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WILL SHAKESPEARE'S LITTLE LAD.

BY IMOGEN CLARK.
CHAPTER XIII.

I have heard of the lady, and good words went with her name.
MEASURE FOR MEASURE.

What have we prize not to the worth
Whiles we enjoy it, but bring lack'd and lost,
Why, then we rack the value, then we find
The virtue that possession would not show us
Whiles it was ours.
MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING.

Where is Hamnet? Hillo, ho, ho, ho, boy!
"He's not within, Will, nor hath not been this hour gone."
"Hast sent him on any errand, then? Marry, I spoke a holiday for the lad this morn' of purpose to keep him by me, and I've scarce laid eyes on him."

"That hath not been his fault," Mistress Anne retorted with a laugh, as she set a stitch in her work and poised her head on one side, the better to regard it. "He hath been closer to thee than thy shadow, sith cockerow until a while back. But there hath been old work to-day with all the neighbors coming in for a word w' thees. 'As 'tis, my mother is e'en gone off sore vexed, for that thou wert so taken up w' Cousin Greene at the last, and had no talk w' her. Thou'rt in her ill books now in very truth."

"Say'st thou so? Then thou must e'en make peace betwixt us, sweet chuck; and for the better furthering of that purpose, devise something for me to fetch her when next I come hither."

"La, now, I do protest—you men e'en think the surest way to win a woman's heart is by guands."
"Nay, Nan, we don't think—perdy! we know, I'll wager this chain of mine against a skein o' Coventry blue that thy good mother's anger will melt away like the snow in April at the first glimpse o' a trinket from London. But what keepeth the boy?"

"By my troth, I wot not; he'll be here anon. Verily, thou'rt as impatient as any youth waiting for his love."

"I faith, 'tis so," the man returned, with a hearty laugh; "but methinks 'tis not like the little lad to leave me the last day o' my stay. I marvel, now—" He broke off hastily, and went to the door, stepping out under the pent-house and searching far and near with his eagle glance.

At sight of him, Judith, who was standing in the lane with some other children, darted half shyly in his direction. He held out his hand, with his sunny smile.

"Well, little wench," he cried, as he clasped her chubby fingers with a fond pressure, "thou'rt ready, and so am I; but where is that leggard Hamnet—hast seen him?"

"He was even here, sweet Father, when Cousin Greene was within w' thees, for he did us some handspings, like the Jack-Pudding on May day; but a big boy came by and called him aside. 'Twas Wat Cawdrey—a great lout o' a fellow—one I could never away with. Nay, I heard not what they said, they spoke so low; only I could see that Hamnet was e'en loath to do Wat's will. But, there! thou knowest how he cannot bear to inconvenience anyone, so at the last he called out that he must be off for a time, and he said we must not tarry here for him—he'd overtake us or meet us at Cross-on-the-Hill."

"So," Will Shakespeare laughed, shortly, "the king hath had his day. What think'st thou?"

"Nay, stammered the little maid, "I wot not what those words mean. Methought there was no king, but that the Queen did queen it in 's stead."

"Why, right; thou'rt right, sweet wench, there is no king. 'Twas only I that had forgot."

He looked down into the small, wondering face, a tender smile growing in his eyes.

"I faith, bird," he went on, "thou'rt slow o' comprehension; but, by the mass, 'tis better so—belike, thou'll be saved many a heartache."

"I cannot tell," Judith faltered; "but I would not have the heartache—nor any ache, in good sooth—through my Grandam Hathaway saith there be cures for all troubles. She knoweth many goodly simples, and she hath a cramp-rod, besides; so, an my heart acheth, I'll away to her. If ever thine dost ache, I'll get her to make it right for thee. Is't true, as Susanna saith, sweet Father, that the great people at Court take doses o' gold and pearls, to make their bodies well withal?"

"Ay, that they do, little one. Susanna hath a sprack memory for what I say. Pulverized pearls, and powdered diamonds, and salt o' gold, they be considered great 'cure-alls' by people o' quality—and there's coral, too, which some esteem the most potent o' all. But the Queen, herself, is chary o' physio-taking; and well she may be, when such stuffs are prescribed. Nature is our best doctor."

