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PRINCESS

IDLEWAYS

MRS. W. J. HAYS

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Hays, W.







THE GREAT  
PULL  
ACROSS THE  
TILLER PULLER  
R L



"I HAVE BROUGHT MY LITTLE DAUGHTER TO YOU, MY FRIEND."—

[PAGE 19.]



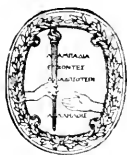
# The Princess Idleways

## *A FAIRY STORY*

BY

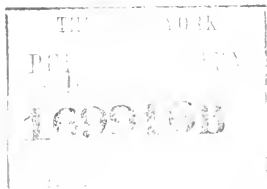
MRS. W. J. HAYS

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# THE PRINCESS IDLEWAYS.

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## CHAPTER I.

OU must not suppose that the Princess Idleways was a great, grand woman, for she was not: she was only a little lovely girl named Laura. To be sure, she was of high birth; that is to say, her father and grandfather and great-grandfather, as well as all the fine lady grandmothers, were people who, not obliged to labor for themselves or others, having always had more time and wealth and pleasure than they knew what to do with, were something like the beautiful roses which grow more and more beautiful with planting and transplanting, and shielding from too hot a sun or too sharp a wind; but, for all that, roses, as you know, have thorns.

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Little Laura Idleways was as bright and bewitching in appearance as any rosebud, but she had a few thorns which could prick. She lived in a great castle high up in the mountains, from the windows of which she could see hill after hill stretching far away up to the clouds, and eagles flapping their great wings over deep ravines, down which tumbled foaming cascades. The castle was a very ancient building, and part of it was nearly a ruin; indeed, it was so old that Laura's father—who was a soldier, and not much at home—had decided not to repair it, but allowed the stones to fall, and would not have them touched; so the wild vines grew luxuriantly over them, and made a beautiful drapery. But the part of the castle in which Laura lived was no ruin. The thick walls kept it cool in summer and warm in winter, and made nice deep seats for the windows, which were hung with heavy folds of crimson silk. The walls were covered with superb paintings, the wide rooms were beautiful with all manner of comforts

and luxuries. Low divans of rich and soft material, ottomans and rugs of Persian and Turkish wool, statues and statuettes of marble, graceful forms, filled the corners and the niches. Birds of many colors sang in golden cages, and curious cuckoo-clocks chimed the hours. Laura's mamma was a fine musician, and her harp and piano were always ready to yield sweet tones. The library shelves held books of all kinds and colors; and the cabinets of richly carved wood, before the glass doors of which Laura often stood, contained rare shells, minerals, stuffed birds and insects, and strange foreign things that a child could only wonder about.

Of all places in which to play "hide-and-seeK," this castle was the best—it had so many nooks and corners, such little cosy turns in the stairs, such odd cupboards, such doors in strange places, so many quaint pieces of furniture to hide behind—and yet Laura never played hide-and-seeK.

There was a delicious garden, too, full of fragrant bushes and arbors and rustic seats, and two

fountains rained liquid diamonds into marble basins. But Laura did not play in the garden.

The truth is, Laura was a petted, spoiled, wayward little creature, always depending upon others for entertainment, too lazy to amuse herself, and much less inclined to study or to find happiness in being useful.

She had nurses and governesses. She had toys and trinkets, and the latter were of about as much service as the former. Her mother had always loved her fondly, but even she began to see that something was amiss with Laura, and to think her little child needed something she could not buy for her. Absorbed in her books, her music, and her embroidery, Laura's mother was constantly occupied; but, strange to say, she seemed to forget that Laura, too, might need occupation. One day Laura's mamma went alone on an excursion into the woods. She had seemed very much distressed. Her maid noticed that she had been intently regarding Laura for several days, and had spoken of the child's unhappiness.

When she returned from her excursion with tearful eyes, and bade Laura be ready for a little journey on the following day, every one in the castle became alarmed.

The nurses put their caps together and whispered. Even Polly on her perch screamed out, "What's the matter? what's the matter?" but no one took any notice of her. Laura did not know whether to be pleased or displeased; but she was, of course, inclined to sulk about it, rather than to clap her hands with glee and shout for joy.

She watched the preparations made for her departure with indifference, although her pretty frocks were taken down from their hooks in the closets, and her gay ribbons from their boxes, and a trunk of cedar-wood with silver bands was brought into the little pretty room, or *boudoir*, as it was called, which joined the bedrooms. Almost any child would have been pleased to watch this getting ready to go away, and would have entered into the details with interest. Many a one would have

busied herself with packing her little treasures, her doll's clothes, or her playthings; but Laura stood in a listless way in the door, leaning first upon one foot, then upon the other, wondering just a little where it might be that she was going, and teasing her little spaniel when he leaped to caress her, till, tired of watching the maids, she wandered off to gaze into the cabinet I have spoken of. And when evening came, there they found her, curled up in a little heap, fast asleep. Fido, too, was asleep beside his little mistress, for, much as she teased him, he yet loved her.

The morning dawned clear and cool, and Laura's mamma bade the nurses put plenty of wraps in the travelling carriage; she also bade them give Laura a cup of hot chocolate, which was an unusual luxury for the little damsel. Laura's trunk was stowed away, and, to the surprise of all, hers was the only trunk visible, so that it looked very much as if the Lady Idleways meant to return sooner than the little princess—whose title, by-





“THEY FOUND HER, CURLED UP IN A LITTLE HEAP, FAST ASLEEP.”

the-way, had been given by her papa in jest, when she was an infant, from some of her absurd little freaks of disdain.

All through the light breakfast Lady Idleways

never smiled, but watched her daughter anxiously. Laura fed her spaniel and crumbled her rolls indifferently. Her little face looked pale and her eyes dim, as if she might have cried, but there were no tears to be seen; and when she bade all the household "good-bye," she seemed to be entirely unconcerned. And in this mood she stayed while the carriage rolled away down the hills, and over the stone bridges, and past the cottages, till they came to the woods. Then her mother drew her to her bosom and said, "Laura, darling, I am about to do something for your good which seems very harsh. It pains me, child, to do it; but you will thank me yet for it. In the Forest of Pines, towards which we are now journeying, lives an old friend of mine—a fairy friend—whom I have consulted in regard to you. She knows that I desire your happiness, and she understands me when I tell her that you seem drooping and unhappy; that it is more my misfortune than my fault (for, having but one child, I do not know the needs of chil-

dren as well as those mothers who have many); and she has bidden me bring you to her, with the promise that she will make you the happy, loving little girl you ought to be. I shall feel the separation keenly, I shall miss you sadly, but knowing that my little daughter is to gain only good, I have made up my mind to let you make this visit."

Laura pouted a little, wept a little, and then, as the woods became denser, crept closer to her mother.

"Am I to stay long, mamma?" she asked.

"That I do not know; it depends upon yourself."

"And what is the fairy's name, mamma?"

"She bade me not tell you her name; she wishes you to call her simple *Motherkin*."

"How very queer!" said Laura. "I cannot do it."

"You will do better to obey her, my child."

"Is she cross? Is she ugly?"

"You may think her plain, but she is neither cross nor ugly."

The road here became almost blocked with bushes, and the wind in the tops of the tall pine-trees made strange music.

"I would rather go home, mamma," said Laura, in a coaxing voice.

"That cannot be done, dearest," was the reply.

"Why not?—why cannot I return with you?"

"Because I have given my promise to the fairy, and a lady, my little Laura, never breaks her word."

Laura knew that her mamma was not to be urged after speaking with so much decision; so she sank back on the cushions and tried to fall asleep. But her curiosity and anxiety were both aroused, and her eyelids would not stay shut. Presently the carriage stopped.

"I can go no farther, my lady," said the coachman.

"Then we must walk," said Lady Idleways; and she bade Laura descend also from the carriage. "You can turn the horses and unstrap Miss Laura's

trunk," she also said to the man; "there will be some one coming for it very soon, so have no hesitation in delivering it." The man bowed and obeyed, and Laura, with her mother's hand in hers, plunged into the forest.

## CHAPTER II.



T was a new thing for Laura to find her self on foot in the woods, to push her way through the brambles, and assist her mother in finding a path, and she fretted considerably at the necessity; but her mother, taking no notice of the child's complaints, went resolutely on, as if determined not to listen to anything that would make her unwilling to complete her errand. So, clambering over fallen trees green with moss, and slipping upon the pine needles, and occasionally getting a scratch from a brier, went Lady Idleways and Laura, until they came to an opening in the forest where the blue sky again was visible; but so, also, was a great rock before them, too high for them to climb, and no way to get around it. Paus-

ing a moment, Laura's mother picked up a little stick and rapped with it upon the rock. Instantly from under the hanging vines a door, which no one could have supposed was there, flew open, and from it came forth a neat little old lady in black gown and white cap, leaning upon a gold-headed cane.

She courtesied pleasantly and bade Lady Idleways enter; but Lady Idleways declined, saying, "I have brought my little daughter to you, my friend, as I promised. Do all you can for me and for her. I have bidden her obey you, and I prefer leaving her now, lest my heart fail me. Farewell, little Laura, for a short time. You are in excellent hands, and must not be sad at parting. Give me a pleasant smile and a nice good-bye kiss." And, clasping her in a close embrace, the mother whispered more tender words in her ears, bade the old lady take good care of her, and then turned hastily away, as if she feared to linger.

Laura beheld all this in quiet astonishment; then,

as her mother left her, she flung herself upon the ground and wept passionately. But she was not allowed to do this very long, for the old lady, rapping her cane upon the rock, summoned to her assistance a funny old servant, as quaint and as curious as herself, a dwarf of kindly, smiling face, dressed in a gray blouse, with wooden shoes upon his feet, and a scarlet cap with a long tassel on his head.

