the windows shining bright and polished, were perfectly empty. As the children strolled back to the kitchen, annoyed and disappointed, feeling, to tell the truth, rather small, something caught Ruby's eye in one corner of the room. It was a small object, gleaming bright and blue on the white stones of the floor. She ran forward and picked it up, it was a tiny bunch of forget-me-nots tied with a scrap of ribbon; the same large brilliant kind of forget-me-not as those which she and Mavis had so admired on their first visit to the now deserted cottage. She gave a little cry.

"Look, Bertrand," she said, "they can't have been long gone. These flowers are quite fresh. I wonder where they came from. They must have been growing in a pot in the house, for there are none in the garden. I looked as we came through."

Bertrand glanced at the flowers carelessly.

"Wizards," he began, "can—"

But his sentence was never finished. For as he spoke there came a sudden gust of wind down the wide chimney, so

loud and furious that it was as startling as a clap of thunder. Then it subsided again, but for a moment or two a long low wail sounded overhead, gradually dying away in the distance.

"What was that?" said Bertrand. While the sounds lasted both children had stood perfectly still.

"The wind of course," said Ruby. She was more accustomed than her cousin to the unexpected vagaries of the storm spirits so near the sea, still even she seemed startled. "It's often like that," she was beginning to say, but she hesitated. "It was very loud," she added.

"There must be rough weather coming," said Bertrand. "We'd better go home by the road, I think, Ruby."

"We," exclaimed Ruby indignantly. "Do you mean you and me, Bertrand? And what about Mavis?"

"She can come on shore," replied the boy carelessly. "She knows where we are. It's her own fault. Come along, there's nothing to wait for in this empty old hole. I want you to show me the caves outside."



"I'll try to signal to Mavis first," said Ruby. "I'll tie my handkerchief to a stick and wave it about. She can see us here quite well, and perhaps when she finds we're alone she'll come."

They left the cottage, and Ruby got out her handkerchief. But it was small use. For just as they stepped on to the rough little terrace in front from whence they could clearly see the shore, there came another and even—it seemed so at least now they were standing outside—more violent blast. It was all Ruby could do to keep her feet, and when she recovered from the giddy effect of the wind she was still breathless and shaken. And that the hurricane was gathering strength every second was plain to be seen; the waves were dashing in excitedly, the sky at one side had that strange lurid purple colour which foretells great disturbance.

But it was not these things only which made Ruby turn pale and shiver.

"Bertrand," she gasped, "I don't know if there's something the matter with my eyes, I can't see clearly—Bertrand—look—where is Mavis—Mavis and the boat; can you see them?"

Bertrand shaded his brow with his hand and gazed.

"Pon my soul," he said, "it's very odd. I can't see them. And there's not been time for Mavis to have rowed out to sea or even to have drifted out; we can see right out ever so far, and there's no boat; not a sign of one."

"Can—can she have landed and dragged the boat ashore somehow?" said Ruby, her teeth chattering with cold and fear.

"No," said Bertrand, "we'd certainly see her and the boat in that case."

"Then, where is she?" cried Ruby. "*Bertrand*, you must care. What do you think has become of her?"

"Can't say, I'm sure," said the boy. "The boat may have capsized: the sea's awfully rough now."

"Do you mean that Mavis may be drowned or drowning?" screamed Ruby. She had to scream, even had she been less terribly excited, for the roar of wind was on them again, and her voice was scarcely audible.

"I don't see that she need be drowned," said Bertrand. "It's shallow. She *may* have crept on shore, and be lying somewhere among those big stones; and if not, can't your precious wizard friends look after her? She's fond enough of them."

He was partly in earnest; but Ruby took it all as cruel heartless mocking. She turned upon him furiously.

"You're a brutal wicked boy," she screamed. "I wish you were drowned; I wish you had never come near us; I wish—" she stopped, choked by her fury and misery, and by the wind which came tearing round again.

Bertrand came close to her.

"As you're so busy wishing," he called into her ear, "you'd better wish you hadn't done what you have done yourself. It was all you who started the plan, and settled how we were to trick Winfried into the turret-room; you know you did."

"And did I plan to drown Mavis, my own darling little sister?" returned Ruby as well as she could speak between her sobs and breathlessness. "Come down to the shore with me this moment and help me to look for her, if you're not altogether a cruel heartless bully."

"Not I," said Bertrand, "we'd probably get drowned ourselves. Just see how the waves come leaping in; they look as if they were alive. I believe it's all witches' work together. I'm not going to trust myself down there. Come and show me the grottoes and the caves, Ruby. We may as well shelter in them till the wind goes down a bit. We can't do Mavis any good; if she's on the shore she can take care of herself, and if she's under the water *we* can't reach her;" and he caught hold of Ruby to pull her along, but she tore herself from his grasp with a wrench.

"You wicked, you heartless, brutal boy," she cried.

"I don't care if I am drowned; I would rather be drowned with Mavis than stay alive with you."

And almost before Bertrand knew what she was doing, Ruby was rushing through the little garden at the back of the cottage on her way to descend the rough path to the shore.

He stood looking after her coolly for a moment or two with his hands in his pockets. He tried to whistle, but it was not very successful; the wind had the best of it.

"I don't believe Mavis has come to any harm," he said aloud, though speaking to himself, and almost as if trying to excuse his own conduct. "Anyway, I don't see that it's my business to look after her, it was all her own obstinacy."

He kicked roughly at the pebbles at his feet, and as he did so, his glance fell on a tiny speck of colour just where he was kicking. It was one of the blue flowers Ruby had found in the cottage. Bertrand stooped and picked it up, and, strange to say, he handled it gently. But as he looked at it there came again to him the queer smarting pain in his eyes which he had complained of in the turret-room, and glancing up he became aware that the wind had suddenly gone down, everything had become almost unnaturally still, while a thin bluish haze seemed gathering closely round where he stood. Bertrand rubbed his eyes.