"The Queen is not over brave," Judith hastened to say, so preoccupied in her own delight at talking that she did not heed the expression of pain on her father's face. "Thou know'st the tale o' her toothache? What! thou shak'st thy head? La, now, I do protest I wish Hamnet were by—thee's such a master hand at telling o' stories. But, an thou know'st it not, and wouldst hear it, I'll e'en do my best."

"Why once, ever so many years ago, the Queen had a grievous pain in her tooth so that she could get no sleep by night nor day, and all her great men were in a sore coil knowing not what to do to ease her o' it. And some folks did say—Judith lowered her voice from the high pitch it had assumed in her excitement and looked cautiously around—some folks did say she was suffering from black magie the wicked had used against her. Then the doctors quarrelled among themselves so that her lords were fain to send for an outlandish wise-man who had ever great skill in curing the toothache. But when he came from overseas they would not let him in to see her Majesty, for that they feared he was a papist or a Jew. So he e'en writ out a letter all in Latin and he said he was unworthy to come after such wonderful doctors, still in his humble mind the tooth were best out—'twas the quickest way o' o'ercorning the ill.

"And the Queen, marry, would hear no word o' it, whereat all her great men got them down on their knees and beseeched her, but she'd not hearken to their prayers. Though the tooth did pain her, she wanted not to have it go, and besides, thou know'st, she was brightened o' the pulling, ay, truly, that she was! Then up rose an old man—I wot not his name—and said the pulling would not hurt much, 'twould soon be over. And quoth he: 'I have not many teeth left, but your Majesty shall see how easy 'tis after all to let one go.' Whereupon did he ope his mouth wide and he bade the master surgeon to pull w' his might. And so he did, and the old man never even said 'boo!' when the tooth came forth. Then the Queen took heart, and she e'en had her tooth out on the spot." Judith ended her recital with a long sigh.

"That's all there is to the tale, good Father," she said, after a moment, "every word, but I wish I knew whether her Majesty cried or no. Dost think she did?"

"Marry, sweetheart, I doubt it not. She hath lady lugs, and belike she bugged the master surgeon's ears for his pains and her own."

"I am glad to hear thee say that, for Susanna will not have it that the Queen uttered a sound, and Hamnet saith, an she did, 'twas no more than the veriest squeak, for she'd not be outdone in bravery by one o' her own Court. But I feel sure she took on most mightily. Poor Madam Queen! An the great Sir cried not for the hurt o' his tooth, 'twould not make the parting w' her own any easier to bear, and so I tell thee."

"Thou'rt wise after thine own fashion," laughed the man, pulling the child's ear gently, "as the others are after theirs. I faith, when all's said and done, we do but suffer our own pain, each man for himself, and how we bear it is but a question o' our natures. And which is best—who shall say—Sue's way, Hamnet's way, thine, mine, or the Queen's? Though I cry her Majesty's pardon for naming o' her last. Now Heaven send thee much happiness, little maid, and scant cause for tears, say I! Prithoe, no more prattling, though thou hast diverted me vastly, and I give thee thanks, but get thee in and tell thy mother and grandmother to lay aside their stickery. They must e'en play the idle hours wix us this afternoon. Come, hasten, hasten, we'll away to Cross-on-the-Hill. I warrant me, the lad will be there before us."

Meanwhile Hamnet was crouched in a low dark room of an ill-built hotel in Sheep Street, listening dispiritedly to the wrangling of his two fellow-conspirators, and Silver who was not granted admittance by Dicon, lay without the door waiting impatiently for his master's coming. It seemed an eternity of time to both boy and dog before they were together once more and were speeding forth across the fields and by divers short cuts to the rendezvous on the hill. The lad's face was flushed and his breath came in hurried gasps. If he should be too late! A mist danced before his eyes at the mere thought, and he stumbled clumsily in his haste. This afternoon that had meant so much to him, when every golden moment should have been spent at his father's side, was slipping by so fast. There was no way to hold it back, no way to live it over! The very last afternoon!