“Hey, little missy!” said the old lady, “this will not do at all. Grim, pick her up and take her to her own little bedroom in my cottage. If she wishes to, she may lie there, but not here upon the ground.”

As Grim approached and was about lifting her, Laura sprang up, and would have run from him, but his arms were of an extraordinary length, and he had her safely in them before she could get away; so she could only scream and sob to no purpose.

Grim whispered to her not to fear, that his mis-



ress was very kind and good ; and his own voice was so gentle, and she was so curious to see the interior of so strange an abode, that in a little while she ceased crying and looked about her.

They went in under the hidden doorway, which led to a winding path through the rocks. Here and there the sky could be seen through the foliage above, but the path was nearly all under a shelving mass of stone. At last they came to a little cottage, not much more than a hut, but it was neat and spotless ; it looked as if it might be nothing but a bird's-nest built of grape-vines ; but within were a tiled floor, a chimney-corner where hung a savory-smelling kettle of soup, and curiously carved chairs and shelves were against the walls.

Grim mounted a ladder in one corner, still with Laura in his arms, and placed her in a tidy upper room, where were one window, a little stool, and a straw bed.

“There, child ; now do be good, and don't trouble the Motherkin. She is used to children, and they

all learn to love her; and if there is anything I can do for you, I am always ready; but no more of this angry sobbing, I beg of you."

So saying, Grim went off down the ladder, leaving Laura alone.

The child was bewildered. What could she do alone? Never had she been alone at home; the nurses were always beside her, except when she purposely wandered away from them to frighten them.

She looked about her—at the hard but white little bed, at the few pegs on the wall, at the strip of scarlet wool by the bedside, at the bare boards of the floor, at the ebony cross over the head of the bed—and she wondered if this humble little apartment was to be hers. Then she heard the rushing voice of a brook, and she leaned out of the window to see it tumbling over the rocks in merry sport. Tired, homesick, and perplexed, she turned from the window and lay down upon the bed, still listening to the brook, till sleep came and put an end to her wonderings.

She slept heavily a long while, but was wakened by a rapping on the floor beneath.

“Come, child, come; it is time you were hungry. Wash your face outside in the brook, and we will have some dinner,” called the Motherkin.

She did not dare disobey, but sullenly crept down the ladder and went out to the brook, as she had been told. The pure cold stream refreshed her, and she could have dabbled in it willingly a longer time, but again came the call:

“Come, come; it is late. Grim has to go on a journey, or I should have asked you to set the table and help me prepare the dinner; but he was in haste, and has done it all.

“What will you have, child?—brown bread and cheese, good sweet milk, curds, and cream?”

“Peasant fare,” thought Laura; “such as our cowherds at home have. I will not eat;” and she drew disdainfully off; but the Motherkin took no notice of her disdain, and placed some food before her. She was too hungry long to refuse, but she

almost choked over the coarse brown bread. It was good, however, and so was all the rest, and in spite of herself she ate abundantly.

The old lady smiled whimsically, and bade her, as soon as she had finished her meal, tie on a long apron and assist her in putting things in order. This was really unbearable.

“No, I will not do it,” said Laura, firmly.

“Oh, my little damsel, do not be ungracious,” said the Motherkin. “I shall have to ask your assistance in many things, for my good, faithful Grim has to be away; he has had to go in search of a wonderful herb which heals many ailments, and which is only found in a region far from here; and as it is to relieve poor sick people, I cannot refuse to allow him. His absence, however, obliges me to do his work, and I am sure you will not see an old friend of your mother making unnecessary exertions that a young pair of arms and legs can do so much better than old ones.”

At this Laura opened her eyes in astonishment, and glancing down at her dress, murmured,

“I am not allowed at home to soil my clothes or my hands; they will get too coarse and rough, Nannette, my nurse, says.”


“No matter for Nannette; you are too much of a lady not to assist me. Come, we will arrange about the clothes afterwards. I have some pretty little gingham gowns which will fit you, and we will lay aside these fine feathers.”

Thus appealed to, though in a very novel manner, on the score of her ladyhood, Laura tied on the apron and obeyed the Motherkin with less reluctance. She was awkward, and made mistakes. She placed cups where plates should go, and turned things upside down and downside up. And when the old lady told her she had done enough, she sat down and cried for vexation, she had done so badly. Again came the whimsical little smile on the Motherkin's face, and, opening the door, she said,

“Come, Laura, and see my cow and my pig, and let me show you my garden.”

Laura rose, but scorned the amusement, and soon found herself admiring both cow and pig, for both were white and clean as two roses; and when the Motherkin showed her a corner which was to be her own garden, to dig in as she pleased, she no longer felt contemptuously as she had done. But the novelty of having a garden and being allowed to dig in it did not make her less homesick and dreary when bedtime came, and she had to creep off alone to the clean but hard little bed. She slept, though, soundly and well.

### CHAPTER III.

 HE rushing of the brook wakened Laura, and she gazed about her; slowly and dimly the sense of where she was came upon her, and she resolved that she would stay in bed. There was no nurse to dress her, no elegant toilet arrangements such as she was always in the habit of using: a little earthenware bowl and jug in the place of her luxurious bath, a good coarse towel instead of the snowy damask linen, and over the foot of the bed a common print dress and a checked apron, both spotlessly clean, had been placed. She looked at them and buried her face in her pillow. The Motherkin called her in vain. After waiting a long while, she came up to her.

“Why are you not out of bed, my child?” she ask-

ed, most kindly. "It is a bright, clear morning. Are you not well?"

Laura said nothing; ashamed of her own sulkiness, she yet was not prepared to acknowledge it.

"Come, shall I help you dress? Do you need assistance?"

Still no reply.

"Ah, what a pity you are ill!" said the Motherkin. "I had some nice chocolate ready for your breakfast, but I will have to go make some gruel. Poor child! poor child!" And away she went, leaving Laura with her head still buried in her pillow. In a short time she returned, bearing a large cup of gruel and a slice of bread, which she placed beside Laura. Then she bathed the child's face and brushed her hair, Laura submitting in silence. When she had rearranged the bed and made it comfortable, she kissed her and left her.

After a while Laura tasted the gruel, making faces over it; but she emptied the cup. In the same way the bread disappeared; and then, getting



very tired of lying in bed, she rose and went to the window.

What a day it was! so sunny and bright! And how merrily ran the brook, and how she longed to see its drops sparkle between her fingers as they had done the day before! How velvety and soft was the grass, how yellow the buttercups! and she was sure she saw a humming-bird dipping down into the flowers in the Motherkin's garden.

A new idea came to her Why not dress and get out of the window, underneath which was a shed, and so drop down into the garden? The clothes were slipped on hurriedly; her little fingers were so eager that the buttons went in and out of their holes again. Then softly on tiptoe she scrambled out. Her skirts caught, her fingers were scratched, the skin was peeled from a spot on one little knee; but, ah! how delicious this liberty! Her feet no sooner touched the earth than she ran swiftly to the brook, and the shoes and stockings were left to themselves while she waded in the clear, cool water. It was

such an unknown delight, such happiness, that Laura forgot she was Laura and might have been any little wood-bird. Out of the brook and on to the grass, off the grass and into the woods. Flowers were here, and she gathered her hands and apron full; berries, too—sweet, red, wild strawberries, with a perfume so rare, so aromatic. She stained her fingers and stained her lips. Hark! what was that? A rabbit, and down went flowers and berries for a hunt over the stones and briers. Heeding nothing, she went after Bunny, who suddenly popped into his burrow with a whisk of his little tail and a kick of his little legs for good-bye. Then a loud chattering made her aware of Mr. Squirrel's presence, and she watched him jumping from bough to bough. Wondering if he would come to her if she kept very still, she sat so motionless that by-and-by her little head began to nod, and, wearied with her unusual exercise, she fell fast asleep leaning against a tree.

When she awoke she was still in the same posture; but her knee smarted, her legs were stiff, and



"IT WAS ONE OF THE MOTHERKIN'S PIGS."



she was very hungry. Besides, she knew not which way to turn. She was lost—or thought herself so, which was nearly as bad.

After all, it would be nice to see the Motherkin's kind face and hear her pleasant voice. But how should she explain her naughtiness, her make-believe sickness; and how, above all, should she find her way back? A few tears of repentance and real sorrow rained down awhile, and then Laura, who was no coward, made up her mind that she would tell the Motherkin the truth, and that she was sorry and would try to do better.

A rustling in the bushes startled her, but she hoped it might be Grim. It was not, however; but it was one of the Motherkin's pigs; and, knowing that Monsieur Piggie had to go home some time or other, she thought the safest course would be to follow him.

Alas! Mr. Pig was no gallant; he had not even common courtesy. He did not so much as grunt agreeably, but squealed in the most piggish manner;

for he, too, was hungry, and he led poor Laura right through a swamp, covering her with mud.

As they emerged from the swamp, Laura thought she saw the cottage far away under the hill before them; and as Piggie ran squealing on, she kept up the pursuit. Into the woods again and out through the bushes, till a nice hedge showed they were near home; and now Mr. Piggie ran off to his sty, and Laura, creeping through the hedge and up the garden-walk with downcast face, went up to the open door, longing to throw herself into the Motherkin's arms and ask her pardon for all her bad behavior.

No one was to be seen. Not a sound came from the cottage. The door stood open, and on the table was a loaf of brown bread and a pitcher of milk.


Laura knew not what to do. She was ravenously hungry, but she was in too dirty a condition to touch food. She looked in and out and around, but no one was there. She mounted the ladder in hopes yet of finding the Motherkin. Her room was as she had

left it, with the exception of a note pinned on the muslin curtain of the window. It read thus:

“LITTLE LADY LAURA,—Necessary and urgent business compels me to leave home for a day or two. My good, kind, faithful Grim has fallen and lamed himself, and I must attend to various matters which he always has done for me. You are quite safe here—no one can molest you; but you will be obliged to prepare your own food, feed the chickens and pigs, milk the cow, and keep the cottage tidy. Do this bravely, little Laura, and you will be rewarded. Remember that a lady is none the less a lady for being able to take care of herself and others, and also remember that the faithful creatures who are dependent upon you will suffer if you neglect them. Animals they are, but God made them and requires us to be kind to them.”