"There can't be smoke here," he said. "What can be the matter with my eyes?" and he rubbed them impatiently. It did no good.

"No, that will do no good," said a voice. It seemed quite near him.

"Look up;" and in spite of himself the boy could not help looking up.

"*Oh*," he screamed; "*oh*, what is it? what is it?"

For an agony, short but indescribable, had darted through his eyeballs, piercing, it seemed to him, to his very brain; and Bertrand was not in some ways a cowardly boy.

There was silence, perfect, dead silence, and gradually the intense aching, which the short terrible pain had left, began to subside. As it did so, and Bertrand ventured to look up again, he saw that—what he had seen, he could not describe it better—was gone, the haze had disappeared, the air was again clear, but far from still, for round the corner of the old cottage the blast now came rushing and tearing, as if infuriated at having been for a moment obliged to keep back; and with it now came the rain, such rain as the inland-bred boy had never seen before—blinding, drenching, lashing rain, whose drops seemed to cut and sting, with such force did they fall. It added to his confusion and bewilderment. Like a hunted animal he turned and ran, anywhere to get shelter; and soon he found himself behind the house, and then the thought of the grottoes the little girls had told him of returned to his mind.

"I won't go back into that witches' hole," he said to himself as he glanced back at the house. "I'll shelter in one of the grottoes."

As he thought this he caught sight of an opening in the rockery before him. It was the entrance to the very cave where Mavis had been left by Ruby. Bertrand ran in; what happened to him there you shall hear in good time.

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## Chapter Ten.

### “Forget-Me-Not Land.”

“A world...  
Where the month is always June.”

*Three Worlds.*

Ruby meanwhile was running or rather stumbling down the stones. She cried and sobbed as she went; her pretty face had never, I think, looked so woebegone and forlorn; for it was new to her to be really distressed or anxious about anything.

“Mavis, Mavis,” she called out every now and then, “are you there darling? can’t you answer?” as if, even had the wind been less wildly raging, Mavis could possibly have heard her so far-off.

And before long Ruby was obliged to stop for a moment to gather strength and breath. The wind seemed to increase every minute. She turned her back to it for a second; the relief was immense; and just then she noticed that she was still clutching the little bunch of flowers she had picked up. They made her begin to cry again.

“Mavis loves them so,” she thought, and her memory went back to the happy peaceful afternoon they had spent with old Adam and his grandson. How kind they were, and how nice the cakes were that Winfried had made for them himself!

“Oh,” thought Ruby, “I wish Bertrand had never come! It’s all—” but there she hesitated. There had been truth in her cousin’s mean reproach, that the mischief and the cruel tricks they had planned had been first thought of by *her*. And Ruby knew, too, in her heart, that she had not been gentle or unselfish or kind long before she had ever seen Bertrand. She had not been so actively naughty because she had had no chance of being so, as it were. The coming together of the two selfish unfeeling natures had been like the meeting of the flint and steel, setting loose the hidden fire.

And besides this, for Bertrand there might have been some excuse; he had been neglected and yet spoiled; he had never known what it was truly to love any one, whereas Ruby had lived in love all her life; and this was her return for it.





"I have killed my little Mavis," she sobbed. "Yes, it has been all me. We needn't have minded Bertrand; he couldn't have made me naughty if I hadn't let him. Oh, Mavis, Mavis, whatever shall I do?" Her glance fell again on the flowers in her hand. They were not the least withered or spoilt, but as fresh as if just newly gathered. They seemed to smile up at her, and she felt somehow comforted.

"Dear little flowers," she said. Seldom in her life had Ruby spoken so tenderly. She started, as close beside her she heard a faint sigh.

"Ruby," said a voice, "can you hear me?"

"Yes," said the little girl, beginning to tremble.

"But you cannot see me? and yet I am here, close to you, as I have often been before. Try Ruby, try to see me."

"Are—are you a mermaid, or a—that other thing?" asked the child.

There came a little laugh, scarcely a laugh, then the sigh again.

"If you could see me you would know how foolish you are," said the voice. "But I must have patience—it will come—your eyes are not strong, Ruby; they are not even as strong as Bertrand's."

"Yes, they are," said Ruby indignantly. "I've never had sore eyes in my life, and Bertrand's have hurt him several times lately."

"I know; so much the better for him," was the reply. "Well, good-bye for the present, Ruby. Go on to look for Mavis; you must face it all—there, the rain is coming now. Ah!"

And with this, which sounded like a long sigh, the voice seemed to waft itself away, and down came the rain. The same swirl which had been too much for sturdy Bertrand was upon Ruby now, standing, too, in a far more exposed place, with no shelter near, and the rough rocky path before her. She did not stand long; she turned again and began to descend, stumbling, slipping, blinded by the rain, dashed and knocked about by the wind.

"She might have helped me, whoever she was that spoke to me," sobbed Ruby. "It isn't my fault if I can't see creatures like that. I'm not good enough, I suppose."

As she said these last words, or thought them, rather, a queer little thrill passed through her, and something, in spite of herself, made her look up. Was it—no, it could not be—she had suddenly thought a gleam of sunshine and blue sky had flashed on her sight; but no, the storm was too furious. "Yet still, I did," thought Ruby, "I did see something bright and blue, as if two of my little flowers had got up there and were looking down on me."

She glanced at her hand; the forget-me-nots were gone!

"I must have dropped them," she said. "Oh dear, dear!"

And yet as she struggled on again she did not feel *quite* so miserable.

Yet it was terribly hard work, and every moment her anxiety about Mavis increased; Ruby had never *felt* so much in all her life.

