



THE EAGLE AND THE BABY

Life is a leaf of paper white,  
On which each one of us may write,  
Our word or two, and then comes night!

Greatly begin! Though thou have time  
But for a line, be that sublime!  
Not failure, but low aim, is crime."

THE EAGLE AND THE BABY.

Far away in the Highlands of Scotland, up among the great heath-covered hills, a shepherd had built a rough little cottage. He had a wife and two children—one named Nancy, about eight years old; the other a little baby only two months old. Nancy often took care of her little brother—went to a village about three miles away, to buy tea and sugar; but generally speaking the baby went with her. One day she had so much shopping to do, and would have so many parcels to bring home, that she made her mind not to take him; so she lifted the cradle into a nice sunny place outside the cottage, and telling Nancy not to leave him for a single moment, she set off with her basket.

Nancy was very proud of being trusted with the care of her little brother, and began singing the way she heard her mother do; so baby awoke, and seeing Nancy, laughed, and kicked his fat legs, until, growing tired, he went to sleep again.

Nancy tucked in the little blankets over his feet, and, thinking she would like to walk about a little, got up and began to look about her.

Now, the cottage was, as I said, in a very lonely place, and not far off were

great cliffs, where ravens and eagles built their nests; and these eagles were very large and fierce, often carrying off young lambs to feed their young ones. Nancy saw one flying slowly round in great circles, as they do when looking out for something to pounce upon and carry away. She watched the great bird for a good while, wondering if it was going to steal any of her father's lambs; and then, getting tired of that and feeling hungry, she went into the cottage to get some bread. There she saw her mother's cap, so she put it on, and began pretending she was her mother, getting so much amused by her play that she quite forgot how quickly the time passed, or that she had left her baby brother so long; indeed, I am afraid she forgot all about him until she heard a loud scream, and, knowing it to be her mother's voice, she ran out of the cottage quite frightened and ashamed. The first thing she saw was the eagle, just rising from the cradle, and holding her poor little brother fast in its great claws; and there was her mother rushing up the hill, screaming to frighten the bird.

Of course Nancy began to scream too; but the eagle did not drop the baby; he only rose higher and higher, wheeling round and round, until, getting very far up in the air, he flew straight away in the direction of the cliffs where his nest was, and where his hungry little ones were waiting for their dinner.

The poor mother kept running on, with her eyes fixed upon the eagle, thinking only of her poor little baby.

As she was running up the hill, she met a party of gentlemen shooting, and thinking they could help her, she told them what had happened. They were all very sorry for her, but they did not think they could do anything, until one of them said he would try and get at the nest if they would get ropes; so while some ran to the nearest house for ropes, the others went to the top of the cliffs, where, looking over, they could see two eagles hovering about, and, as neither of them had the baby in its claws, they guessed that it was laid in the nest, and would, perhaps, be safe.

Still nothing could be certain. And when the ropes arrived, and the young laird made them tie him firmly to one, and began to creep down the face of the cliff, his friends tried hard to prevent him, telling him he would surely be killed; but he looked at the poor weeping mother, and thought of his own dear mother who was dead; and then, saying to himself, "Almighty God, help me to save the poor woman's baby," he went boldly down holding on by bits of grass or bracken, and resting upon the rope. At last he reached a ledge, and sat down to take a little rest. The eagles came sweeping past, screaming angrily at him, and once or twice nearly striking him with their great strong wings. Looking over the ledge on which he sat, he could see the eagles' nest, a long way below, and in it lay the dear little baby, and then he began to descend the cliff again.

When he reached the nest he took up the baby, and tying it round him with a

plaid, he gave the signal to pull up. But if coming down was difficult, going up with the baby was far more so; and when he got within a few yards of the top he fainted, and was pulled up more dead than alive. You may believe how delighted the poor mother was, and how proud all the people were of their brave young laird, who risked his life for the shepherd's baby.

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