This was all the note said, except that “THE MOTHERKIN” was written underneath as signature.

## CHAPTER IV.

 F Laura had been astonished before, she was still more so now, and so much so that she really could not collect her thoughts. She felt like crying, but she could not; she felt angry, but there was no way of venting anger; so she just sat still on the floor awhile and counted the nails in the boards. This had the happiest effect, for, after she had gone over and over the nails, a few quiet thoughts came to her.

First she must make herself clean; so, dropping all her clothes, she gave herself, for the first time in her life, a good scrubbing. She made a great splashing, and succeeded in getting the floor very wet; but she also made herself very sweet and nice, and found plenty of clean clothes ready for her hanging on the



pegs. Then she went down below and ate a whole loaf of bread and drank about a quart of milk. This also had a good effect, for she began to face the situation, and determined to do her best. As she sat meditating, she heard a great noise among the fowls, and it reminded her of what she had to do. Going to the cupboard in search of food for them, she found a slip of paper and a key; on the slip of paper was written:

“This key opens a door in the rock; there you will find food for the chickens and pigs; hay and straw for the cow are in the barn. The key-hole is just this side of the vine that hangs beside the cottage door.”

Her doubts were now dispelled, and, doing as the paper directed, she opened the door into a large, cool, rock cellar, full of provisions of all kinds.

On the shelves were pots of butter and lard, pans of sweet milk and curds, empty pans shining, all ready for fresh milk, a milking-pail and stool. Hams and tongues hung from the roof, with bunches of sweet

herbs. Barrels of flour and sugar, vinegar and molasses, were in another room off the large one. Opening a closet, she found jars of clear jellies and delicious preserves. Every fruit that one could think of was here, crystallized in the most inviting manner.

Nothing was wanting, not even cheeses or pickles, and on a shelf by itself was a chicken-pie as if for her immediate use when hungry.

Grain for the fowls stood ready in huge bags, and she knew, because Nannette had told her, that sour milk was good for the pigs. After surveying all these goodly stores, she went out to the chickens, just in time to drive away a great hawk which was creating much fear among them. Then Mr. Pig was attended to; but it was with much quaking that she carried the milking-stool into the barn where waited the patient cow. Never in all her life had she attempted this. Once or twice she had watched the cowherds at the castle, and she hardly dared to think of anything now in that dear home. Mooly was

very quiet and good, and glad to be relieved; but poor little Laura's fingers ached when her duty was ended, and she was very tired by the time she had emptied the milk into the pans and locked the rock cellar. Then she sat herself down in the cottage door-way, and had a little homesick cry, and wondered if her mother was playing on her harp in the great parlor of the castle, and if she longed to see her little daughter.

The twilight lingered, the stars peeped out, and weary little Laura still sat, listening to the crickets, watching the fire-flies as they flashed their tiny lamps in her face, and half humming the refrain of a song of her mother's which seemed to be in tune to the falling waters of the cascade. Then to bed, and the sweetest slumber came to the lonely little maiden.

Thus passed two, three, four days. Laura all alone, busy as a bee, finding always something to do, gathering berries, arranging flowers, living like a wild bird on what she could find—for she did not dare try any cooking. But bread and milk, cheese, and

cold chicken-pie, and a dip into the jelly jars occasionally were very good fare, and the roses had come into her cheeks and a healthful glitter in her eyes. She was lonely, but she was not unhappy, and when, to her great surprise, the Motherkin walked in one evening with Grim hobbling behind, she gave a great shout of joy, and sprang into the Motherkin's arms.

“Well done, little Laura! Think you I have not known how charmingly you have kept house for me?”

“How could you, dear Motherkin? and how can you ever forgive me for running off as I did?”

“Ah! we will let by-gones be by-gones; you have had all the punishment necessary; now we must see what we can do to entertain our little guest. Poor Grim has his herbs, but he has also a sprained ankle which we must nurse. How have you liked being my maid?”

Laura hung her head as she replied: “Truly, I have enjoyed it. Is it ladylike for me to have done so?”



“AFTER THIS SHE ASSISTED THE MOTHERKIN IN DRESSING GRIM’S ANKLE.”



“Surely it is, and, if you will have the patience to learn, I will make you proficient in many other homely duties, such as knitting and spinning.”

“But the peasants do those things.”

“Well, the peasants are happy.”

“But I shall not live as they do.”

“No matter; it is well you should understand all things; they may serve you, they may not; they will teach you in many other ways. You will learn to have sympathy for all; you will learn to be patient and painstaking.”

“Then I will try.”

“That is all I ask. And now suppose I tell you all about these wonderful herbs?” Picking up a sprig of each, the Motherkin related its qualities, while Laura, with a pencil and paper, wrote down her words; then she fastened each sprig in a slip of paper with its name attached. After this she assisted the Motherkin in dressing Grim’s ankle, carrying warm water, and rolling the bandage, while Grim looked on with a funny face, holding his cap with its


scarlet tassel in one hand, and with the other supporting himself in his chair.

Then the fire had to be lighted and tea made, and Laura no longer was awkward, but very alert, for now she had the willing spirit which makes everything so much easier to do than where there is reluctance.

After tea, Grim said he would tell her what he had seen on his little journey, so, drawing near the chairs upon which he was resting, the Motherkin and Laura listened to the old man's tale.



## CHAPTER V.

 must explain to little Lady Laura," said Grim, with a wave of his hand towards the Motherkin, "if you will allow me, madam, that we fairies have the power of making ourselves unseen whenever we wish, though we seldom use the power except for some useful purpose."

"Ah," thought Laura, "perhaps I was not so much alone in the Motherkin's absence as I thought."

"And thus it is," continued the dwarf, "that we see many strange things; but I have nothing very remarkable at present to relate, for my journey was an ordinary one but for my accident. I had to see the elves who had charge of healing herbs, and gain their permission to cull them, for they are very particular that they should be pulled in the right season, and

they so cover their gardens up that one could easily think there was not a bit of motherwort or hoarhound to be found when they choose to conceal them. To see the Chief Gardener Elf I had to go pretty far out of my way, for he was off superintending the planting of some tansy beds, and had quite an army of elves at work. I wish Lady Laura could have seen them. They are such an odd crew; but it is as well not to interfere with them while they are at work, for sometimes they are very troublesome; they have a spiteful way of scattering weed seed, right plump into a bed of roses or violets, that is very provoking. But they were too busy to take much notice of me, and when I had gained the permission I wanted, and was about to leave them, I thought I heard a child's cry. It attracted me at once, for, you know, my lady, we have an especial interest in children.

“I listened, and again heard the cry; but the elves did not seem to hear it at all. Concluding that it was best not to attract their attention to it, for they

are very teasing to little children, and often give them a pinch which is supposed to come from a mosquito, and fearing that the cry might come from some little unhappy victim of their malevolence, I followed the sound until I came to a small house which looked as if it might be a forester's—a forester, Lady Laura, you know, is one who plants and trims the trees, and sees that the brushwood is cut properly, and in every way keeps the forest in order. Well, as I said, the cry came from this little cottage, and I made bold to enter invisibly. All alone on a little bed of straw was lying a young child; it looked to me as if it were a cripple, for its little feet were all drawn up and its legs were bent. By its side was a stool on which had been some bread, for I saw the crumbs; a tin cup was there also, but no milk, no water. 'Crying from hunger,' said I to myself; and, pulling out my luncheon, I laid a bit of bread beside the little creature. He did not see it at once, and kept on his sad little cry; but when he did notice the food, his eager grasp of it assured me I was

right in my supposition. Ah, my Lady Laura, it is a dreadful thing to be hungry—to feel that gnawing in one's stomach, as if one could almost swallow stones to stop it. Well, the child ceased crying a moment and turned its little white, pinched face towards me; it was a pitiful sight, it looked so old, so wan, so wizened; but while I looked at it a bright smile came over it, just as you see a gleam of sunshine lighten up a cold, dark little pool of water, so this smile danced over the child's features. I was vain enough for an instant to think myself the cause of the little creature's pleasure, but, remembering I was invisible, I turned at some slight sound and saw that another child had entered the door—a girl not larger than yourself, Lady Laura, about eleven or twelve years of age, thin and poor-looking, but with the sweetest, tenderest of faces. Her hair was a dark chestnut brown, brushed away from her temples and braided neatly, her eyes were the same color, and her skin was very white, but the expression of her face was its charm. She looked so calm, so resigned, so

willing, so free from pettishness—but, oh! so much older and calmer than her years. Coming in quickly, she lifted the little one from the bed and folded him in her arms, where he nestled as if he were a bird, and her embrace his warm, soft nest.

“‘Ah, my little Fritz,’ she said, ‘how tired you must be, how weary and hungry! And does the little leg ache to-day? See, sister has a cake for thee,’ drawing from her pocket one poor little cake made of meal.