"Who could it be that spoke to me so strangely?" she asked herself over and over again. "And what can I do to be able to see her? I wonder if Mavis has seen her, I wonder—" and suddenly there came into her mind the remembrance of Miss Hortensia's long-ago story of the vision in the west turret.

"There was something about forget-me-nots in it," she thought dreamily. "Could it have been true?"

How she had mocked at the story!

She had at last reached the shore by this time. The rain still fell in pitiless torrents, but the wind had fallen a little, and down here she seemed rather less exposed than on the face of the cliffs. Still Ruby was completely drenched through; never before had she had any conception of the misery to which some of our poor fellow-creatures are exposed to almost every day of their lives. And yet, her fears for Mavis overmastered all her other sufferings; for the first time Ruby thought of another more than of herself.

"Mavis, dear little Mavis, Mavis darling, where are you?" she sobbed wildly, her teeth chattering, while terrible shivers shook her from head to foot. "Oh, it *can't* be that she is under those dreadful, fierce, leaping waves. They look as if they were dancing in cruel joy over something they had got;" and a shudder worse than those caused by the cold went through the poor child.

"Mavis," she called out at last, after she had peered round about every large stone, *every* corner where her sister could possibly have tried to find shelter, without coming upon the slightest trace of either the child or the boat, "you must be in the sea. I'll go after you; it doesn't matter if I am drowned if you are. Perhaps—perhaps the mermaids are keeping you safe; there are kind ones among them it says in the fairy stories."

And she turned resolutely to the water. It was cold, icily cold as it touched first her feet, then her ankles, then crept up to her knees; it seemed to catch her breath even before it was at all deep. Ruby felt her powers going and her senses failing.

"I shall never be able to find Mavis even if she is under the sea," she thought to herself, just as a huge wave caught her in its rolling clutch, and she knew no more.

It seemed as if time beyond counting, years, centuries had passed when Ruby came to her senses again, enough to know that she was herself, gradually to remember that once, long ago, there had been a little girl called Ruby, somewhere, somehow, and that some one dear, most dear to her, had been in awful danger from which she had tried to rescue her. And through all the long mist, through all the dream wanderings of her spirit, in which may be it had been learning lessons, the fruit of which remained, though the teachings themselves were forgotten,—for who knows, who can limit what we *do* learn in these mysterious ways?—Ruby's guardian angel must have rejoiced to see that the thought of her sister, not herself, was uppermost.

"Mavis," was the first word she whispered; "Mavis, are you alive? Are you not drowned, darling? But it was such a *very* long time ago. Perhaps the world is finished. But Mavis—I thought Mavis was dead; and, oh! who are you?" she ended with a thrill which seemed to make her quite alive and awake.

"Are you the fairy in the turret? And what are you doing to my eyes?"

She sat up and rubbed them. There was the strangest feeling in them—not pain now; indeed it was, though strange, a beautiful feeling. They felt drawn upwards, upwards to something or some one, and a new light and strength seemed to fill them, light and strength and colour such as Ruby had never before even *imagined*. And the some one—yes, it was the lovely gracious figure, with the exquisite never-, once seen, to-be-forgotten eyes, of Winfried's princess. Ruby saw her at last!

A smile overspread the sweet face; the blue eyes shone with gladness.

"How often I have hoped for this," she murmured. "No, Ruby, you will never know how often. Darling, shut your eyes, you must not strain them; shut your eyes and think of Mavis, and trust yourself to me."

Ruby obeyed; she had not even looked round to see where she was; she only felt that she was lying on something soft and warm and *dry*; oh, how nice it was to feel dry again. For now the distant, long-ago sensation began to fade, and she remembered everything clearly as if it had happened, say, yesterday or the day before at farthest. The naughty mischief she and Bertrand had been planning, the strange little boat, the deserted cottage, the hurricane, and the misery about Mavis, the plunge in search of her into the sea, even to the loss of the forget-me-nots, which had been her only comfort, all came back; and with it a wonderful delightful feeling of hope and peace and trust, such as she had never known before. She gave herself up to the kind strong arms that clasped her round! "She will take me to Mavis," she thought; "and oh, I *will* try never, never to be selfish and unkind and naughty again."

Then, still wrapped in the soft warm mantle or rug she had felt herself lying upon, she was lifted upwards, upwards still, she knew not and cared not whither, for Ruby's eyes were closed and she was fast asleep, and this time her sleep was dreamless.

"Ruby, my own little Ruby," were the first words she heard. They awoke her as nothing else would have done.

"Mavis," she whispered.

Yes, it was Mavis. She was leaning over the couch on which Ruby lay. Never had Ruby seen her so bright and sweet and happy-looking.

"Mavis," Ruby repeated. "And you weren't drowned, darling? At least;" and as she raised herself a little she looked round her doubtfully, "at least, not unless this is heaven? It looks like it—only," with a deep sigh, "it can't be, for if it were, I shouldn't be in it."

"No, darling, it isn't heaven, but it's a beautiful place, and I *think* it must be a little on the way there. It's one of the homes of our princess; she won't tell me the name, but I call it Forget-me-not Land. Isn't that a good name? Look all about, Ruby."

They were in a little arbour, in one corner of what one would have called a garden, except that gardens are usually enclosed. They don't stretch as far as the eyes can see, which was the case here. A soft clear yet not dazzling or glaring light was over everything, yet there was no sun visible in the sky. And as Ruby gazed and gazed she began to feel that there were differences between this garden and any others she had ever seen. One of these Mavis pointed out to her.

"Do you see, Ruby," she said, "that all the flowers in this garden are our wild flowers, though they are such beauties?" She stooped to gather one or two blossoms growing close beside her as she spoke.