In a lightning's flash he reviewed the happenings of the holiday his father had obtained for him. There was a walk in the early morning to the 'Great House'—New Place, the little lad corrected himself quickly—just the two of them going hand in hand along the streets where, on every side, the folk stepped forward with some word of greeting, and then there was the visit to the house itself. He remembered well how he had strutted about the garden while his father and Master Underhill were deep in talk and had cast proud glances, ever and anon, at the school opposite to see if any of the boys were looking in wonderment at his being there. Then home again to the eleven-o'clock dinner, and after that no peace at all with father, with all the visitors coming in.

Well 'twas passing pleasant to stand by and listen to the talk, now merry, now wise. Talk of the Queen, mark you! and the expedition to Cadiz, and my Lord Essex—he that was so young and bold—and Sir Walter Raleigh, too, and his vessel the Warspite and how they'd be at rendezvous on the Spaniards for all our men had suffered at their hands. And talk of the plays and players, and bear-baitings—a sport the Queen loved mightily—I faith 'twas monstrous diverting to hear it all and then, look you! Cousin Green must e'en fall to talking of cattle and such like, so that any sensible lad would be driven forth to where the girls and their gossips were playing in the garden. Well 'twas pleasant, too, there for a while, until—

Hamnet broke off in his thoughts with a shudder. In his ears he could still hear that low whistle—two long shrill notes, and then a pause while one could count three, then the notes again followed by a cuckoo's call. He had waited all Saturday for that signal, listening, listening, but it had not come to mar the day. Then Sunday, from the earliest time of waking until long after the house was quiet for the night, he had waited, fearing—hoping as the hours went by—and fearing again, and still there was no sign; until at last he had cheated himself into the belief that after all Ned was not to be punished, that that interview on Welcome Hill was some hideous dream which had afflicted him. Monday a holiday—Monday his father's last day at home—Chapel Lane in the morning, and the prospect of that delicious stroll in the afternoon, through the meadows and woods to the hill where, in his youth, Will Shakespeare had been wont to meet Anne Hathaway, and where, ever since, during the succeeding year on each home visit, there was constant pilgrimage made to the spot.

It was afternoon and they had all set forth, a glad, frolicsome train, only he, Hamnet, was not one of the number. Something like a spasm in the lad's throat choked him, and as he put up his hand to wrench the band of his shirt aside, a little, crackling sound followed the motion. It was very faint, and yet

on the moment it was like thunder in the boys' ears and seemed to cast a leaden weight upon the flying feet so that they dragged painfully. How could he go on? How could he go into his father's presence when in his bosom he carried that bit of paper which would snuff out Ned's hopes?

He could not go forward. He would creep away and wait, in hiding through the long, long hours of the night past the sunrise, past the time of father's going and then crawl home. But Ned would be safe—safe on the London road at father's side journeying toward his heart's desire.

Hamnet paused irresolute and pressed his aching temples with his trembling hands. Was that plan best? Would it do? He cared not if Dicon Hobday and Wat Cawdrey wrinkled their foreheads on him; that he would as lief meet, he could stand a thrashing as well as the next one and make no cry so long as Ned was safe and father's plans unshaken. Father's plans! Down came the hands and a blinding rush of tears blurred everything. Father's plans—Why?—Hamnet—was part of those plans, this very afternoon's pleasure was devised chiefly for Ned's sake.

Despite the cruel insinuations Dicon had poured forth, the lad's loyal faith in his father had not been shaken for an instant. Ned must have said those ill things, since Dicon, who loved the truth maintained he had and seemed sore distressed in the repetition, but that they had originated with his father was a possibility that Hamnet would not even admit into his thoughts. Ned again was responsible for this.

With a contrary rush of feeling the little lad sat through those tedious, slow night hours? Mother, grand, Sue, Judith, Ned, grandfather—the list stretched out indefinitely. And if they came not upon his hiding place, would father go off in the morning back over the road to London, or would he stay and search and search? There was his word to keep and important business calling him on the one hand, and there was the flaming sword of the law on the other. And which would be the weightiest?