“Her gentleness was exquisite, but it made my heart ache. I knew this was all the food she had, and I was puzzled to know what to do. While I was pondering the girl hushed the little one to sleep, after she had rubbed his legs with her poor thin little hands. Laying the child down, she brought in a few fagots and made a little blaze on the hearth, and with a handful of herbs brewed some sort of a tea from the water in the pot which hung over the blaze. It was a sorry sight, this poverty and wretchedness, but it was a beautiful sight also to behold

this sisterly care and affection. Evidently she had long nursed this poor little cripple. How could I relieve her? was my perplexity. I had not seen any houses near, no neighbors were at hand. I determined to try and enlist the sympathy of the Chief Gardener Elf, and yet I also feared the result. Just as I left the little hut I met a woodsman, and the happy thought came to me to whisper my wish in his ear; that is to say, I spoke in fairy fashion my plan of relief for these poor children, abandoned as they seemed to be by all human beings. I was rewarded by seeing the man enter the little abode. Resolving to return as soon as I could, I was making my way through the forest when I fell, and was obliged to despatch the first Herb Elf who came in my way to gain assistance. To my great annoyance, the Chief Gardener Elf had gone to South America for seeds. I could not follow him, and I would not intrust the lesser elves with a message to him, lest I should do the children more harm than good. Relying, therefore, upon the little assistance which the

poor woodsman I met would undoubtedly give after my suggestion, I was obliged, my dear madam, to return to you."

"Oh, my dear Grim," cried Laura, "how could you leave them to starve! Let us go, dear Motherkin—pray let us go to those poor little children. Quick! quick! they must be suffering so much."

She fell on her knees before the Motherkin in her great anxiety and excitement, and the tears of pity rolled down from her blue eyes.

Grim nodded his head with satisfaction.

"Ay, my lady, do go; do not wait for my lame leg to get well. The way is rough and fatiguing, but by all means let Lady Laura go and do what she can for those suffering little ones."

Laura did not want to wait a moment; she begged the Motherkin to start at once, that very night; but the old lady insisted upon the night's rest.

"But I cannot sleep, dear Motherkin—I am sure I cannot sleep; pray let us go. I am so afraid they are suffering dreadfully."


“We have to arrange matters a little, Laura,” urged the Motherkin, pleased at the child’s earnest desire to aid the little unfortunates. “I will go as early as we can to-morrow; and now let me see you show prudence as well as zeal by sleeping soundly, and so fitting yourself for the fatigue of a journey. Come, dear, to bed, and hope that the good angels are caring for the little ones we are so sorry for.”

Grim, too, assured Laura that this plan was best, and that he felt confident the woodsman would do all he could until they reached the little sufferers.

So Laura went to bed, her heart stirred with very new emotions, that were both happy and painful; the desire to do good, the hope that she might relieve the poor little objects of her pity, made her glad, while the thought of their pain and poverty caused her real sorrow. Her bed no longer seemed hard, nor her little room empty of any luxuries; and, as she looked out at the stars glittering in the sky and listened to the running of the brook, she prayed that she might be of use to the poor children of the forest.



## CHAPTER VI.

 have decided not to go upon this journey, Laura," were the first words the Motherkin spoke after she had given her a morning embrace, as the child came briskly in haste to receive it, and hear the plans which she supposed Grim and the Motherkin had made after she had gone to bed the night previous.

"Oh, dear Motherkin," exclaimed Laura, "how can you forget those poor little suffering creatures! My heart has ached for them even in my dreams. All night I have been climbing rocks and wading brooks to get to them, and now you tell me I cannot go. Oh, it is too, too hard!"

"Gently, gently, Lady Laura. I have not said *you* could not go."

“Well, what do you mean, dear Motherkin? Is Grim to go?”

“No, Grim cannot go either,” said the Motherkin, with a peculiar little smile upon her face; and Grim twisted the scarlet tassel of his cap mysteriously. Laura looked at one, then at the other: what did it mean?

“Are you sure you wish to befriend those children, Laura?” asked the old lady.

Still more surprised, and not a little indignant, Laura answered, quickly, “Indeed I do; I long to aid them.”

“And you are willing to make some sacrifice, some unusual effort, to do this?”

“Yes,” again answered Laura, very quickly.

“Then, my child, you must go alone to their relief.”

Laura’s eyes opened very wide at this.

“How can I? I do not know the way.”

“We will guide you, if you have resolution enough to undertake it.”

Perplexed, Laura knew not what to say. How could she go alone? All sorts of dangers rose before her—great gloomy forests to traverse, wild beasts to meet, perhaps. She stood irresolute, her hand on the Motherkin's shoulder.

The old lady took her hand in hers as she said, "I do not compel it, Laura."

"But the poor little children—how can I be of service to them? I do not know how."

"I will instruct you; I will aid you. All I ask is for you to go alone: will you, or will you not?"

A vision of the little lonely hut and the suffering child and the ministering sister rose before Laura.

"I will go," she said, no longer irresolute.

"The blessing of the poor be upon you!" said Grim, and the Motherkin kissed her brow.

"Now, my child, have a good breakfast, and then I will tell you what you are to do."

Laura obeyed very willingly, no longer disdain-  
ing good substantial food or the simple manner of

its preparation. After breakfast the Motherkin opened her closets and chose a few garments for the poor children. These, with a small flask of wine and some oat-cakes, were packed in a basket which had leather straps attached to go over Laura's shoulder. Then she was arrayed in a flannel costume that her kind mother had sent with all her fineries. It was blue, with delicate trceries of silver, silver buttons, and a silver belt, from which depended a pocket, a fruit-knife, and a little drinking-cup. In the pocket the Motherkin placed a few coins, and then assured Laura that there was but one thing needed.

"And what is that, dear Motherkin?" asked Laura.

"I will show you," was the reply.

"Grim! Grim!" called the Motherkin to the dwarf, who was sunning himself out-of-doors.

"Yes, madam," said Grim, hurriedly stirring himself.

"Do you think you can cut me a good stout staff

for Lady Laura, without any injury to your lame ankle?"

"Of course, madam, of course. What wood shall it be?"

"Of wood that shall serve her well—you know their qualities even better than I; and whether it be ash or birch, you can get the elves to charm it, that it may have the power to guide her aright."

Grim hobbled off in haste, and was soon seen emerging from the forest with the charmed staff in his hand. It was a light, pretty stick, and the Motherkin bade Laura be very careful not to lose it, as it could not be replaced by any ordinary wood.

"And now, my child, you are ready. I will conduct you to the path on which you set forth. You are to follow it all day, wherever it may lead; at night you are to sleep beneath the canopy of heaven; but have no fears: we guard you. In the morning place your staff in your hand, penetrate the forest by which you will be surrounded, and the staff

will guide you to the bed of a mountain stream; follow it patiently until the rocks become precipitous, then climb the bank towards which your staff will incline; this will bring you to the summit of the hills, in one of the valleys of which dwell the children you seek. Constantly allow yourself to be guided by your staff; it will very gently but very surely determine your path. Let no song of birds or murmur of bees, no fragrance of flowers nor music of brooks, detain you; do not linger. Hasten on, and you shall be guided going and coming."

"And the children—what am I to do for them?" asked Laura.

"Give them the clothes, food, and wine, and such assistance as your heart may suggest."

"But am I to leave them alone to suffer again when that which I carry to them is gone?"

"No; you are to do all in your power for the present, and leave the future to me."

"Ah, how I wish I could take them to my home in the castle, and share all my comforts and pleas-

ures with them! I would teach them, and they should teach me, and we should be so happy together. Ah, please, dear Motherkin, let me; urge



“SHE TURNED FROM TIME TO TIME AND THREW KISSES O THEM.”

my mamma, beg her to let me take the little orphans home."

"Patience, dear child," said the Motherkin, pleased at Laura's kind wish.

"Yes, patience," reiterated Grim, twirling his tassel, and looking the picture of delight.

"She does you credit, dear lady," said Grim, as Laura, after embracing the Motherkin, and pressing both Grim's hands in her own, started out with her staff in hand.

"Yes," said the old lady, "I am well pleased."

They watched the child's retreating form, as she turned from time to time and threw kisses to them, till at last the glittering figure of silver and blue was merged in the green of the forest foliage.



## CHAPTER VII.



AURA'S step was light and brisk, for she carried a light heart, she was animated by a new purpose; the pleasure of doing good, or of only having the wish to do good, was a new happiness to her, and as she walked she trolled out a merry little song she had heard Nannette sing in the nursery. When she grew weary, she sat down and made a wreath for her hat; when she was thirsty, she drank from the little cup at her girdle, for there was always a stream at hand, first on one side of the road, then on the other, and the babbling of the brook was like a pleasant voice telling her sweet stories. It seemed to whisper to her how glad her mother would be to hear that she was getting to be a better child. Then again it sang to

her of the woods and the mosses, the wild-flowers and the birds, and of its own busy life—how much it had to do to keep all these pretty things refreshed and alive, and how it suffered when the drought came, and the sun was scorching, and the little leaflets withered on its brink; and as its voice became sad, and tears welled in the child's eyes, it would suddenly seem to burst into a foam of laughter, and toss itself in tiny cascades over the pebbles. Then Laura would laugh too, and forget all sadness. Then she would take off her shoes and stockings and wade, and watch the flies dart hither and thither as she dashed the drops apart. So the day went on. Her path grew wilder, the woods more difficult to go through. Great masses of tangled vines interlaced and hung low, reaching out their tendrils as if to hinder her. Clouds gathered, and the skies were dark. A storm seemed coming. The birds ceased twittering. Low mutterings of thunder, far away, broke the stillness.

Laura's feet were aching, and her heart oppressed.

Doubts troubled her. Why had they let her come alone on this long journey? It was cruel. She forgot the poor children, and, throwing herself down, she thought she would go no farther. Her staff was still in her hand, and as she fell it seemed to draw her gently up again, just as a magnet picks up a needle; it led her to a little cave or grotto, merely a nook under great rocks, but in it was a heap of leaves which would serve her as a place of repose, and she would be sheltered from the approaching storm, which, now that the wind had arisen, was swaying the trees violently. Crouching in a corner, she listened to the crashing of boughs, the peals of thunder, and the dash of the rain. But she was safe and unharmed. Gradually the wind decreased, the vivid gleam of lightning stopped flashing in her frightened eyes, the thunder rolled farther and farther away; the birds began chirping softly; there was but a gentle plash of drops from the dripping leaves; long rays of sunshine stole in between the branches. The storm was over.