"See, here are the same kind of forget-me-nots that were at the old cottage, and that we found so strangely on the castle terrace. And here are violets and primroses and snowdrops, all the spring flowers; and the summer ones too, honeysuckle and dog-roses; and even the tiny common ones, buttercups and daisies, and celandine and pimpernel, and eye-bright and shepherd's-purse, and—and—"

"But you're mixing them all up together," said Ruby. "They don't all come at the same time of year."

"Yes, they do *here*," said Mavis. "That's the wonder. I found it out for myself almost immediately, and the princess was so pleased I did. I think this garden is a sort of nursery for wild flowers; you see up where we live there are no gardens or gardeners for them."

"Up!" said Ruby, "are we down below the world? Are we out of the world?"

Mavis smiled.

"I don't know," she said. "It may be up or it may be down. It doesn't matter. The princess says we may call it fairyland if we like. And fancy, Ruby, old Adam is the gardener here."

A shadow passed over Ruby's face.

"Don't be frightened, dear. He knew you were coming, and he's as kind as kind. We're to have supper at his cottage before we go home."

"Oh," said Ruby disappointed, "then we are to go home?"

"Oh yes," Mavis explained, "it wouldn't do for us to stay always here. But I *think* we may come back again sometimes. Adam has been often here, ever since he was a boy, he told me. And now he's going to stay always, till it's time for him to go somewhere else, he says. It was too cold and rough for him up by the sea now he is so old."

"And—about Winfried?" asked Ruby, growing very red.

Mavis laughed joyously.

"Winfried," she cried, "why, he was here already when I came; the boat went down, down with me, Ruby, when the great waves rolled over it and me. I *was* frightened, just for a minute, and then it was all right, and the princess and Winfried lifted me out."

"How many days ago was it?" asked Ruby.

Mavis shook her head.

"I don't know that either; perhaps it's not days at all here. I've never thought about it. But cousin Hortensia won't be frightened. The princess told me that. Winfried will take us home. He can't stay here either; he's got work to do somewhere, and he can only come back sometimes. There, Ruby—look—there he comes; do you see him coming up that little hill? He'll be here in a few minutes."

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## Chapter Eleven.

### Down the Well.

"Blue-bells the news are spreading,  
Ring-a-ting, ting, ting, ting!  
All the flowers have voices,

Lovely the songs that they sing;  
*How* the blue-bell rejoices,  
Ting-a-ring, ting, ting, ting!"

Ruby shrank back a little.

"I don't want to see Winfried," she said, "after all we did. And, oh Mavis, I must be in such a mess—my clothes were all soaked in the sea."

"No, they weren't," said Mavis, laughing; "at least if they were they've come right again. Stand up, Ruby, and shake yourself, and look at yourself. There now, did you ever look neater or nicer in your life?"

Ruby stood up and looked at herself as Mavis advised her.

"Is this my own frock?" she said. "No, it can't be. See, Mavis, it's all beautifully embroidered with forget-me-nots! And what lovely blue ribbon my hair is tied with; and my hands are so white and clean Mavis, did the princess dress me while I was asleep?"

Mavis nodded her head sagely.

"Something like it," she said.

"And oh," continued Ruby, "your frock is just the same, and your ribbons and all. *How* nice you look, Mavis! Is the princess here? I should so like her to see us."

"She's not here to-day," said Mavis. "She's away somewhere—I'm not sure," she added in a lower voice, "but that it's about Bertrand."

Ruby gave a sort of shiver.

"Oh Mavis!" she said, "he was so cruel and so heartless, and I was so miserable. I do hope the princess will make him go quite away."

"Or—if he was to be quite changed," said Mavis.

"No, no. I don't want him. I only want you, my darling little Mavis, and we shall be so happy—much, much happier than we have ever been. Kiss me, Mavis, and tell me you quite forgive me, and if ever I am naughty or horrid again, I hope the princess will punish me."

"She won't let you forget her any way," said Mavis. "I think that is how she punishes."

Ruby looked rather puzzled; but before she could ask more they heard Winfried's whistle, and in a moment he appeared. His face was all one smile—all Ruby's fears and misgivings faded away before it.

"Grandfather is waiting for you," he said. "There are some cakes, Miss Ruby, that you will find even better than those others. For *everything* is better here, you see."

"How lovely it must all be," said Ruby, with a little sigh. "Aren't you sorry, Winfried, that you can't stay here altogether? Mavis says you have to go away to work."

"Of course," said Winfried cheerily. "It would never do, young as I am, not to work. And we shouldn't enjoy this half as much if we had it always—it's the rest and refreshment after common life that makes half the happiness. It's different for gran—he's done *his* part, none better, and now his work should be light I'm thankful to know he's safe here. Now we had better go—down that little hill is the way to his cottage."

Children, you have perhaps never been in fairyland, nor, for that matter, have I been there either. But I have had glimpses of it a good many times in my life, and so I hope have you. And these glimpses, do you know, become more frequent and are less fleeting as one grows older. I, at least, find it so. Is not that something to look forward to? Though, after all, this sweet country to which our three little friends, thanks to the beautiful princess, had found their way, was scarcely the dream region which we think of as fairyland; it was better described by little Mavis's own name for the nameless garden—"Forget-me-not Land"; for once having entered there, no one can lose the remembrance of it, any more than once having looked into *her* eyes one can forget Princess Forget-me-not herself.

But it would be difficult to describe this magic land; I must leave a good deal of it to that kind of fancy which comes nearer truth than clumsy words. Though, as it is nice to be told all that *can* be told of the sweetest and most beautiful things, I will try to tell you a little of what Ruby and Mavis saw.