The small heart beneath that folded treacherous paper leaped quickly. No need to even ask the question. There would be no thought of business, or of honour even, on the man's part at such a time. And up in London town his brother players would say chiding the impatient, "Tis not like sweet Will Shakespeare, he hath never broke his word before, belike some evil chance hath fallen upon him."

Hamnet's face stiffened with a sudden resolve. He must go forward. Nothing must come in the way of his father's honour or his happiness. Only that much was clear to the child's troubled mind—that and the imperative duty which his own evil spirit had lain upon him and from which there was no relief. He must travel over every foot of the road to the fulfilling of his vengeance, no matter now what it cost him of pain or regret, but in carrying it out he had no right to cloud the last few hours of his father's stay. He had missed so much happiness himself from the short visit that he wondered, as he hastened on if his father had known in his turn any falling off in the usual cheer. There had been the same walks, the same pleasures, but with a difference, between the two, ever growing higher was the secret in the child's breast which poisoned all his time and made the nights, as he lay sleepless in the attic, interminable in their going, and the days, with their haunting dread, dark though the sun shone its brightest.

And now the visit was almost over, and after it had come to an end what would happen? Hamnet had asked himself that question with a sickening iteration. Ned's fury when he should learn what part his nephew had played in frustrating his desires would be nothing, less than nothing, to bear. There was something else that thrilled the little lad with a feeling worse than the fear of any physical hurt. The thought not only of his father's displeasure, but of his sorrow. How would he look? What would he say when everything should be made known? For it must be made known if ever between them there would be the old tender relationship again. Wouldn't something of its sunniness be lost forever? Could it ever be just the same again?

Over and over, through the night watches, those thoughts had come to the child while the clock in the living-room below-stairs had sounded like a human voice, saying monotonously: "Never again! Never again!" The words had crept into the boy's mind, and as he ran along he repeated the words with a dull persistence, first unconsciously and later with a growing consciousness: "Never again! Never again!" Suddenly the sound of his voice in that indistinct murmur aroused him. With a rush their meaning was clear to him.

Well if 't was to be 'never again' this hour at least was his and he would make it fair while it lasted. There would be no thought of what might happen after curfew. He'd not think of that, he'd think of other things—of—

Why, there was that anthem he had sung with the boys at 'Fruity o' Sunday. How pleased and proud father had looked as he listened from his place, his eyes just watching one small lad who had led the others, singing loud and clear the words of their favorite psalm:

"He shall feed me in a green pasture and lead me forth beside the waters of comfort."

CHAPTER XIV.

Like as the waves make toward the pebbled shore, So do our minutes hasten to their end: Each changing place with that which goes before. In sequent toil all forward do contend.
SONNET LIX.
Heaven give you many, many merry days!
MERRY WIVES OF WINCHESTER.

Will Shakespeare, looking off at the view he loved, missed something from its usual beauty. It was not that the meadows were less fair, though in truth they had lost a little of the fresh greenness of the spring and were no longer starred with tall moon-daisies, but that summer had deprived with one hand she had recompensed bountifully with the other, and in the glow of rich maturity the delicious promise of blossoming-time was almost forgotten. It was not that the Avon, passing through the broad valley with the fields rising on both sides in softly swelling undulations, had grown turbid, it still curved along, a gleaming coil of silver, like some wondrous chain binding the emerald land.

It was not that Stratford was less dear to the eyes that had grown accustomed to the sight of palaces and lofty cathedrals, or less lovely for that matter. It was not that the flowers at his feet—the flowers of middle summer—that raised their faces to catch his glance, were not as sweet as those of an earlier day, nor that the sky-lark, the blackbird, and the thrush had departed from the spot which, according to his wont, they frequented longer than any other of the neighbouring localities. There was an occasional shrill burst of song from their little feathered throats as they flew past, frightened from their haunts by the gay band of people who had invaded their solitude with laughter and pastimes. The place was still as fair as he had known it in those other times when, with a heart beating high with love, he had hastened thither to meet the Shottery lass.