Laura took courage, ate her dinner, and started forth again.

She was not so merry as in the early morning; Nannette's song was forgotten; but in her graver face was an expression of determination. The poor children came again to her recollection, and she renewed her zeal.

On and on she went, sometimes nearly falling, but her staff maintained her, and prevented that. She climbed, she waded, she slipped, she scrambled. Sometimes on dizzy heights she looked down into chasms; then she would cross peaceful and lovely valleys; then the road would wind up to some high summit again, giving her pictures of mountain-peaks and clouds and all their many charms; and while on the crest of a high hill, with all the heavens in a glow, she saw the sun sink beneath the horizon, and knew that darkness would soon surround her. Hurriedly descending, her staff led her to a group of oak-trees, whose wide and shadowy boughs seemed to offer her the protection of which



"SHE SAW A QUEER LITTLE FIGURE MAKING GRIMACES AT HER."



she was in need. Farther and farther sank the sun, leaving clouds of purple and gold to fade into the soft shades of twilight. The hush of evening fell upon nature; stars peeped out. Laura watched the waning light until, too tired to keep her eyes open, she laid her head upon her little knapsack, and was soon in a deep slumber. Whether or not wild beasts came prowling about, or owls hooted, or the night winds sighed in the tree-tops, Laura knew not; she slept as soundly and as safely as if in her own carefully watched nest in the castle. When she awoke, the sun was rising, birds were singing, and every blade of grass twinkled with dew-drops. After her morning prayer of thanks for the night's rest, a dip into the brook close by, and a little shake and jump by way of dressing, she sat down to her breakfast of oat-cake.

As she munched it in leisurely fashion, wishing for some honey, she thought she saw a queer little figure making grimaces at her. It was an odd little creature, with a rabbit-skin so thrown over him that

she fancied it might, after all, be only a bunny out in search of breakfast.

“Good-morning, my dear, good-morning! So you wish you had some honey, do you?” said the queer little creature.

Laura laughed out in surprise. “How do you know?” she asked.

“How do I know anything, Miss Rudeness? By my wits, to be sure.”

“Oh, I beg your pardon,” said Laura, conscious at once of having offended; “but I did not know I had spoken aloud.”

“Nor did I; we people of the woods do not wait to be spoken to—we are wiser than you. But do you really want some honey? If so, come with me and I will show you where you can find it.”

“But who are you? I never saw you before,” said Laura, forgetting that the little creature had already shown himself to be easily angered.

“Who am I? What difference is that to you?” said the queer little object. “Honey is honey; if



you want some, come with me; if you don't, stay where you are."

"Oh, really," said Laura; "you are very kind. I do like honey, and it would be very nice with my dry oat-cake;" and, forgetting her staff, she followed the elf into the woods. He led her to a hollow tree, and, flinging his rabbit-skin away, clambered into the cavity, and came out with a great mass of glistening honey dripping from its white comb.

"Here; now let me see you eat it," said the elf, putting on his rabbit-skin again, and laying the honey-comb on a broad leaf at her feet. Laura sat down and dipped her oat-cake into the honey.

"It is delicious," said Laura. "Won't you have some?"

"I? No, indeed," said the elf, standing off and gazing at her curiously from beneath his bushy little eyebrows.

"Don't you care for it?"

"No; I'd rather sharpen my teeth on an acorn."

“But that is so bitter.”

“It suits my digestion. I am a planter of bitter herbs.”

“Are you? Oh, then you must know my good friend Grim?”

“To be sure I do! He came to see me a few days ago.”

Laura thought Grim must be mistaken in his belief that the elves were fond of teasing children, for surely this one had been kind to her, when suddenly she remembered that she had not her staff with her. She jumped up hastily, crying out:

“Oh, my staff! my staff! I must go back and find it.”

“Ha! ha!” laughed the elf, evidently amused at her alarm.

“Which way must I go?” asked Laura, anxiously.

“Any way you please, my dear. Is not the honey so good as it was?”

“Oh yes, yes, it is just as nice, and I thank you

ever so much for it. Now, please, dear Mr. Elf, let me go for my staff."

"I am not keeping you, am I?" laughed the elf, beginning a strange sort of dance, rubbing his hands together, and giving a series of jerks to the rabbit-skin.

Laura was ready to cry with vexation and alarm, but something seemed to tell her that she must control herself and not let this mischievous creature know how she felt; so, springing to her feet she said, "I, too, can dance—see," and she waltzed away as if she were in a ball-room.

"Hurrah!" shouted the elf; "that is capital."

"Shall I teach you how to do it?" asked Laura, stopping to get breath.

"Yes; let me see the steps; go slowly. Oh, your feet are so big and clumsy I cannot copy you."

"But, Mr. Elf, you do it beautifully—really you do. Now show me, please, where the oak-trees are, that I may find my staff."

At this anxious request the elf started on a run, whooping and hallooing. Laura could do nothing else than follow him, but she found it difficult, he was so small and sprightly. Nimbly he leaped over the rocks, turning occasionally to make a queer grimace at poor Laura's efforts to keep pace with him. When it pleased him, he stopped and waited for her to come up.

A happy thought came to Laura. "Mr. Elf," said she, "I have a fine knife here. You could use it for almost anything. See, it is nearly as long as your arm, and it has a very curiously ornamented case, all of silver."

"Let me see it closer," said the elf, reaching up for it.

Laura held it high out of his reach, but his eyes evidently danced with eagerness to get it.

"A little closer—a little closer," said the elf.

"Not till I have my staff: give me that, and you shall have this," said Laura, shutting the knife and holding it still over his head.

“You have no fun in you. What do you want of your staff? Stay here in the woods, and you’ll not need one. But you have not told me where you are going.”

All the time he was speaking, the elf had his eyes on the knife; but Laura was guarded.

“I am going on an errand of charity, and I need my staff; please give it me. Look what a knife this is”—and she sprung the blade open again; then, assuming to be weary of waiting, she said, “Well, I must go without my staff, I suppose. I have lost too much time already. Good-morning, Mr. Elf. Your honey was very nice; I am much obliged. Good-morning;” and she turned as if to go.


“Hoity-toity! you *are* in haste. Well, if you must go, good-bye. Your staff is on your left-hand side, beneath the very trees before you. But how will I get the knife now?”

“Here,” said Laura, only too glad to regain her precious staff; and giving the knife a toss on the

grass, she ran for her stick. The elf shouted and danced again, and, shouldering the knife as if it had been a great bludgeon, he disappeared in the forest, the rabbit-skin dangling behind his back.

Laura was greatly relieved, and started on her tramp with the resolve that nothing should hinder or detain her again. All day she kept in the bed of the brook, as the Motherkin had told her to do, and as it grew afternoon and the rocks became precipitous it seemed to her that she could not go farther; but thoughts of the children inspired fresh courage. Her feet were aching, but as she reached the top of the high bank which bordered the stream, she espied a little thin curl of blue smoke rising probably from the very cottage of which she was in search. Pushing on through brambles and bushes, led by the gentle guidance of her valuable staff, she at last came to the cottage door, and, with her heart beating rapidly from excitement and fatigue, gently knocked for admittance.

## CHAPTER VIII.

O answer coming to her knock, Laura pushed the door open, and saw just the same poor little room Grim had described. There were fagots burning on the hearth; but though it was so poor and bare, it had an air of neatness and order as if unused. Even the forlorn little bed of straw looked as if no one had slept on it. Laura was so disappointed that she knew not what to do; but, too tired to make any search, she was about turning away when a light footfall arrested her, and she saw the figure of a weeping child coming towards the hut. Evidently this was the elder of the two children, for she had the same brown hair Grim had spoken of, but she was so much overcome by sorrow that she did not see Laura

until she came quite to the door, and then she started as if with painful surprise.

“Do not be alarmed,” said Laura. “I have been walking a long way, and am very tired: can you let me rest here for the night?”

“Oh yes,” said the girl, with a sweet, sad smile. “I am very lonely now, but”—and she hesitated, glancing at Laura’s embroidered dress—“I fear I cannot offer you anything so nice as you are used to having. I am very poor.”

“But see, I have enough for both of us,” said Laura, showing her flask of wine and her oat-cakes; “and I have nice warm clothing, too, which a kind friend sent to you. But where is little Fritz?”

A look of such deep pain came in the girl’s pale face that Laura was sorry she had asked.

“How did you know anything about my little Fritz?” responded the girl, in a low tone.

“I will explain very soon,” replied Laura; “but first tell me your name—mine is Laura.”

“And mine is Kathinka, or Kathie.”



“Now we can get along nicely; but shall we not have more fire and some tea before I tell you my story?” said Laura.

“I have no tea, and since little Fritz has been gone I have not cared to eat,” said Kathie, with the dulness of sorrow.

“Then I will make the fire burn better,” said Laura, “and make tea, too, for I am sure the Motherkin packed some.”

“But your hands are too fine and white—no, I will do it,” said Kathie, more aroused; and she went out for a while, and came back with some sticks. Presently there was a good blaze, and Laura got out the tea and sugar and cakes, and set them down on the hearth, for there was no table. Laura was hungry, and glad to eat, and, after looking somewhat curiously at her, Kathie, too, joined in the simple repast.

Then Laura told her all about herself, beginning at her mother’s leaving her with the Motherkin, all about her new and strange experiences, about Grim,

and lastly about her adventures in the woods coming to Kathie's relief. Kathie became so interested that she forgot for a moment her sorrow; but when Laura related Grim's account of little Fritz, and Kathie's own kindness to her young brother, about Grim's whisper to the woodsman, and his regret at leaving the children alone, and Laura's resolve to come to them, she could keep quiet no longer, but fell into such sobbing as Laura had never heard nor seen before. Though she had not seen the like, she knew by intuition that tenderness and patience would subdue it; so she drew Kathie's head on her own shoulder, and softly smoothed the child's brown hair; then she bathed the poor tired eyes with her handkerchief, and forced a little wine upon the sorrowful girl, and at last Kathie fell asleep.