It might not have seemed such a lovely place to everybody, perhaps. Time had been even when Ruby herself might not have thought it so; for this garden-land was not a gorgeous place; it was just sweet and restful. As I told you, all the flowers were wild flowers; but that gives you no idea of what they looked like, for they were carefully tended and arranged, growing in great masses together in a way we never see, except sometimes in spring when the primroses almost hide the ground where they grow, or at midsummer when a rich luxuriance of dog-roses and honeysuckle makes it seem as if they had been "planted on purpose," as children say. All along the grassy paths where Winfried led them, every step made the little girls exclaim in new admiration.

"Oh see, Ruby, there is a whole bank of 'Robin.' I could not have believed it would look so beautiful; and there—look at those masses of 'sweet Cicely,' just like snowflakes. And in *our* fields it is such a poor frightened little weed of a flower you scarcely notice it," said Mavis.

"But it's lovely if you look into it closely," said Winfried. "Some of the very tiniest flowers are really the most beautiful."

Then they came in sight of a stretch of hair-bells—white and blue—the kind that in some places are called "blue-bells."



"Stop a moment," said the boy. "Stop and listen—hush—there now, do you hear them ringing? That is a sound you can never hear in—anywhere but here."

They listened with all their ears, you may be sure. Yes, as they grew accustomed to the exceeding stillness, to the clear thin *fineness* of the air, they heard the softest, sweetest tinkle you can imagine; a perfect fairy bell-ringing, and the longer they listened the clearer it grew.

"Oh, how wonderful," said Mavis.

And Ruby added, "I should think if we lived long enough in this country we should end by hearing the grass growing."

"Perhaps," said Winfried.

"But don't you miss the sea things?" Ruby went on. "You love them so, Winfried, and somehow you seem to belong to the sea."

"So I do," the boy replied. "The sea is my life. Coming here is only a rest and a holiday."

"I wonder," said Mavis, "I wonder if there is a garden country for the sea to match this for the land. A place where seaweeds and corals and all the loveliest sea things are taken care of, like the wild flowers here?"

"You may be sure there is," said the fisher-boy, smiling. "There is no saying what the princess won't have to show us, and where she won't take us now she has us in hand. Why, only to look into her eyes, you can see it—they seem to reach to everywhere; everywhere and everything beautiful seems in them."

"You have seen farther into them than we have," said Mavis thoughtfully. "But still I think I can understand what you mean."

"So can I, a *very* little," said Ruby. "But—they are rather frightening too, don't you think?"

"They must be at first," said Winfried.

But just then, a little way off, they caught sight of old Adam coming to meet them. His cottage was close by; they

came upon it suddenly, for it stood half-hidden under the shelter of the hill they had been descending. Such a lovely cottage it was—so simple, yet so pretty; *quite* clean, with a cleanness you never see out of fairyland or places of that kind, with flowers of all kinds, forget-me-nots above all, clustering about it and peeping in at the windows.

Adam welcomed his little guests as kindly as if no unkind thought of him had ever entered Ruby's head; he made no difference between her and Mavis, and I think this caused Ruby to feel more sorry than anything could have done.

If they had been happy that afternoon in the cottage by the sea, you can fancy how happy they were in this wonderful new fairy home of the good old man's. There was no end to the things he had to show them and teach them, mostly, I think, about flowers; things they had never dreamt of, beauties of form and colour such as it would be impossible for me to describe. And each time they came to see him he promised to show and teach them still more. But at last Winfried said they must be going.

"I promised the princess," he said, for now he spoke of her quite openly to the children, "that I would take you home by the time the sun sets beside the castle, and it must be near that now."

"And how are we to go home?" asked Ruby.

"The boat is ready," Winfried answered.

"But where's the sea for it to sail on?" whispered Ruby to Mavis. She had not the courage to ask Winfried anymore.

"Wait and see," said Mavis. "I don't know, but it is sure to be all right."

Then they bade Adam farewell, promising to come to visit him again whenever they should be allowed to do so—and rather wondering where Winfried was going to take them, they set off.

There was some reason for Ruby's question, for so far they had seen no water at all in Forget-me-not Land. Everything seemed fresh and fragrant, as if there was no dearth of moisture, but there was neither lake, nor pond, nor running brook. Winfried mounted the hill a little way, then turning sharply, they found themselves in a sort of small wooded ravine or glen. Steps led down the steep sides to the bottom, which was a perfect thicket of ferns, mostly of the deep green delicate kind, which loves darkness and water.

Winfried stooped and lifted, by a ring fixed into it, a heavy stone.

"You won't be frightened," he said. "This is the way. We have to go down the well. I'll go first; you'll find it quite easy."

It scarcely looked so, for it was very dark. Winfried stepped in—there was a ladder against the side—and soon disappeared, all but his head, then Mavis, and lastly, trembling a little it must be confessed, Ruby. As soon as they were all inside, the stone lid shut itself down; but instead, as one might have expected, of this leaving them in darkness, a clear almost bright light shone upwards as if a large lamp had been lighted at the foot of the well, and without difficulty the children made their way down the ladder.

"That's very nice," said Ruby. "I was so afraid we were going to be in the dark."

"Were you, dear?" said a voice whose sweet tones were not strange to her. "No fear of that when I have to do with things. Jump, that's right; here you are, and you too, Mavis."

The princess was standing in the boat, for the "well" widened out at one side into a little stream large enough to row along.

"The brook takes us to the river, and the river to the sea; that is your way home," she said. "Winfried will row, and you two shall nestle up to me."

She put an arm round each, and in silence, save for the gentle drip of the oars, the little boat made its way. It was a still evening, not yet dark, though growing dusk, and though they were back in the winter world by now the children felt no cold—who could have felt cold with the princess's mantle round them? They grew sleepy, too sleepy to notice how, as she had said, the brook turned into the river, and the river led on to the sea, the familiar sea, not more than a mile or two from the cove below the castle. And it was only when the boat grated a little on the pebbly shore that both Ruby and Mavis started up to find themselves alone with Winfried. The princess had left them.