It was as pleasing to the eye, and yet a vague cloud had robbed the scene of much of its brightness. He stood a trifle apart from the others, resting after a game of hoodman-blind, and looking off at the way curving along from Stratford. Suddenly the mist cleared and never was the land lovelier, nor the sky fairer; never did the river flash more gleefully, nor the birds' song sound sweeter—for there was the little lad with Silver at his side coming—coming along.

Will Shakespeare turned with a quick exclamation and hurried toward the advancing figures.

"Marry, my pretty knave," he said, with a tinge of impatience in his playful voice, "thou art eaten up w' parking cares. Could'st not have kept this afternoon free for me—my last afternoon, too?"

"Nay, an I could I would not have bugged from thy side," the boy answered, catching the extended hand in both of his; "and that thou know'st full well. I warrant, I meant not to stay so long—but 'twas an old promise and I could not break it."

"I faith I should have scorned to have thee treat this honor so lightly. I'd liefer thou'dst stayed the whole day from me—eruel as that would have seemed—than have had thee depart so much as an hair's-breadth from the given word."

Hamnet's grasp loosened and his face twitched. After a moment he raised his eyes to his father's with a world of entreaty in his glance, which for once went unnoticed.

"But a boy's word," he faltered, "a boy's word now, is no such great matter. 'Tis not o' so much import as a man's."

"Ay, verily it is. There be no degrees in honor—it knoweth no question o' age. A promise, sweet, as thou giv'st it, or I give it, is still a promise—something we both must keep, though it cost us dear. Once thou hast pledged thy word in good faith to another, so it must hold bright with as soon as the two verses stronger. Let it never be said o' my little lad that he is a promise breaker. Come, I forgive thee thine absence sith thou wert but doing o' thy bounden duty. The afternoon hath been hardest to thee, I trow, but past cure it is still past care—thou hast missed a rare sport."

Hamnet stood pondering for a minute. He could be asked to be guided aright in this troubled matter where he had bound himself to secrecy? He knew now, in part, what his father thought of the sacredness of a promise—what a boy's word was worth to him. And that should be sufficient guide for his own conduct. Meanwhile this was his hour—the time that would never come again! He darted forward with a loud cry, tugging at the man's hand, and tugging him a laughing prisoner into the gay group where were assembled Mistress Mary and Mistress Anne Shakespeare, Sue and Judith with their cousin, Ursula, and pretty Katharine Rogers. Ned, as they came up, was adjusting a plank across a tree-stump, while little Humphrey Shakespeare, with the prospect of riding the wild mare in company with his playmate Tom Quiney, stood at one side shrieking on directions in shrill excitement, and Tom Combe alternately lent a helping hand or fanned his heated face with his cap.

"Such fine doings," Judith said, plucking at her brother's sleeve as he passed; "methought thou wouldst lose them all. Prythee, sweet Father, wilt play at barley-break, now Hamnet's here?"

"Ay, that I will, or prisoners' base. 'More sacks to the mill,' or whatever thou devise'st."

"Then barley-break let it be," Ned cried, having set the two little lads to riding up and down; "we be over many, 'tis true, but we can e'en take turns. Come, let's draw o' it."

So the drawing o' it, with William Shakespeare in the midst as gay as the gawt, played at the old sport, while Mistress Mary and her daughter-in-law sat beneath a tree looking on with happy eyes. And there, after the pasture was ended, the others came to rest themselves with a game of 'Spanish m-rehant' which, as everyone doth know, was made by her Majesty, the Queen, for my Lord Barleigh's children. A monstrous diverting game surely, and

an easy, if one would only remember to offer for sale what he hath in hand upon. But though Master Will Shakespeare had been the first to bring the sport into Stratford, he was ever forgetting its rules, so that he forfeited much, yet right bravely did he redeem all the fines. There was no undertaking so hard that he was not willing to try to compass it and was no whit disturbed by the merriment his efforts evoked.

