

A FIRST ADVENTURE

II

So when Mercy made up her mind to the daring act of running away, it followed as a matter of course that Captain Muggs should accompany her upon her flight.

"We'll go into the fairies' wood," said Mercy, and Captain Muggs wagged an assenting tail.

Mercy loved the fairies' wood; but nobody would ever stay in it as long as she wanted. To get to it you had to go all through the shrubberies outside the gardens, and cross one meadow, and that brought you to the little foot-bridge over the stream that was always laughing and trying to tell you things. Mercy was sure she would understand in time what it said; only nobody would ever wait long enough. And over the bridge was that lovely region of copse, which to Mercy was an enchanted forest, where the primroses, the bluebells, the wood anemones, and the shy wood-sorrel grew so abundantly according to their season. This was the wood where the fairies lived, where they came out to dance at night to the music of the river. Mercy found little treasures from time to time which they had dropped—tiny cups, little red balls, fluffy green tufts—all sorts of treasures to which the grown-ups would give prosaic, ugly names often; but which Mercy knew very well had been the fairies' playthings or adornments, and which always withered away when they were taken from the fairies' wood.

The trouble was that the grown-ups had to keep to the paths, and it was not on the paths that these things were to be found, but away in the trackless intricacies of the forest, where Mercy's feet loved to stray, and where Captain Muggs rooted and snuffed with such limitless delight: only they were always being called back to the prose of life and the beaten track. And Mercy wanted to explore this fairy region alone and undisturbed.

And so upon this exquisite April day she eluded observation, and ran away. And Captain Muggs aided and abetted.

Mercy had never before been beyond the gardens alone. This dash across the smiling meadow was like the sortie of a forlorn hope—a thing to be taken at full tilt, with beating heart and eyes wide with wonder and excitement. Would