"I will go up to the door with you," said the boy. "Miss Hortensia is expecting you. See, there she is standing under the archway with a lantern."

"My darlings," said their cousin. "So Winfried has brought you safe home."

"And I must hurry back," said the fisher-lad. And almost before they could thank him or say good-night, he had disappeared again in the fast-gathering gloom.

It seemed to the children as Miss Hortensia kissed them that *years* had passed since they had seen her or their home.

"Haven't you been dreadfully lonely without us all this time, dear cousin?" said Mavis.

"No, dears, not particularly so. It is a little later than usual, but when Winfried ran back to tell me he would bring you safe home, he said it might be so."

"Was it only *this* afternoon we went?" said Ruby wonderingly.

Miss Hortensia looked at her anxiously.

"My dear, are you very tired? You seem half asleep."

"I am rather sleepy," said Ruby. "Please may we go to bed at once."

"Certainly. I will tell Ulrica to take your supper upstairs. I do hope you haven't caught cold. We must shut the door;" for they were standing all this time at the entrance under the archway. "Bertrand is behind you, I suppose?"

The little girls looked at each other.

"We have not seen him for ever so long," they replied.

"He would not stay with me," said Ruby.

"I thought perhaps we should find him here," said Mavis.

Miss Hortensia looked more annoyed than anxious. "I suppose he will find his way back before long," she said. "Bad pennies always turn up. But he is a most troublesome boy. I wish I had asked Winfried what to do—"

"I don't think he could have done anything," said Mavis. "But—I'm sure Bertrand is safe. What's the matter, Ulrica?"

For at that moment—they were on their way upstairs by this time—the young maid-servant came flying to meet them, her face pale, her eyes gleaming with fear.

"Oh," she cried, "I am glad the young ladies are safe back. Martin has seen the blue light in the west turret; he was coming from the village a few minutes ago, and something made him look up. It is many and many a year since it has been seen, not since the young ladies were babies, and it always—"

"Stop, Ulrica," said Miss Hortensia sharply. "It is very wrong of you to come startling us in that wild way, and the young ladies so tired as you see. Call Bertha and Joseph. You take the children to their room, and see that they are warm and comfortable. I will myself go up to the west turret with the others and put a stop to these idle tales."

But Ruby and Mavis pressed forward. A strange thought had struck them both.

"Oh cousin, let us go too," they said. "We are not a bit frightened."

So when old Joseph and Bertha had joined them, the whole party set off for the turret.

As they got near to the top of the stair, a slight sound made them all start.

"Hush!" said Miss Hortensia. They stood in perfect silence. It came again—a murmur of faint sobs and weeping. Ulrica grew whiter and whiter.

"I told you so," she began, but no one listened. They all pressed on, Miss Hortensia the first.

When she opened the door it was, except for the lamp she held in her hand, upon total darkness. But in one corner was heard a sort of convulsive breathing, and then a voice.

"Who's there? Who's there? Oh the pain, the cruel pain!"

And there—lying on the same little couch-bed on which years and years ago Miss Hortensia had slept and dreamt of the lovely fairy lady—was Bertrand—weeping and moaning, utterly broken down.

But he turned away sullenly from Miss Hortensia when she leant over him in concern and pity; he would not look at Ruby either, and it was not till after some moments had passed that they at last heard him whisper.

"Mavis, I want to speak to Mavis. Go away everybody. I only want Mavis."

They all looked at each other in mute astonishment. They thought he was wandering in his mind. But no; he kept to the same idea.

"Mavis," he repeated, "come here and give me your hand. I can't see you. Oh the pain, the pain!" Then Mavis came forward, and the others drew back in a group to the door.

"Try and find out what it is; surely it is not another naughty trick that he is playing," said Miss Hortensia anxiously.

"No, no. I am sure it isn't. Don't be afraid, dear cousin," said the little girl.

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## Chapter Twelve.

### Opened Eyes.

"The world that only thy spirit knows  
Is the fairest world of the three."

### Three Worlds.

"Mavis," whispered Bertrand, when he was sure the others were out of earshot, "you can understand; they would think I was mad. Listen—stoop down—it is *she*. You know who I mean. She made me see her, and oh, the pain is too awful. It isn't only in my eyes, it goes down into my heart somehow. What shall I do? Can't you make her come to take it away? I've been crying and crying to her, but she won't."

"Perhaps it is that you *must* bear it," said Mavis. "Think that way, and see if that makes it any better." The boy gasped, but did not speak. After a moment or two he went on again.

"I was in the caves behind the cottage. I ran in to get out of the storm, and because I didn't want to go looking for you. I thought you were drowned, and I didn't want to see your white face," he shivered. "And I was peeping about in one of the caves when I fell; I don't know how or where. I fell down, down, ever so far. I thought I was never going to stop, and then my breath went away, and I didn't know anything till I found myself in another cave, all knocked about and bruised. I'm aching now all over, but I don't mind that. And then, Mavis, *she* came and looked at me."

"You saw her?" said Mavis.

"Yes—oh Mavis, she made my eyes go up to hers. And oh, the pain! She didn't say anything except just 'Bertrand.' But I knew all she meant, better than by any speaking. And she was kind; she lifted me and carried me up here. And she put something on my leg; that was where I was most hurt, I think. Then she sat by me here, and she put it all into my mind, all the naughty things I'd ever done. Mavis, I didn't know, I *really* didn't, how bad I was. It came out of her eyes somehow, though I dared not look again; and when she went away, even though I *think* she kissed me, the pain got worse and worse. Oh Mavis, will it ever go? Will my eyes ever feel the same again?"

"No," said Mavis, "I don't think they'll ever feel the *same*, for they'll feel much, much better than they used to. The pain will go, though it may come back sometimes, to *remind* you."