Outside the wind was rising, the moonlight glittering; within, by the few smouldering brands, sat the two children. Laura held Kathie until her own head began to droop, and then, in each oth-

er's arms still resting, they slept the sound sleep of childhood.

When the bright beams of morning penetrated the little hut, Kathie awakened first, and rekindled the little fire.

Laura still slept; unaccustomed to so much fatigue, she needed the long rest, and as Kathie looked at the pretty silver and blue of her dress, and at the golden hair and healthful flush of her young companion's fair face, she seemed to her an angel of mercy sent to comfort her in her loneliness. For little Fritz was gone to the better land; hunger and want had been more than his poor little crippled body could bear, and Kathie's kindness could not keep life any longer in so feeble a frame. The woodsman had made a little grave in the forest for him, and there poor Kathie had gone every day, and was but returning from it the evening previous when she found Laura waiting for her.

As soon as Laura had wakened, and the two children had eaten, Kathie led Laura to the place

where her brother had been laid. Birds were singing gayly in the trees over his head, and Kathie had made wreaths of wild-flowers and garlands of grasses and placed them over the spot so dear to her. Together they stood silently listening to the birds' clear notes, and the morning was so bright and beautiful that Kathie could not grieve as she had done the night before. With Laura's hand clasped over hers, she felt that she was no longer alone; and when Laura said, "Now we will both go back to the dear Motherkin," she did not refuse, but turned away to make her little preparations. This was soon done, and guided by Laura's staff, they started out for their long tramp through the woods.

"Now, Kathie," said Laura, after they had walked far enough to need a little rest, "let us sit on this nice mossy rock, and you tell me, please, how you came to be living all alone here in the woods."

Kathie sat down, and, pushing back her hair, which had been loosened by an overhanging bough,



"WITH LAURA'S HAND CLASPED OVER HERS, SHE FELT NO LONGER ALONE."



said to Laura, "It is all so sad and sorrowful that I wonder you care to hear about it."

"But I do—really I do; only if it makes you unhappy to tell me, perhaps you had better not."

"It is not much to tell: we have not been long alone. I do not remember my mother; my father was a wood-cutter, and we were very happy till the war came, and he had to be a soldier, and leave little Fritz and me all alone."

"Your father a soldier! so is mine. How nice!" said Laura.

"Ah, but your father is an officer, of course, and can do almost as he pleases, while my poor father had hardly time to bid us good-bye when he went away; and I do not know whether he is alive or has been killed in some dreadful battle."

"Then we'll think he is alive and well, and soon coming home," said Laura, springing up and dragging Kathie with her for a race. "Come, we will not talk any more, for your eyes are full of tears,

and this is too lovely a day for us to be unhappy, my poor, poor Kathie. Come! I am sorry I asked you anything."

The day was indeed lovely, and the soft, sweet air was full of delicious odors from the many buds and blossoms.

Soon the children forgot their sad talk, and were chasing butterflies, when again Laura, in her glee, threw down her staff, and could not recollect the spot where it had fallen.

"Oh, Kathie, my staff! my staff is lost again! where did I put it?" she exclaimed, when a little mocking voice was heard repeating her words, and skipping over the rocks was seen the well-remembered rabbit-skin of the Herb Elf.

Laura was very much provoked at her own carelessness, and annoyed at again seeing her teasing acquaintance of the woods reappear; but she had gained a little wisdom from her former encounter, and took care not to show her vexation.

But Kathie was very much alarmed, and clung



close to Laura. The Herb Elf, seeing this, brandished his bludgeon, and executed a fantastic series of capers.

“Afraid, are you?—ho! ho! he! he! A great big girl afraid of me!” he sung.

“I am not afraid, Mr. Elf,” said Laura. “You and I have met before, and what nice honey you gave me! I am sure Kathie would like some, and are you too busy to help me find my staff?”

“Lost it again, have you? Oh, you’re a nice one! I am busy pruning witch-hazels, and your knife has been very useful.”

“So much the more reason why you should find my staff again for me. Please, Mr. Elf, do be as kind as you were before.”

“Let me see you dance again.”

Laura took Kathie’s hand and whirled her away in a waltz till they were both breathless, while Kathie whispered, “What shall we do to get away from this strange little creature?”

“He will find my staff if we are good-natured,”

replied Laura, in a whisper, "and we never could get back to the Motherkin without it."

Suddenly the Herb Elf came up behind Kathie, and, jumping up vigorously, gave a twitch to one of her brown braids.



"THE HERB ELF CAME UP BEHIND KATHIE AND GAVE A TWITCH TO ONE OF HER BROWN BRAIDS."

“They don’t come off, then?” he said, as Kathie winced.

“No, they are not meant to,” said Laura, in some haste, fearing he might be disposed to cut one.

“I was in China once, and saw all the men with pigtails—how do you think I would look with one?”

“Queer,” answered Laura, still fearing he might covet Kathie’s beautiful hair.

“Not at all queer,” said the elf, angrily, stamping his foot and hitching his rabbit-skin from shoulder to shoulder.

A bright thought just then came to Kathie, but fearing to speak to the Herb Elf, she whispered it to Laura.

“Oh, Mr. Elf,” said Laura, “Kathie thinks you would be grand with a great long Chinese queue, and she says she is sure she could make one for you.”

At this the elf looked greatly pleased, and cut a very curious caper.

“But,” continued Laura, “she needs some flax to

make it of, for her dark brown hair would not be at all becoming to you."

The elf frowned at this, and asked, "Why not?"


"Oh, it would be really ridiculous; instead of looking like a Chinese mandarin, a splendid, elegant Chinese, you would be exactly like an ugly old Indian who had scalped somebody—indeed, it would not be nice," said Laura, very earnestly, so afraid was she that the elf would insist upon having one of Kathie's beautiful braids. "But if you would get us some lovely yellow flax, Kathie would plait it, and we would fasten it on for you, and then you would find my staff for me, and we would be your friends forever."

"Ho! ho! he! he!" laughed the elf. "Well, I'll get the flax;" and away he went, leaving the two girls again alone.

Laura squeezed Kathie, and told her she was a jewel for thinking of the flax, for she certainly would have had to cut off her hair had she not been so shrewd.

By this time they were hungry; so, opening their basket, they sat down to their dinner. Birds hopped tamely near them for the crumbs, and squirrels leaped, chattering, from bough to bough. They finished their lunch, but still the elf did not return; they did not dare to go from the spot where he had left them, and their little hearts were full of anxiety, for if he should not return, how could they ever find their way through the woods without the precious staff? Laura blamed herself for her giddiness, and wondered how she could for a moment have been so forgetful. Kathie tried to comfort her, and suggested that if they found it again it would be well to tie or fasten it in some way to her girdle.

## CHAPTER IX.

UST as the girls were thinking what they should do for the night in case they were obliged to remain in this place, they heard a little shout, and their eyes were gladdened by the welcome sight of the rabbit-skin, and trailing behind the elf was a large bunch of flax.

He came slowly towards them, and flung the flax at their feet, saying, "I have had hard work to get this, I can tell you; this is something we have nothing to do with, and I have robbed a garden for it."

"Oh, how could you be so wicked?" exclaimed Laura.

The elf made one of his strange grimaces, and stood on his head a moment.

"So you call that wicked, do you?"

“Yes; robbing is very wicked.”

“If I planted ever so much catnip in its place, what do you call that?”

“Oh, that was all fair, I suppose.”

“Well, don’t suppose anything more about it, but just go to work, if you want your stick.”

At this Kathie began to plait most diligently, and Laura, finding a bit of blue ribbon somewhere about her dress, tied the end of the long braid with it. The elf watched them closely — his little black beady eyes following every movement of Kathie’s dexterous fingers, while Laura held the flax. When it was finished, Laura proposed fastening it in the elf’s cap as the easiest way for him to wear it, and then when he chose he could lay it aside. This suited exactly, and the little furry rabbit’s head was soon adorned with this peculiar ornament. When the elf put it on he gave a shout of glee, but afterwards became very grave—whether the weight oppressed him, or whether he remembered that Chinese sedateness and dignity would be appropriate, cannot be deter-

mined; but Laura and Kathie both assured him he looked very grand.

“And now,” said Laura, “please be so good, Mr. Elf, as to give me my staff, for we have a long way to go, and have lost much time.”

The elf at this request began his queer capers again, but finding the long queue very much in his way, stopped short, and asked Laura why she could not stay awhile in the woods with him, and said that he would get her more honey, and find her the prettiest red cup-moss and maidenhair ferns she had ever seen. Laura declined very resolutely, saying that the Motherkin and Grim had charged her not to delay.

Then the elf made hideous faces, and blew a shrill whistle through his fingers, whereat a swarm of mosquitoes buzzed around the children most uncomfortably.

“Really, Mr. Elf,” said Laura, brandishing her handkerchief wildly about to keep off the stinging insects, “I thought you were more of a gentle-





“THEY BATHED THEIR SWOLLEN AND DISFIGURED FACES.”



man than this. A Chinese mandarin would not vex us in this way. I have a pretty turquoise ring on my hand, which, if my staff were here, I might give you— But, oh! oh! how these things do bite! Come, Kathie, let us run,” she added; and, seizing Kathie’s hand, she started off.

“Hey! not so fast. Here is your staff. The ring! the ring! where is it?” called the elf.

“I cannot stay in that swarm of mosquitoes,” replied Laura, still running; but the elf was quicker than she, and, leaping before her, threw her staff across her path. “Here is the ring,” replied Laura; “and next time you meet any children, I hope you will be kinder to them than you have been to us.”

“Oh, you are too stupid to have any fun. Just a little joke like that was nothing at all.”