It coming at last to Judith to set him some task, she was e'en for making him dance, whereupon, knowing how fond she was of footing it, he proposed they should have 'Sellers' Round', and before they could say him nay he walked him up to his mother and, with his hand upon his heart, bowed in right courtly fashion and led her forth to her place, saluting her with a kiss. In a twinkling Hamnet had sought out Mistress Anne Shakespeare, while the couples paired off as quickly. Then the round twice and back again and in and out with a succession of figures to vary the circular movement, and because there were no fiddlers present they all did sing, 'The Beginning of the World', which is a sweet and gracious tune, and the one always associated with that dance. When it was over, each must confess that 'twas the best sport that had yet been devised, and so with courtesies and kisses they took leave of their partners.

And then, because the day was waning and the little sadness that is ever lurking in the air at such times had crept over them—only not unpleasantly—the gay shouts of laughter subsided and in their stead someone started a song. 'Twas Mistress Anne Shakespeare in a voice as true and sweet as the skylark's, and as it rose and fell in the strains of the melody, each one listening knew that this was best after all; the music so suited the golden peace about them. At her will, they all joined in with the burden, and after that they sang some simple old madrigals and then 'Joan, come Kiss me Now,' one of the most favourite airs in the Queen's virginal book, and rightly so, for 'twas as sweet a little canon as ever was thought on and full of tenderness. And anon followed 'Joan's Placket' and 'Green Sleeves' for Ned's sake, and 'Constant Susanna,' just to tease Sue, and many another ballad, while to please the little lads—Tom Quiney and Humphrey—there was King Harry's hunting-song, the one that goes:

"Blow thy horn, hunter,
Blow thy horn on high;
In yonder wood there lieth a doe
In faith she will not die.
Then blow thy horn, hunter,
Then blow thy horn, hunter,
Then blow thy horn, hunter,
Then blow thy horn, jolly hunter."

At its close, when they all paused out of breath, laughing and wondering what they should sing next, young Mistress Kate—with a sly look at Master William Shakespeare—started a song that began in this wise: "You spotted snakes, with double tongue, and when you had finished the verse they all, with one exception, took up the chorus:

"Phimel, with melody
Sing in our sweet lullaby:
Lulla, lulla, lullaby; lulla, lulla, lullaby;
Never harm nor spell nor charm,
Our lovely lady nigh;
So, good-night, with lullaby!"

In faith, though it was a passing sweet song, 'twas a luckless one to light upon with a careful grandmother in the company (as anyone should have known) for as soon as the two verses were sung she needs must get to her feet and counsel them to hasten home. And when they all protested, she stood firm and spoke right roundly, though laughter still lingered in her gentle tones:

"La, Will, la, Nan, I marvel at your waywardness—you be worse than the children. Hark ye, both, an we start not soon 'twill be curfew-time before we know it."

Curfew-time! Hamnet, leaning against his father's shoulder, his face flushed and bright with happiness, started away from the pleasant resting-place, a shudder passing through his frame despite himself, as if some current of air, or some grim sense of approaching ill had caused him to fall a-trembling. His hour of pleasure was over and already the night had come!

That vague shaking and the sudden whiteness of the small countenance were enough to spur Will Shakespeare from his lazy loitering. In an instant he was on his feet, stung by the fear that the boy had in some way caught a chill and up-raiding himself for his own lack of foresight—the little lad was overhauled from dancing when they sat down and—Why less than that had brought about a man's death—Death! why should he ever be harping on that grin theme? He put the thought from him resolutely, and marshalled the young people together most anxiously that even his mother could have done, and drove them laughingly before him, still keeping Hamnet at his side and bearing six-year-old Humphrey aloft on his shoulder.