"I shan't need reminding," said the boy. "I can't ever forget. I'm sure of that. I wish I could!"

"No, Bertrand, I don't think you do wish that."

He gave an impatient wriggle, but without speaking.

"Oh the pain," he cried again in a moment or two, "and it did seem a little better."

Miss Hortensia came forward.

"Mavis, my dear, what is it? Where is he hurt? And why did you hide yourself up here, Bertrand, instead of coming to me?"

Bertrand would not answer. He turned his face away again.

"He's had a fall, cousin Hortensia," said Mavis. "But I don't think it's very bad, he says he's only bruised and sore. Bertrand, do you think you can manage to get down to your own room?"

"If you'll come at one side and Joseph at the other, I'll try," said the boy, with unusual graciousness. "And when I'm in bed, will you stay beside me, Mavis? I think the pain isn't so bad when you're there," he whispered, so that no one else could hear.

Miss Hortensia was quick-witted.

"I will order a fire to be lighted in Bertrand's room," she said; "and if you like, Mavis, you may have your supper there beside him."

She hurried away, calling Ruby to go with her. It was a sign of a very different state of things with Ruby that she showed, and felt, no jealousy at Bertrand's preference for her sister.

"Poor Bertrand," she said to herself softly, "perhaps I made him naughtier than he would have been."

The boy was more hurt than he would allow, but he put great constraint on himself, and limped downstairs with scarcely a groan.

"It's nothing compared to the other pain," he murmured. And when he was at last safely deposited in his little bed, he looked so white and pitiful that for the first time Mavis stooped down and gave him a loving kiss. Bertrand started.

"What is it?" said Mavis.

"I don't know," he replied. "When you kissed me, the pain got worse for a moment; it gave a great stab, but now it seems better. If you'll kiss me again, Mavis, the last thing when you say good-night, perhaps I'll be able to go to sleep."

She stayed beside him all the rest of the evening. He scarcely spoke, only groaning a little from time to time. When Miss Hortensia came in to send Mavis to bed, she began for the first time to feel really uneasy about the boy.

"Mavis," she said, not meaning Bertrand to hear, "if he isn't better to-morrow morning, we must send for the doctor."

"Perhaps," said the little girl, "he could do something to take away the aching—poor Bertrand is aching all over from his fall."



"I don't mind that," said the boy suddenly. "It isn't that, you know it isn't, Mavis, and I won't have the doctor."

Ruby, who had stolen in behind her cousin, crept up to Mavis.

"Do you think," she whispered, "do you think, Mavis, that he has seen *her*, and that that's it?" Mavis did not answer.

"Bertrand," she said, "we are going to bed now; do you mind being left alone for the night?"

"No," he said, "I'd rather, unless it was you, and you can't stay. You'd be too tired. Listen," and he drew her down to him, "do you think perhaps she'll come again and take away the pain? For I *am* sorry now—I am sorry—and I didn't know how bad I was."

"Poor Bertrand," whispered Mavis pityingly. "Perhaps she will come. Any way, if you are patient and try to think the pain has to be, I think it will get better, even if it doesn't go away altogether."

And again she kissed him.

"Mavis," said Ruby, as the two little sisters were lying side by side in their white curtained beds, "cousin Hortensia may not know it, and nobody may know it, but I know it, and it is that years have passed since we went to bed here last night."

"Yes," said Mavis. "I think so too. There are some things that you can't count time for, which are really far more than any time."

"All my hating of Bertrand has gone away now," continued Ruby. "Only I don't want him to stay here, because the naughty in him and the naughty in me might get together again like it did before."

"Why don't you think of the good in him and the good in you joining to make you both better; and the good in me too! I suppose it isn't conceited to think there is a little good in oneself, at least there's trying to be and wanting to be," said Mavis, with a little sigh. "But you're so much quicker and cleverer than I am, Ruby, I wish you would think about helping me and not about being naughty. And, oh Ruby, isn't it lovely to think that we may go sometimes to Forget-me-not Land?"

"Let's go to sleep now as quick as we can and dream of it," said Ruby.

Bertrand looked still very white and ill the next day. He was very quiet and subdued, and even gave in to Miss Hortensia's decision that the doctor must be sent for. The doctor came "and shook his head." The boy was not in a satisfactory condition,—which they knew already as it happened, otherwise the doctor would not have been sent for,—he had been shaken by the fall, and it was possible that his back had been injured. There was not much comfort in all this, certainly, but it decided one thing, that he was to stay where he was for the present, not to attempt to get up or to move about. And, strange to say, this too Bertrand accepted uncomplainingly.

He said no word to the doctor of the strange pain he had confided about to Mavis; and though his eyes seemed sad and wearied, they had a new look in them which had never been there before. Even Miss Hortensia was moved by it, though hitherto, and rightly, she had been inclined to treat Bertrand's troubles as well deserved.

"Is there anything we can do for you, my poor boy?" she said kindly.

"No, thank you," he replied; "except to let Mavis come to stay beside me sometimes—and—" he hesitated, "if the fisher-boy, Winfried, comes to the castle, I'd like to see him."

"Certainly," Miss Hortensia answered. "But I doubt if he will come any more. I hear in the village that his grandfather has gone away, quite away, to a milder part of the country. I can't understand it, it seems so sudden."

But Winfried did come, that very afternoon. His new home was not so very far away, he told Miss Hortensia with a smile. "Gran's home, that is to say," he went on. "But I myself am going to have a different kind of home now. I'm going to sea; I've always wished it, and gran has wished it for me."

"But won't he miss you terribly?" asked the lady. "I'll often be with him, and he's well cared for where he is," said the boy.

And then Mavis took him up to see Bertrand, with whom she left him alone for some time.

There was a brighter look in the boy's face when she went back to him.