Laura made no answer, but, seizing her staff, she and Kathie hurried into the woods in search of a brook where they could bathe their swollen and disfigured faces. When they began their walk again, nothing was seen of the elf.

“I do hope we shall now have no more to hinder us, Kathie. See, I have tied my stick to my wrist.”

“And we had better keep very quiet the rest of the way; for if we talk, the elves may hear us, and contrive something new to stop us.”


“Quite right, Kathie. We’ll play we are hunters in search of game, and not speak a word.”

So on they went till again the twilight made it necessary for them to seek a place of repose for the night. An overhanging rock surrounded by low bushes seemed an inviting spot, especially as the staff did not withhold them from it. Kathie, more learned in woodland ways than Laura, broke down branches of hemlock, and made a fragrant and spicy bed; and then, too tired to do more than say their prayers, they both were asleep in a few moments.

It seemed to Laura that she had not been long asleep when something wakened her. What it was she knew not. There was a soft stir in the tree-tops, as if a light breeze were blowing—an occasional chirp from some bird which had been disturbed,

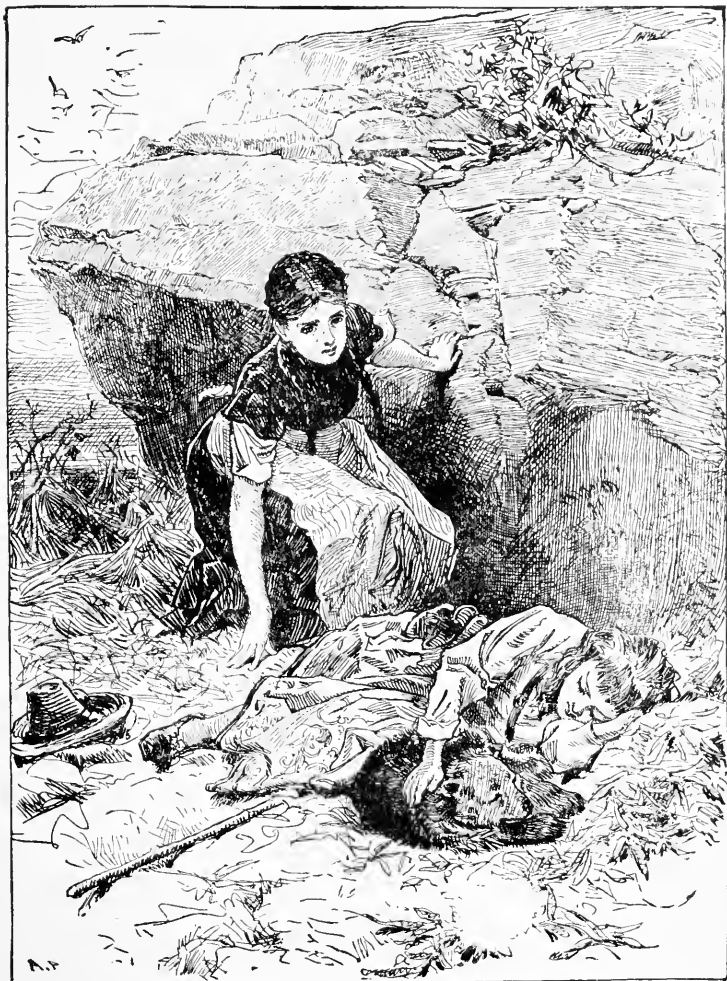
perhaps by a dream that its eggs were broken; but otherwise all was still. Kathie was sleeping soundly, and Laura closed her own eyes again, but again was aroused, and this time by a cold something poking in her hand.

## CHAPTER X.

 HE cold little nose of an animal it seemed; for it was followed by the lapping of a warm little tongue, and the cuddling of a muffy, furry little body against Laura. Still Kathie slept soundly, and Laura was too frightened to waken her. Every moment she expected to hear a growl, and have an angry bite from a set of savage teeth; but no bite or growl coming, and the cuddling of the little creature seeming to be kindly, she became less fearful, and her heart stopped its hurried beating.

“Kathie!” she whispered—“Kathie!” But Kathie slept, and would not waken.

An owl hooted dismally, and Laura shivered, which only made the little furry creature crowd nearer, as if for protection. She put out her hand



"KATHIE GAZED AT LAURA, SLEEPING WITH ONE HAND ON THE NECK OF A YOUNG BEAR CUB."





and felt of the soft warm fur; again the warm tongue touched her hand, and reminded her of her spaniel Fido. She patted the head, wondering if it were a dog. Fido she knew it could not be, for his head was smaller, and he was every way more slender than this strange creature. As her fears abated, and she became more reconciled to the presence of this new-comer, she became drowsy again, and before long fell as soundly asleep as was Kathie; and when morning came, with its bird-calls and tender flush of dawn, Kathie was the first to waken; and she gazed with astonishment, not unmixed with fear, at Laura, sleeping with one hand resting on the neck of a young bear cub.

Kathie had witnessed such strange and novel things in Laura's company that she began to think Laura too was a fairy, and had something in common with all the inhabitants of the woods; but so lovely was she in Kathie's eyes, and so welcome had been her kindness and gentle sympathy, that Kathie was disposed to think all that was good of Laura,

and that if she were a fairy, she was a very charming one. When Laura aroused, however, her start of surprise and look of wonder at the little animal beside her, and then her dimly remembered experience of the night coming to her recollection taking off the edge of her fear, showed Kathie that she was quite as much a human child as herself.

The little bear had snuggled himself so close beside Laura that she could not move without disturbing him. As yet he showed no signs of waking; his eyes were tightly shut, and he was almost a ball in shape.

“It’s a real baby bear, Kathie. Where do you suppose he came from?”

“I cannot imagine,” answered Kathie. “But,” she added, “I think we had better hurry away, for fear its mother may come in search of it.”

“Oh, Kathie, no; he is too cunning and pretty. I cannot give him up. See how he nestles up to me, and how affectionate he is.”

“But the mother, Laura, would be very cruel to

us. I have heard terrible tales of children hugged to death by bears."

"I don't believe he has a mother," said Laura, eagerly. "I think his mother has probably been killed, and that he has come to us to be taken care of. You need not look so doubtful, Kathie. Perhaps this was his home, this very nook of ours where we have been sleeping, and he has come seeking his mother, poor little cub, and not finding her, has lain down here for warmth and comfort. I mean to keep him and take him home with me. Now, Kathie, be good and help me, and you shall see what a dear pet he will make. I think he is just as cunning and pretty as he can be, and we will train him to do all sorts of funny things."

Still Kathie looked anxious; but the cub wakened and whined, and ate some oat-cake from Laura's hand, and when they rose to begin their walk he trotted after them, as if afraid they were about leaving him. But Laura was too delighted with the idea of a new pet to think of leaving him, and

Kathie and she took turns in carrying the little creature when it appeared to be tired ; for, now they were nearing home, Laura's steps were quicker, and the way seemed far less difficult.

"How glad I shall be to see the dear Motherkin again!" said Laura, as they rested for a while in the cool shadow of a great tree at whose roots babbled a clear brook.

Kathie looked sad and weary and homesick.

"And how glad she will be to see you, Kathie dear!"

"Do you think so, Laura? I am so unused to strange faces, and so afraid, that I almost wish you had left me in the woods."

"Ah, don't speak that way, Kathie; you might have starved there all alone."

"I am not ungrateful, dear Laura."

"No, I know you are not, Kathie; you only miss little Fritz; but I am going to find your father for you, and then, if you want to, you shall go back to your own home, and my mamma and I will give

you a great many nice things, and we will make it pleasant and comfortable for you."

Kathie's face brightened at these kind words.

"And what can I do for you?" she asked.

"Oh, you shall teach me to spin and knit and plait, and do all sorts of things."

And then they went on again, still followed by the little cub, around whose neck Laura had hung a wreath of wild flowers, from which he munched occasionally, and which she had as frequently to renew.

They had no more strange adventures, for the staff guided them safely on their way, and as the sun lowered, and the afternoon became cool, and the birds were less noisy, Laura suddenly espied the gray figure and scarlet cap of Grim, waiting on the edge of the wood to welcome the little wayfarers. When he saw them, he tossed his cap high in the air as a signal to the Motherkin, whose pleasant face quickly appeared, and in a few moments Laura was in her embrace. Then followed the welcome to Kathie,

and even the cub came in for his share of attention; but as they neared the cottage, to Laura's greater astonishment, her own dear mamma came out and took her in her arms.

“My child! my own dear Laura!” exclaimed her mother, tenderly, “how altered you are! how you have grown! and what a fine healthy brown is upon your cheeks! and, best of all, my dear friend tells me of the loving pilgrimage you have just finished, and what a good girl my Laura has become.” And the mother kissed and clasped Laura, while tears of joy fell from her eyes.

Never had there been so charming a feast seen as the Motherkin had prepared for the little pilgrims. All about the cottage in the trees were hung colored lanterns, which, as the evening grew darker, gave out brilliant sparkles of light; on the little lawn was a table laden with fruits and creams and cakes, and the white cloth was festooned with pink roses; rustic seats, dressed with flowers and canopied with boughs, were arranged on a carpet of

richly woven colors; vases and jars of sweet-scented flowers adorned the tables, where glittered silver pitchers and crystal cups.

Lovely white dresses of thinnest muslin and coronets of white blossoms had been prepared for the children, who, having bathed and refreshed themselves, were led by Grim to their seats beside Lady Idleways and the Motherkin, who listened with attention to Laura's account of her journey.

Grim listened, too, chuckling with pleasure as he moved about, waiting upon his mistress and her guests.

"Now, my dear Lady Idleways," said the Motherkin, "I can let Laura return to you with great satisfaction, for I am quite sure she has been much benefited by her visit to us. She came to me a spoiled, too much indulged child; she goes back to you a sensible, intelligent being, with a desire to be useful, and with sympathy for her fellow-creatures."