Down the hill and through the meadows, singing all the way, went the happy band, Ned's voice this time leading the song. And now he sang: "When icicles hang from thy wall"—and even the owls wailing from their day-long sleep must have thought that some foolish brother of theirs was abroad before the primrose had died out of the west, so exactly did the youth imitate the merry note—To-who, tu-whit, fo-who. And anon he sang: "Theousel cock so black of hue," and waited for Hamnet to take up the throatsong's song with his high sweet warble, which none could do better than he. The little lad, however, was in no mood for singing, and so the rest, missing his clear notes, must do without him.

Then did Mistress Anne begin "Who is Silvia? But none would join in with her; she must sing the song from start to finish by herself, in that pure voice of hers that thrilled them all ineffably, and when she had come to an end a spirit of quietness settled upon them, as if for a time at least, no other music was worthy to be sung.

So they pushed on, saying naught until Susanna bethought her of some riddles from the book at home, and fell to asking them of everyone. 'Twas pass-

ing strange how they would all cry that they could tell, and then, when they were put to it, how they failed. There are only a few things in this world as slippery as a riddle's answer—'tis here, 'tis there—and yet 'tis gone when one seeks to grasp it even for a moment. 'Twas small wonder, then, that Susanna should be called upon to reply to her own questions and should chide them for their lack of wit. Judith, too, was ready with her favourite riddle:

"My lover's will
I am content for to fulfil;
With this time his name is framed,
Tell me then how he is named?"

Only, having little respect for their abilities, she would not give anyone a chance to speak, but shouted out the solution in a high, triumphant voice:

"His name is William; for in the first line is Will, and in the beginning of the second line is I am, and then put them both together, and it maketh William."

In this way the door of their mirth was once more set ajar and the fun and jollity broke forth again.

All too soon Tom Combe was forced to halt, and after bidding them good-night and taking leave of Master Shakespeare and Ned, who would be away betimes in the morning, he darted off to his home. Katharine Rogers was the next to drop out of the little company as they came to her door in High Street. There was more than a trace of sadness in her glance and in her heart as she bade Ned good-by, and wished him a happy day in London town, while a note of regret crept into her voice as she said farewell to the man.

He glanced at her upraised, winsome face, grown suddenly grave with the chill of separation.

"Nay, sweet maid," he said, cheerily, "look not so cast down; to be merry best becometh thee. We'll have many goodly walks and talks together yet I trow."

She clung to his hand tremulously, not trusting herself to speak, then with a quick kiss on Hamnet's cheek she turned away.

A few minutes later Ursula and Humphrey—the latter half asleep—were given over to their parents in Bridge Street, and after that it was but a short distance to the home in Henley Street, and only a step or so beyond to the Quineys' house where little Tom disappeared in a trice with a noisy whoop at parting. The others lingered in the Shakespeare garden, reluctant to go within-doors. The sun had set, but the sky was radiant with the after-glow; little rosy, golden clouds were floating hither and thither in the soft ether, like the wind-loosened leaves of some wondrous heaven-born flower.

Susanna leaned her cheek against her father's arm.

"It hath been a brave, brave day," she cried, with happy eyes. "Canst tell what is my thought?"

"I prave thee what, my little riddle-monger?"

"I faith I have had my heart's content," she whispered.

"He touched her bright hair tenderly. 'Say'st thou so, sweet rose o' May? Marry, I'll let thee into a secret—bend thine ear close. Methinks I must borrow me thy phrase an I would speak the truth."

"Hark!" Judith interrupted, "there's that same whistle I heard this noon. I marvel now what it may mean—'tis passing strange."

There was a cessation of the light talk and laughter at the child's request, and on the soft air there was borne to the listening group two long, shrill notes. Judith stood half turned in the direction whence the sound had come, her hand raised, compelling silence. In the short interval of quiet no one spoke, then the notes were repeated, and again there was a short pause which was followed by a cuckoo's call.

"'Tis hard by," Ned said, indifferently; "belike 'tis some signal. That's all mouse, thou canst read no mystery there-in. Some boys are e'en off for a frolic."

"It seemeth to say, 'Remember—remember—'" Judith persisted. "Why, that's a signal's meaning any way," Ned laughed; "'tis to stir someone's memory."

TO BE CONTINUED.



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