"Winfried has promised to come again before he goes quite away," he said. "Did you know, Mavis, that he is going ever so far away? He is going to be a sailor, a real sailor, not a fisherman. He says he has always wanted it, but he couldn't leave his grandfather alone here where the village people were not—" Bertrand stopped suddenly, as it struck him that it was not the ignorant village people only who had been unkind to good old Adam. Mavis understood but said nothing. And after a bit Bertrand went out again.

"Mavis," he said, "I've seen her again. Either I saw her or I dreamt of her. I don't much mind which it was, for it's all come true. She said I must try to bear it, like what you said, Mavis; and it has got better. But she said it would come back again, and that I'd get to want it to come back—at least, unless I wanted to forget her, and I don't want to do that. I don't think I *could*, even if I tried. And she kissed me—my eyes, Mavis; so you see I couldn't forget her now."

"You never could, I'm sure," said Mavis; "that's what she is; it's her name."

Bertrand threw himself back with a sigh.

"I can't feel like you," he said. "I've never thought about being good, and sometimes I think I won't try. Oh Mavis!"

"Was it the pain again?" said the little girl sympathisingly, though in her heart she felt inclined to smile a very little.

"Yes," said Bertrand dolefully, "I'm afraid it will take an awfully long time before I begin to get the least bit good," and he sighed again still more deeply.

Just then Ruby put her head in at the door. She and Bertrand were not yet quite at ease with each other, but she came up to his bedside very gently and said she hoped he was better, to which he replied meekly enough, though rather stiffly.

"Mavis," said Ruby eagerly, pleased to find something to talk about, "have you heard about Winfried? about his going to be a real sailor?"

"Yes," said Mavis. "Bertrand was talking about it."

Bertrand sat up and his eyes sparkled.

"I didn't mean to tell you," he said, "but I think I must. Do you know, I believe I shall be a sailor too? Papa has always wanted it since I was quite little, and I shall soon be old enough to begin. But I thought I wouldn't like it till I came here and saw the sea; and now Winfried's talking has made it come into my mind, just the way papa said it did into his when he was a boy."

Ruby glanced at him admiringly.

"How brave you are, Bertrand!" she said, which was a very foolish speech.

"No," he said with a touch of his old roughness, "I'm not. It isn't that at all. Mavis, would you be glad for me to be a sailor?"

"If you found it the best thing for you I'd be glad," said Mavis. "Sailors must see wonderful and beautiful things," she went on thoughtfully.

"Perhaps you and Winfried might be sailors together some time," said Ruby. "That would be nice."

"Yes," said Bertrand. "When I got to be captain or something like that, I'll look him up, and—" but he stopped abruptly. There had been a touch of arrogance in his tone.

Just then Ruby ran off. Mavis was going too, but Bertrand stopped her.

"Mavis," he said, "Winfried knows all about *her*. He calls her his princess."

"I know," said Mavis.

"And," Bertrand went on, "he says he knows she'll never be far away if he wants her. Even *ever* so far away, over at the other side of the world, out at sea with no land for weeks and months; he says it would be just the same, or even better. The loneliness makes it easier to see her sometimes, he says. I can fancy that," he went on dreamily, "her eyes are a little like the sea, don't you think, Mavis?"

"Like the sea when it is *quite* good, quite at peace, loving and gentle," she replied. "But still, if you had lived beside the sea as long as we have, Bertrand, you'd understand that there's never a sure feeling about it, you never know what it won't be doing next; and the princess, you know, makes you feel surer than sure; that's the best of her."

"Yes," said Bertrand, "the sea's like Ruby and me. Now just at this time I want more than anything to be good, and never to be selfish or cruel, or—or boasting, or mischievous. But when I get about again with Ruby—even though she's very good now, and she never was anything like as bad as me—I don't feel sure but what we might do each other harm and forget about being good and all that; do you see?"

"I think it's a very good thing that you do *not* feel sure," said Mavis. But she was struck by his saying just what Ruby herself had said, and it made her a little anxious.

The children's new resolutions, however, were not put to the test in the way they expected. Bertrand quickly got well again and was able to run about in his usual way. But very soon after this his uncle, the father of Ruby and Mavis, came unexpectedly for one of his short visits to the castle, to his little daughters' great delight. And when he left he took Bertrand away with him. There was more than one reason for the boy's visit coming to an end so much sooner than had been intended. Miss Hortensia may have had something to do with it, for though she had grown to like Bertrand much better during his illness, and no one could have been more delighted than she at the improvement in him, it was not to be wondered at if she trembled at continuing to have the charge of him. Then, too, Bertrand confided to his uncle his wish to be a sailor, in which he never again wavered.

Ruby and Mavis felt sad when the travellers had left them. Their father's "good-byes" were the only alloy to the pleasure of his visits. And this time there was Bertrand to say good-bye to also!

"Who would have thought," said Mavis, "that we should ever be sorry to see him go? But I am glad to feel sorry."

"Yes," said Miss Hortensia, "much better for him to go while his present mood lasts, and we are able to regret him. And may be he will come to pay us a visit again some time or other."

"I hope he will," said Mavis. "I don't think he will *ever* again be like what he was, cousin."

"Mavis," said Ruby, when they were alone, "when Bertrand does come to see us again, we must plan all to go to Forget-me-not Land together. It would be so nice, all four of us. Winfried will come to see us again soon; he said he would whenever he comes to his grandfather; let us ask him. I am sure the princess wouldn't mind now Bertrand is so different."

"I am sure she wouldn't," said Mavis, smiling. "And who knows," Ruby went on, "what lovely new things and places we shan't see when we go there again. Winfried says there's no end to them, and that every time we go we'll find more to see."

"Perhaps it's because we learn to see better and better," said Mavis.

And I think she was right.

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The End.

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