"But, my dear Motherkin," said Laura, with tears,


“am I to go home and never, never see you again, or Grim, or Kathie, or my dear little bear, or have any more happy days in the woods?”

“Why, no, my dear Laura,” said her mother, quickly. “You shall take Kathie home with you, and your dear little bear, and all that you love; and you shall see the Motherkin very often—as often as she will let you come to the Forest of Pines; and we will spend all our days in the woods if you wish, for I shall want you to go about with me among the cottages, and see what we can do for the poor people in them; besides, you forget that we are to find Kathie’s father for her, and make her home a happy one again.”

“And after all, dear Laura, you need never suffer for want of my company,” said the Motherkin; “for though I asked your mother not to reveal my name before you came to me, I have no wish to make it any longer a secret. I am the fairy Industry. Be industrious, dear child, and I am always at your service.”



## CHAPTER XI.

OTHING more beautiful could well have been imagined than the day Lady Idleways, Laura, and Kathie started for Idleways Castle. Towards morning there had been a shower, which freshened every leaf, and gave a glittering touch to every flower. It was a joyous, glad day, when even the birds seemed to be happier; and when Laura bade farewell to her kind friends, sorry as she was to leave them, she could not be unhappy.

The Motherkin and Grim escorted them through their woods and beyond the door in the rock where Laura had first seen the fairy. At this point they exchanged good wishes and made their final adieux, the Motherkin never venturing out of the confines

of the Forest of Pines—at least to mortal vision she never went farther.

As they reached the limit of the woods, where Lady Idleways's carriage was waiting, Laura thought she saw a familiar object partly hiding behind a bush of sweetbrier. Kathie's eyes also turned in the same direction, and she whispered to Laura, "Is that the Herb Elf, or is it only a rabbit?"

"It is the elf. Look at his queue. I wonder what he wants? He seems to be afraid of being noticed. Look! he is waving his cap to us, and then he retreats behind the bush again."

"What is it detains you, children?" asked Lady Idleways; for both Kathie and Laura lingered a little.

"The Herb Elf, mamma," whispered Laura.

"I see nothing but a rabbit, my dear."

"But it *is* the elf, mamma. May I go speak to him? He may want to say good-bye."

"Are you not afraid of his mischievous tricks?"

"He would not dare do any harm to me with you so near, mamma."



“LAURA THOUGHT SHE SAW A FAMILIAR OBJECT BEHIND A BUSH OF SWEETBRIER.”



“Go, then; but do not let him urge you away out of my sight.” Laura ran to the bush of sweet-brier behind which the elf was hiding, at which he capered and frisked about as if highly pleased.

“So you are going home, are you?” he asked.

“Yes, I am going, and Kathie is going with me. How could you let those mosquitoes torment us so? The bites hurt yet. Look!” and she held out a swollen finger.

At this the elf fumbled in his pockets, and drew out a peculiar-looking ring. It seemed to be cut out of coral.

“There,” said he, “this will make you believe me somewhat your friend. Let me put it on that finger. See, the swelling goes down. While you wear this, no insect can ever trouble you. Had you been ugly with me, I should not have given you this. But you can have your choice between it and your own blue ring. Which do you prefer?”

“Oh, yours, Mr. Elf, of course. Why, it’s a real treasure.”

“Of course it is; it came from China. Will you ever come to these woods again?”

“I hope so. Good-bye, Mr. Elf, good-bye.”

“Good-bye. You are a real little lady. Good-bye.” And with any number of twists and jerks and queer contortions, the rabbit-skin and its owner disappeared in the forest.

Lady Idleways and Kathie looked at the elf’s gift, and pronounced it a very useful and pretty trinket. Then they all got in the carriage, and turned their thoughts towards home.

It was late when they reached the castle; for the coachman lost his way, and they were detained. Lights were gleaming from all the windows, and as they neared the broad steps a delightful strain of music welcomed their approach. Servants were waiting to greet them, and Laura was quite overwhelmed with all their kind attentions. She could not but remember how coldly and indifferently she had been in the habit of receiving kindness before she left home; for, child that she was, she had learn-

ed to think and reflect. Thrown upon her own efforts to make herself comfortable and happy, and even to sustain her own life, she had grown out of the listless, dissatisfied, unhappy child into a rational and useful being, grateful and disposed to make others happy.

“Oh, Miss Laura, what a tall, lovely girl you are!” exclaimed Nannette, looking at her affectionately and turning her around. “Who dresses you, dear? and who brushes your beautiful hair? I have been lost without you.”

“I am my own maid, Nannette, and you will have to wait upon mamma in future, or knit stockings for all the poor people. Do I not look well dressed? Ah! here is my dear Fido. What a great big creature he has become! And, oh! my dear Nannette, how are all the birds? and where is Polly?”

“Welcome! welcome!” screamed Polly, in reply.

Laura took Kathie about from room to room till the child was almost bewildered; but so modest and refined was she by nature, that the grandeur did not

dazzle her. She was just the same simple, quiet child of the woods, with a heart-sick and homesick longing to return to her own poor home; and it was not many days before Laura and Lady Idleways saw that the little wood-violet was drooping.

Kathie had been allowed a room next to Laura's, and each day Lady Idleways gave them lessons together. They walked, they rode, they gathered flowers. Kathie was teaching Laura to knit, and Laura was teaching Kathie many little nice ways about herself; and Laura was all brightness and energy—a veritable sunbeam, as all in the castle said; but Kathie grew quieter and sadder, and one day Laura found her unable to rise from her bed. In alarm she went to her mother.

“Mamma, Kathie is ill; her head is hot, and she says strange things to me, and she moans as if in pain.”

Lady Idleways found the child truly ill, and she had to forbid Laura's even seeing her, for she knew not but that her fever might prove to be contagious.



Nannette shook her head wisely, and took her place at the bedside, as if now she had indeed some thing to occupy her.

Laura was lost without her companion, but made fresh bouquets and sent them in every morning to her, and was always ready at the end of the long hall to wait upon Nannette, that she might not leave her charge a moment. Lady Idleways sent for a physician, and his face looked grave when he came from Kathie's bedside.

"What is it, mamma?" asked Laura, as, with her books and Fido, she sat in the embrasure of the large hall window, waiting for the doctor's decision.

"It is a low fever, my darling, and we must do something to cheer the child and make her hopeful. I am going now to write to your papa, to see if he can get permission for Kathie's father to return. Meanwhile we will get their cottage in order, cleaned, and made comfortable with all that they need, and then we will take the little wild bird back to its nest. These woodland creatures cannot live

away from their haunts. Do you understand, my Laura?"

"Yes, mamma; but I am so sorry."

"So am I, dear child."

So it was decided. The letter was written, and a favorable answer came. Day after day went by, and yet Kathie could only take a little soup and a little wine, and Laura was allowed to go beneath her window and talk to her a while. And Lady Idleways was very busy, driving out to the forest every day with a donkey-cart laden with many useful goods, going and returning with work-people, and coming home to bid Laura hope that Kathie would soon be very well and happy again.



"SHE WAS NOW ALLOWED TO SIT BESIDE KATHIE AND READ A LITTLE TO HER."



## CHAPTER XII.



T last Kathie was pronounced able to leave her room. The summer had ripened into autumn, and the leaves, which had turned crisp and brown, had fallen, making the branches bare. The air was sharp and frosty. Great logs burned in the fireplaces, delighting Laura with their cheerful blaze, and keeping her busy in the twilight finding pictures in the flames. She was now allowed to sit beside Kathie and read a little to her, a few verses, a hymn, or a Bible story. And to Laura was given the pleasant task of telling Kathie she was soon to see her father. It happened this way. Kathie had been carried out for fresh air in Nannette's arms, and was resting on cushions; it was the middle of the day, and the sunlight streamed

through the broad windows. Laura was roasting chestnuts, and as she drew them from the ashes she said,

“Kathie, if I were a fairy and you had a wish, what should I turn this nut into for you?—a pot of gold?”

“No, dear Laura. I do not want a pot of gold.”

“But I know what you do want, and what you shall have.”

“Ah, Laura, you are too good to me, and I am ashamed to say I want anything.”

“But it is not *anything*, it is *somebody*, you want; and there is mamma at the window, all wrapped up in a shawl, beckoning me out to see a soldier who has just gotten down from a horse, and he looks enough like you, Kathie, to be your father.” With which rather sudden announcement Laura ran out of the room, and soon came back ushering in a tall man with bronzed cheeks and heavy mustache and a kind eye like Kathie’s; and Kathie was next in his arms, and her face hidden on his breast.

Not many days after, with grateful words and kindest thanks, the soldier and his little girl went to their home in the woods. The forester had received his discharge from the army through Laura's papa.

Laura often went to visit Kathie in her own home, which Lady Idleways had made bright and sweet; and Kathie could never do enough for Laura to prove her gratitude. Stockings of softest and whitest wool knit by Kathie, with delicious cheeses and cakes she had made, were sent to the castle. The forester carved beautiful toys and footstools and picture-frames and crosses for the kind friends of his little girl.

As a parting gift Laura had bestowed upon Kathie the young bear she had befriended in the woods, and which, chained in the stable-yard, had grown large and fat and tame. Laura had found it a rather awkward pet, less tractable to her teachings than she had supposed it would be; but the forester promised that the animal should have the

best of care, and be taught all that a tame bear ought to know.

So many people settled in the villages near, and so many houses and factories were to be found after a while, that the good fairy and Grim had to take their departure. The elves, too, disappeared, leaving behind them only their garden beds of bitter herbs.

Laura, however, lost none of the good lessons the fairy had taught her, and was never happier than when doing some kind act for those who had less to make them comfortable and thankful than had the Princess Idleways.

**THE END.**









